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Assumed identities and the construction of self among the West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Anthropology

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the (re) construction of identity and sense of self among members of the West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area. The research took place between October 2021 and March 2022, taking the form of semi-structured interviews with people who identify as West Indian and participant observation at various West Indian establishments. My objective is to show how the cultural elements of sport, food, and music are experienced and engaged with by the members of the West Indian diaspora, and the ways in which it allows for the development and expression of a West Indian identity. This was achieved by identifying and examining the depth of engagement with the West Indian cultural elements and the way members of the community highlighted the rearticulation of their West Indianness through the socializing dynamics afforded by the cultural elements to re-create a sense of self.

Keywords

West Indian, diaspora, identity, culture, element, self, consciousness, comfort, nostalgia

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis looks at the way people in the Greater Toronto Area who identify as West Indian engage with the cultural elements of sport, food, and music as a way of re-constructing and expressing their identity. The re-imagination of this is looked at through its facilitation at various establishments throughout the GTA and the information is gathered through a combination of interviews and observations that were conducted at these establishments. As the West Indian population in the GTA has continued to grow, so has the number of establishments and the popularity of West Indian culture in the landscape. It is highlighted through the food, music and cultural festivals such as Caribana. This growing popularity and visibility have reinvigorated and provided a sense of pride and comfort to members of the West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area. The gathering of data took place over several months, beginning in late October 2021. The data gathered presented the view that members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA actively and passively engage with the cultural elements; because it is familiar and provides a sense of comfort to them. This then contributes to the way in which they want to identify themselves and the spaces they occupy in society as it relates to the types of people and cultural elements that they engage and are familiar with. The data revealed that for many persons of West Indian identity, it is important to visit the West Indian establishments and engage with people and a culture that is familiar to them in the light of living in a place that sees them as different – it is a reminder of their own identity and allows them to foster a sense of pride in their sense of self and identity as West Indian. The impact of this thesis is a recognition to the role of engaging with cultural elements in spaces that are conducive and facilitative in order to make sure the version of one's identity that is being presented is a true and accurate reflection of themselves and the community with which they wish to identify.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Greg Beckett, for his unwavering support, compassion, and understanding during my time as an M.A. student. You guided me through an understanding of the culture and identity I am part of, one that I believe in and wanted to present to a larger audience – showing me that this is possible through the incorporation of theoretical frameworks and ideas interlaced with passion and personality. I am eternally grateful for your support and guidance as well as the freedom you afforded me to explore these ideas.

I also extend my gratitude to the Faculty of Social Science, the Department of Anthropology, the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, for the opportunity to undertake this thesis. To the faculty I have interacted with and have informed my academic thinking and understanding – Dr. Lisa Hodgetts, Dr. Randa Farah, Dr. Lindsay Bell, Dr. Jay Stock, and Dr. Karen Pennesi, the sincerest and most heartfelt thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank all the persons who were a part of the research for this this. This includes the interlocutors, patrons and employees at establishments, and the proprietors of the establishments – without whom this research would not have been possible. Thank you for your time and your thoughts, the pleasant experiences and memories that will last a lifetime. Without you this research would not have been possible.

A special thank you to my family members and partner, while our family has been going through the loss of a loved one and the difficulties presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. You all have continued to offer support throughout the challenges of my M.A. candidacy and thesis – I will forever remember and appreciate it.

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Preface

When I began this thesis, I was adamant that I would focus on the West Indies. To the reader, please note that the West Indies is not synonymous with the Caribbean; in fact, the Caribbean in this thesis only factors in as the place in which many of the West Indian territories are situated. The literature on identity, culture and the heavily repeated ideas in this thesis are consciously chosen to be that of West Indian scholars so as to highlight a specifically West Indian perspective, theorized by West Indians themselves— a literary and academic perspective that has a rich history dating back to the early twentieth century. I am quite clear throughout my thesis that there is no place for the misappropriation of ideas and themes and for the examiners of this thesis, I draw your continuous acknowledgement and attention to Martin Sökefeld (1999), and his conversation of the “othering” by Western thinkers. Understand, that the West Indies, as a racialized and radicalized minority is considered as something “other” and is in opposition to the prevalent cultures of the West. Additionally, it is worth remembering that I position myself as part of the research, being a self-identified West Indian rather than identifying by my country of birth or ethnicity – this is my ode to my cultural identity of a pre-independence era that has been continued through the cultural elements I consider through this thesis.

Chapter 1

1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the construction of identity among the West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. It took the form of a specific examination of some of the elements of culture that is retained by the diaspora and the permutations of its manifestation, in this case these were Music, Food and Sport. These cultural elements were already present in the community and were identified by the members as being important. As such, I wished to see how the members of the community interacted with these elements and the role played in developing a sense of self and identity. These cultural elements were not explored in its entirety, but rather, I focused on the way these cultural elements were experienced by the members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. There was a focus on these specific elements as they serve a role in the construction, expression, and reproduction of one's identity in terms of contributing and belong to a certain community or umbrella identity such as the West Indian diaspora. One might wonder why these three elements (music, food and sport) were the elements considered and this was influenced by a few factors. The first factor was that of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that it put in place with regards to conducting in-person research and the pre-research data discovery process. There was a deliberate effort to ensure that the elements chosen were going to be able to be investigated adequately within the parameters that were available. Secondly, during initial literature reviews and data gathering in formulating the specifics of the thesis research, these elements stood out as they were ones that could be understood as West Indian and studied as such. The intention being, the research evading the contamination and pollution of ethnocentric western academic positionalities, as these elements have themselves a storied history which is heavily relied upon throughout the thesis to present a theoretical framework for the development of ideas and to contextualize the data collected.

1.1 Basis of the research

In order to conduct the research for this thesis, it was important to establish an understanding of how members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA viewed themselves and their practices within the diasporic community as it pertains to a sense of identity. To do this I approached the data collection process with the following questions in mind: Firstly, how do social interactions mediate the concepts of identity among the diaspora? Secondly, how does identifying as part of the diaspora inform ideas on agency and self-identity? Finally, how does identifying as part of the West Indian diaspora contribute to one's identity in terms of how they choose to identify themselves in relation to current country, cultural identity, and home country?

My thesis introduction will proceed with the following general outline in terms of the layout of the material presented: Firstly, I will begin with a theoretical background discussing the concept of the diaspora, which then transitions into a presentation of data on the GTA and its role as a host of multiple diasporas and continuing with an introduction to the West Indies as a region and an identity. This introduction will end with my presentation on the methodology adopted for this thesis and a consideration of the effects of COVID-19 and the provincial public health response on the research project.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Many definitions proposed to encapsulate the true meaning of culture from as early as Franz Boas. According to anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor: "Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871, 2). In other words, culture is shared, learned, symbolic, dynamic, and integrated. I will soon incorporate more contemporary ideas on culture related to identity, but I would be remiss if I do not take a moment to explain my decision to start this conversation with Tylor. I need the readers to understand that the discussion of the West Indies as will be explained is one that has a turbulent historical narrative, and I see value in beginning the theoretical conversation in an academic epoch that coincides

with the birth of the British West Indies and its ideals rather than a contemporary idea. In the West Indies, we are taught about the UK-based West Indian diaspora from kindergarten and elementary school. It is a part of the West Indian way to know the history from a young age. From infancy we are taught about the *Windrush* era of 1948; the region's academic stalwarts have prospered in the British system. But this is the post British West Indian episode of history. One where western ethnocentrism's influence has begun to dwindle, and West Indian intellectuals have begun to stamp their names on a truer reflection of history.

The *Windrush* is worthy of further consideration as it is the foundation of migration out of the West Indies. Certainly, there was migration before *Windrush*, but not on such a scale and not with the consequences. Huon Wardle and Laura Obermuller note of the era,

Windrush Generation was coined in 1996 by Sam B. King and Arthur Torrington who went on to establish the Windrush Foundation. Their aim was celebratory. When the evocatively named Empire Windrush docked in Britain in 1948, amongst its 492 passengers was the advance party for an entire British Caribbean community in-the-making, or so it can appear in retrospect. The ship and its moment of arrival have become iconic; the actual Windrush manifest may have been small, but the 'Windrush generation' incorporates all West Indian migrants who arrived between 1948 and 1971 as well as their descendants, and it celebrates a new way of being British. (2019, 82)

The span of the influences of the *Windrush* includes every facet of culture and identity that is investigated in this thesis. Building off Wardle and Obermuller, the new way of being is that sense of identity that is created by persons with a shared history, an identity marker that brings them together as a unit rather than seen as others.

This thesis focuses on the presentation of one's identity as a result of belonging to the diaspora and as such we must consider the concept of identity. Allow me to introduce a perspective of identity that I believe is important as it shows a different perspective of the western anthropologist. The reason for this is, as I have already established, the West Indies is an enigma, and it is important to respect it for what it is rather than to use preestablished and institutional biases to frame it. To this end, I introduce Martin Sokefeld who notes that "the metanarrative of the identical subject was finally destroyed by poststructuralist deconstruction. Michel Foucault analyzed the subject not as the

source and foundation of knowledge but as itself a product or effect of networks of power and discourse” (1999, 417), which shows that there was a paradigmatic shift in our understanding of the concept of identity. Stuart Hall, whose work sets the foundation for this thesis, relied heavily on this shift of seeing identity as something that is socially and historically produced. Sokefeld urges as to pay attention to the effects of power in the construction of identity, and he discusses the process of “othering” as essential to an understanding identity, as it presents the comparison point of juxtaposition, to which he makes the point which sums up my ongoing dialogue on the relevancy of the views and perspectives:

Anthropological characterizations of “the other” are often inversions of European self-images (Fardon 1990, 6). This certainly applies to understandings of others’ selves. In the conceptualization of non-Western selves, the Western self³ was taken as the starting point and the non-Western self was accordingly characterized as its opposite: unbounded, not integrated, dependent, unable to set itself reflexively apart from others, unable to distinguish between the individual and a role or status that individual occupies, unable to pursue its own goals independently of the goals of a group or community. Effectively, this characterization involved the negation of all the definitional qualities of the self, that is, of those that point to the differentiation of the self from others. We can conclude, then, that by being denied a Western self, anthropology’s others were denied a self at all. (1999, 418)

Worthy of consideration in unpacking this is that the Western idea has contributed to the negation of the self, and it detracts from the identity of those that are inherently non-Western. As such, my thesis relies on the works of those who give acknowledgement to the complexity of the other, which, as will be seen, is a key point when considering the West Indian diaspora in the GTA.

Building on this, another perspective worthy of consideration is that of John Tomlinson, who considers identity as a treasure, noting: “Identity, then, like language, was not just a description of cultural belonging; it was a sort of collective treasure of local communities. But it was also discovered to be something fragile that needed protecting and preserving, that could be lost” (2007, 269). Referring to the need of identity to be something protected and preserved, I consider the role of it in the context of the diaspora that utilize

the shared community to express and reaffirm the elements of their identity, and specific to this thesis, their West Indian identity.

Progressing the conversation on the concept of identity as something that must be protected and preserved, I also consider it to be a bit more complicated in the sense that there is no endpoint to one's identity; it continues to grow, evolve and adapt per the circumstances. To this end, I return to the work of Stuart Hall, who claims that identity is neither transparent nor a completed fact; instead, "it is a production that is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1994, 222), as mentioned before, in line with the ideas of Foucault as presented by Sokefeld. Stuart Hall's work is a main pillar of my thesis and his perspective on identity forms the basis for much of my analysis. It is my opinion that the creation of community by the diaspora allows for the expression of one's identity. The diasporic community continually faces pressures and stimuli to adapt and change. In doing so, it lends itself to a fluid concept of the creation of identity; the notion of identity as something that is akin to organic in nature, in that it evolves and adapts dependent on the surrounding environment. A person's cultural identity has a history, as noted by Hall, but it also undergoes constant transformation (1994, 225), and to this I add that when considering the construction of identity, I view it as a product of the community or communities that shape it. Going further, we must appreciate the concept of identity as something that is not simply in the present or past, but it is something that is evolving and part of the future; our identity, as suggested by Hall, "is a matter of becoming as well as being" (1994, 225).

In considering the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, I echo the sentiments of Frank E. Manning, who notes that the West Indian diaspora to North America must be considered as the second diaspora, with the first being the slave trade and the aftermath of European discovery of the Caribbean region in the 1500's (1983, 186). To be clear so that there is not a nepotistic misinterpretation of myself or of Manning's work, the second diaspora refers to something that can be logically constructed in the sense that the majority of the population of the West Indian region was brought there by the first diaspora; the second diaspora now allowed the descendants of those persons to spread throughout the world,

with the identity marker of belonging to the Caribbean or West Indian region. The first diaspora lends itself to an appreciation of how the manpower or human resources, (i.e., slaves and labourers) were brought to the region and the socioeconomic powerhouse that was once referred to as the British West Indies.

Nancy Foner notes that in considering the West Indian diaspora, we must take into account that West Indians and persons of Caribbean origin are seen as “others” (Foner 1998). Referring to Sokefeld, what Foner and Hall are highlighting is the otherness of the West Indian individual and the identity as something that is ‘un-Western’. This ‘otherness’ lends itself to the facilitating of the creation of new networks and connections that in effect contributes to the formation of a community that people feel a sense of belong to, and a social inclusiveness. Foner’s claim to support this is based on what West Indians experience when they immigrate, as a result of the colour of their skin being different than that of their new home territories, stating “Being black and being West Indian takes on new meanings in the immigrant situation and form the basis of new alliances as well as new divisions with people of other racial and ethnic groups they come into contact with away from home” (1998, 173).

Considering this, one can view the West Indian diaspora as that new community formed through alliances with those who share a similar home country or region which will manifests itself through shared elements of culture. I interject here to reassert my plea to the reader, that it is imperative to this thesis and a matter of respect to the West Indies and its history, that you suspend any attempt to consider the West Indies as the Caribbean or more absurdly, make assumptions of the West Indies as synonymous with the Caribbean and having a sameness. Returning to the conversation at hand, as I consider the diaspora, some of these elements of identity and culture, such as music, sport, and food are the ones being considered in this thesis.

The theoretical framework thus far has shown that there is division between those who belong and who are othered. It may be a bit of an abstract idea here, but all me to explain; there are certain dynamics ranging from racism to structural issues that are experienced by West Indians when they arrive in the Caucasian-dense West (North

America and Western Europe), that situate them as being “others.” What is worth understanding is that the important part of this framework shows that as a result of being seen as something other, immigrants tend to form new groups, there is a division from those who see them in that ‘other’ light, and the new divisions that are formed are as a result of finding comfort through the alliances with fellow West Indians with a division that makes them distinct from the rest of the Canadian population. Going further, the intent of this thesis is to see the engagement with the cultural elements by the West Indian diaspora in a white space; seeing how they navigate this space to carve out one of their own, that produces a sense of self that brings with it comfort and resilience.

1.3 Drawing on Hall’s notion of Identity

Immigrants find themselves in new surroundings, detached from the world they had grown accustomed to, and as a coping mechanism they rely on avenues and establishments that allow for a construction, expression and reaffirmation of identity. According to Stuart Hall:

Histories come and go, people come and go, situations change, but somewhere down there throbs the culture to which we all belong. It provides us a ground for our identities: something to which we can return, something solid, something fixed, around which we can organize our identities and our sense of belongingness. (2001, 30)

Essentially, for Hall, culture is something that is shared by a group of people, but then people, whether individually or in groups, actively organize their identities in relation to it. The communities that are established within the diaspora act as conduits for the expression of one’s identity and allow for the synthesis of an identity that is recognizable to members of the community as one that has shared elements resulting in a sense of belonging. This acts as a means of insulation from the inherent pressures and consequences of the migration process, which is a different experience for every individual given their respective circumstances, but omnipresent. This addresses one of the key issues with immigrants, which is that in most cases, they lack the feeling of belonging and identity, specifically referring to the idea of identity presented immediately above, by Stuart Hall.

West Indians travelled abroad and settled in different parts of the world, including Canada, as they searched for, and continue to search for, better economic opportunities and resources (Foner 1998) as early as the *Empire Windrush* in the 1940s, which transported persons from the British West Indies to Great Britain. This process is not an easy one with several factors contributing to the relative outcome of the process. One of these factors is the strength of the diaspora, and the West Indian diaspora in the GTA showed itself to be on the path to being a strong one. This diaspora and associated sense of identity was, in part, created as a ‘stand’ in the wavering terrain of Ontario. The ‘stand’ I refer to is a concept best highlighted by the Jamaican-born, Stuart Hall. He explicitly stated when discussing the West Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, that there was identity politics, (2001) and this led to the concept of the West Indians being seen as ‘others’ that were not seen or valued as part of the whole. Identity politics refers to the tendency of persons to orient themselves in groups (political or sociopolitical) based on a shared commonality of identity such as, in this case, race and shared history or origin. Building on this, Hall stated:

Now one of the main reactions against the politics of racism in Britain was what I would call “Identity Politics One,” the first form of identity politics. It had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society. It had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. Because people have to find some ground, some place, some position on which to stand. Blocked out of any access to an English or British identity, people had to try to discover who they were. It is the crucial moment of the rediscovery or the search for roots. (2000, 202)

My invocation of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA being formed as a stand is founded on the content of my interviews with my interlocutors throughout this research, and reinforced through Hall, with the idea being that the need of the West Indian immigrants in the GTA to find a place of belonging, where there is identity lending itself to the poignancy of the West Indies, and a sense of safety in establishing roots. I refuse to be any stronger in my characterization of the other given the ethnocentric views that are commonplace among Western anthropologists as highlighted by Sokefeld and my fear that in doing so, I jeopardize the value of my research as intellectual material and my thesis as a form of academic assessment.

Migration has lent itself to an increase in the heterogeneity of nation-states and this has resulted in an inextricable link between identity, as established as a core foundation of this thesis, and the state. When considering migration, there are both push and pull factors, that is pull factors that make developed countries more desirable and push factors that facilitate the outward movement of persons from their home territories. As noted by the aforementioned Foner (1998), Hall (1994) and others, economics and academics have long been the major factors attributed to the outward migration of West Indians to North America and the United Kingdom. The intensification of this migration has had the cascade effect of rapid changes and transformations as host nations have continued to push further towards capitalism (P. C. Hintzen 2004, 290). What this means in actuality is that there is a more targeted focus as it relates to the economic benefits or gains to be had. The net effect of this rapid change in conditions meant that there was a new need and desire on the part of immigrants to find a sense of belonging. Hintzen, in acknowledging this need, stated “The changes also necessitated a need to make distinctions among those who could claim the rights and privileges of belonging as “citizens” and those who could not” (2004, 295). A reminder, that here I speak of those immigrants who are a product of the second diaspora as proposed by Manning, and in this case, my focus is limited to the specifics of the West Indian diaspora.

The need for distinctions that Hintzen alluded to in turn facilitated the dynamic effect of diasporic consciousness. He noted that the diaspora became a place for those who were being denied “the right to national belonging or those whose rights to such were curtailed and compromised” (2004, 296). When I mention the diaspora as a place, I am evoking Hall (1994) as mentioned above and combining it with my perspective of place being something that is transient in nature—meaning that it can be a physical space or a place that is instead transnational in a way, a theoretical space that is shared by those of the West Indian identity. The shared history of the members of the West Indian diaspora lends itself to the diasporic consciousness; it generates a group or shared experience that begins to organize and fashion identity in a way that allows for re-creation and expression of a sense of self. The West Indian diaspora in the GTA is none too dissimilar, as Canada has become a surging economic powerhouse that, while open to immigrants, nevertheless has an established status quo of those who have an intrinsic sense of belonging and

having ‘Canadianness.’ This reestablishes the work of Sokefeld, and I venture further to say quite broadly that Canadians as Westerners, have engaged in the process of the generation of the “other” (Sokefeld 1999) and have marginalized them, reducing their identity, marking them as something that is non-Canadian, and in this case, also marking them as non-Western. I take this further to say that the Western approach as it regards the “other” is to corrupt and bastardize it under the guise of hope for assimilation and acceptance. It is my contention that given the nature of the history of the West Indies, that is not something that is doable and instead, it is why the West Indian identity is valuable to the diasporic community which I investigated.

The West Indian diaspora, with roots in the geographical Caribbean, has an associated sense of exoticism associated with it through the concept of sunshine, beaches, and island paradises that are regular destinations for travelers looking to avoid the winter weather that can be quite brutal in Canada. The concept has meant that there are avenues for the monetization and commodification of West Indianness. This has been successfully explored by members of the diaspora as well as those who consider themselves inherently Canadian, referring to the Caucasian Canadian who was born within the boundaries of the country.

While I do not specifically look at the economic perspective of the diaspora, the critical component of the establishments that have arisen as a result of the associated economics serve as integral structures that serve to reinforce West Indianness and identity among the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. This is discussed in much more detail throughout the chapters and specific focus is directed on the roles of the establishments as incubators of identity among the West Indian diaspora. The establishments, which range from grocery stores to restaurants and lounges, serve an important role in reinforcing the sense of community as well as the construction and expression of identity. The West Indian diaspora in the GTA has facilitated the broadcasting and exposure of its culture through the establishments as well as through its festivals, none more so than the much-revered Caribana. What all this really means is that these establishments, the festivals, and the broader cultural elements to which they all appeal—food, music, and sport—are the key

infrastructure for the GTA diaspora to emerge as a diasporic community with diasporic consciousness

The diaspora, in this capacity, serves the role of cultural producers with the rest of the population being potential “cultural consumers,” as discussed by Maica Gugolati (2018, 250), who notes that this production is not directly as a result of economic circumstances, but rather a component of identity, referring to the idea of a perpetually incomplete production of identity. It is through these avenues that the diaspora attempts to reconcile the shortcomings of the community and reproduce a more complete version of identity. This, according to Hall could be a “collective one true self” (2000, 46), that is critical to one’s cultural identity.

1.4 The Curious Case of the West Indies

In these tiny theatres of conflict and confusion

Better known as the isles of the West Indies

We already know who brought us here

And who created this confusion

So I'm begging, begging my people please,

Rally, rally round the West Indies,

Now and Forever.

(Rudder 1990).

When considering the West Indies there is a considerable amount to unpack regarding the meaning of the term and to begin with, I will give some context with respect to the evolution of the meaning of the West Indies. Catherine Hall in *What is West Indian?* notes that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term West Indian was first used in 1597 to describe inhabitants of the islands and to describe the unsavory practices meted out by the first colonizers, the Spanish, to the inhabitants of the islands. The meaning evolved as quickly as 1661 in the wake of Oliver Cromwell’s Western Design invasion of Jamaica, with Catherine Hall stating, “the term had come to mean an inhabitant or native of the West Indies, of European origin or descent” (2018, 34).

Let us fast forward to the 1900s as we meander towards a contemporary concept of the West Indies. But before this, the history of the region needs to be addressed. Beginning with a geographical sense of the West Indies which consists of the island archipelagos of the Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan archipelago as well as Guyana and Suriname on the eastern coast of the South American mainland. It consists of 18 dependencies, 13 countries, with a total area coverage of 275,400 sq. kilometers and a population of just over 43 million as of 2019 (World population prospects - population division 2019).



Figure 1. Map of the West Indies. Adapted from *West Indies* by B.M. Brereton, 2020. Retrieved May 1st, 2022 from <https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Indies-island-group-Atlantic-Ocean>

Continuing to look at the West Indies, it is worth remembering that the territories of the region have changed hands in terms of ownership several times, either as a result of

strategic agreements and purchases or as a result of war and hostile takeovers. What this has lent itself to is that the West Indies is a region that is not influenced solely by one European powerhouse, but by several. Considering the history of the region there is also a need to appreciate the West Indies which was formerly called the British West Indies is associated with the English-speaking Caribbean Territories and as such there is a historical context to the region in terms of that. What is also worth considering are the various influences that took effect in the West Indies as a result of the changing of ownership of the territories coupled with the unsavory components of the region's history including slavery and indentureship. The European powers that have exerted a long-lasting effect on the West Indies include the British, Dutch, French and Spanish empires. The effects are wide-reaching including the languages spoken, the name of major cities and towns, the type of governance and the foods of the region.

It is also important to note how the transatlantic slave trade and those attempts to replace it (such as the trial of Asian and Persian labourers), shaped the region in not too dissimilar way of the European influences. The African slave trade brought across African people to the territories of the West Indies to work on the plantations that belonged to those persons so anointed by the Europeans as the landowners. I wish to inform the reader here that at an elementary education level in the West Indies, it is taught in schools that the name West Indies is due to a mistake made by Christopher Columbus. As I continue in this thesis, I reaffirm my urgency to the reader to maintain an understanding and appreciation that my discussion is on the West Indies, with its own history, heritage, and culture, exclusive from the Caribbean. Following the abolition of slavery, there were several attempts to replace African slaves with labourers from Asia, Portugal, and the Middle East, which all proved to unsuccessful and unsustainable. This resulted in the British Empire turning to the Indian subcontinent and bring East Indians to the West Indies under the guise of indentureship—which was nothing more than a superfluous navigation around the term of slavery. People from all these regions eventually made their home in the territories and brought with them the elements of their culture which adapted and melted together with the others that were present in the region to create the curious case of West Indian culture; some elements of which, such as music,

food and sport we will discuss further in this thesis as it lends itself as agents of the construction of identity among the West Indian diaspora in the GTA.

Before going further, I want to clearly establish and rearticulate my stance on what is meant by the West Indies because it is important that this notion be understood so that the reader respects the distinctions that are being established. As I refer to the West Indies, I do so much in the way Catherine Hall does in *What is West Indian*. She notes, “The term West Indies is complicated in itself. Is it the West Indies of the colonial period, when the islands were named by their European ‘discoverers’? Is it the British West Indies, or the French or the Spanish or the Dutch?” (2018, 33), and clarifies that “My concern in this chapter, as with the other chapters in the book, is the islands, and parts of the mainland, which were colonised by the British from the early seventeenth century and named as the British West Indies” (2018, 33), to which end I echo that when I refer to the West Indies, I refer to the same as Catherine Hall.

Building off this, I would assert that it is in no significant way gainfully advantageous to the thesis for me to give a history that extends beyond the early 17th century of the West Indian region that does it justice; instead, I offer the following narrative through West Indian history. Hall notes of this history, “this process was in itself a long and complicated history of conquest, associated with the great European wars of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (C. Hall 2018, 33), to which I would add that the complicatedness of the history lends itself to the complicatedness of the culture and identity that exists today.

To understand the West Indies, the main point in my opinion is that it must be understood as an identity born out of a power struggle, and it must be clearly appreciated that because of the root or birth of the West Indian identity, it is one loaded with emotion and valor. To this end, Hall notes:

Englishness and West Indianness have always existed in relation to each other: they have been mutually constitutive over along connected history. But the colonial relation has been one of power: the British were the colonisers – English, Scots and Welsh – while the majority inhabitants of the islands – Africans, and then, following emancipation, Indians brought in as indentured labour – were the

colonized. Complicating that binary division of coloniser and colonized was the ambivalent status of the white settlers, the creolized natives of the islands, who became West Indians and claimed rights of self-government from the mother country. (2018, 35)

The point that I think is most important here is the complicatedness of the relationship, one in which the colonized were able to become the colonizers in a sense, as they claimed the West Indies, becoming a people, having the desire to create something that is new and their own despite the circumstances that brought them there, and a fuel that allowed them to sustainably create the West Indies to a sporting, art, and economic powerhouse. To substantiate this a bit further, I point to Hall's discussion of the change in the power balance in the West Indies, where she presents the following,

The degeneracy of the West Indies in the English imagination is powerfully evoked in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, written in the year safter the slave trade had at last been abolished in 1807. Sir Thomas Bertram is the complacent patriarch who rules Mansfield Park, the comfortable gentry home in the south of England where the main part of the novel is set. But that home relies for its comforts on plantations in Antigua and when troubles erupt on the island the absentee landlord has to go himself to reassert his authority, presumably over managers and the enslaved alike. But while he is away from home the young people at Mansfield Park, no longer restrained by his patriarchal presence, abandon the decencies of respectable society and break loose with theatricals. Their performance of illicit feelings mirrors the troubles in Antigua, where slavery threatens the destruction of civility, and more generally of English ways of life. Only the return of Sir Thomas, the husband and father, secures a reordering of domestic life. (2018, 35)

This would become an all too familiar occurrence, one that shocked the British and began the birth of the West Indies as it is today. There are countless stories like this littered throughout the isles of the West Indies, each one contributing in its own way to the formation of an identity that was born with a purpose, to no longer be subjugated, but to become elevated.

That process of change and evolution of the West Indian identity was facilitated in a large way by the advent of emancipation in the West Indian region, to which end Hall notes:

Emancipation marked a critical break in ideas about the West Indian. From 1838, the time of full emancipation, the possibility of self-government was always present, even if envisaged to be far in the future. West Indian could no longer be

conceived of as a predominantly white identity. The islands had majority black populations and the numbers of mixed-race men and women were fast increasing. These people were all there to stay. (2018, 41-42)

This reasserts what I mentioned earlier that the colonized peoples, the others; that is, those persons in the West Indies that were non-white were able to transition in a sense to become the new colonizers of the region in terms of the culture and identity that would give birth to what currently exists.

Now, returning to the contemporary concept of the West Indies that will provide structure and framework for this thesis, I refer to a critical time in the political history of the region, which is the formation of the West Indian Federation (WIF), which was in existence from 3rd January 1958 to 31st May 1962 (Wallace 1962, 270). It was eventually dissolved as a consequence of insularity in the Parliament of the United Kingdom in the “West Indies Act of 1962” (Wallace 1962, 272). According to Percy Hintzen,

The idea of West Indian federation became transformed from a project for local and regional reform into one with implications for worldwide black liberation, unity, and empowerment. According to Duke, this transformation meliorated tendencies toward “islandism” by black anticolonial activists and reformers in and from the region. It also congealed ideological differences into one project of universal black liberation... The West Indian Federation was shaped in the cauldron of racialized black diasporic activism occurring particularly in Harlem and London, with their growing populations of West Indian immigrants. (2017, 373)

This builds off the *Windrush*, with the West Indian identity in London being forged by the migrations and the strong influences of the *Black Power Movement* in the US. What these groups and ideas shared was a history of being marginalized and seen as the other. Being anything but Caucasian made them black and sentenced them to a form of treatment that they deemed unsuitable.

I mention the West Indian Federation because the concept of West Indies that I use for this thesis and as my enunciated sense of self and personal identity was born out of the notion of West Indian unity, with Hall noting that Sir Grantley Adams, the Prime Minister of the West Indian Federation, referred to this unity, “In his message to West

Indians on Christmas day Sir Grantley Adams, the Prime Minister of the Federation, spoke of West Indian unity” (1994, 34). The unity which is being referred to here is one that is dynamic, much like the concept of identity which governs this thesis in the sense that unity is something that has taken on a life of its own; evolving based on the participants and the circumstances. For this, consider the migration of the term West Indian to something that became an identifying marker.

Prior to World War II there was not much in terms of migration out of the West Indian region but following the war, there was mass movement, firstly through the Windrush era to Britain, with Hall noting that this gave new life to what it meant to be West Indian, mentioning: “It is the postwar generation of migrants who tell of their discovery of becoming West Indian in the metropole: their meeting for the first time with those from other islands of the Caribbean, and recognizing a common identity in the face of shared histories” (2018, 34). Essentially, it refers to the shared history of the people from the region and territories, who are inextricably linked to each other with shared elements of their identity. To be a bit more specific, it refers to a transnational, diasporic sharedness, relating to something that can only be experienced as shared through this transnational migration and diasporic consciousness.

The idea of the West Indies as a region and a socio-political entity has appeared to have seen a renaissance in recent times with more focus falling onto the collectiveness of the region rather than the individual territories themselves. This has been seen more through the eyes of the diaspora, as for instance, during the 2016 census in Ontario, in the GTA alone, 46,300 people voluntarily chose to identify themselves as West Indian (Statistics Canada 2017). This voluntary identification as West Indian is seemingly influenced by a greater global presence of the elements of West Indian culture through food, music, sport, academia and literature. Personally, I began to identify as West Indian rather than Trinidadian at a young age in the early 1990s because of my passion for the sport of cricket, with the West Indies Cricket Team being the only international team that represents a region rather than a nation or state. Further to this, my sense of identity was shaped to be West Indian even further by my appreciation for the literary scholars and social scientists of the region including C. L. R. James, George Lamming, Sir Derek

Walcott, Sir V.S. Naipaul and Stuart Hall. Most of these established persons are not of my shared Trinidadian birthplace, and my identity as West Indian precedes Sir V.S. Naipaul's Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001. As such, my choice to identify as West Indian was because of a shared history with these distinguished figures who were born in the islands of the West Indies and participated in a culture that was shaped by the history which we share. It is worth appreciating that this sharedness is what Stuart Hall refers to when he considers the organization of one's identity, as I am using it to organize and structure my own. The shared element lends me a sense of belonging to a group; transnational and diasporic, with core values built out of a storied history.

As previously mentioned by Catherine Hall and my reiterations, the history of the West Indies is a complicated one. However, for the purposes of this thesis I want to highlight the importance of the changes in perspectives and elements that shaped the region in terms of the manifestation of identity. When we consider the cultural history of the region, we begin with an understanding that there is a lot that will be left unsaid as it has been undocumented. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot considered the Caribbean, a region that hosts many of the West Indian territories, as an "open-frontier" for influence. (1992, 20). He highlighted that prior the E.B. Tylor's first social science publication in 1881, "Barbados had been British for two and a half centuries, Cuba had been Spanish for almost four, and Haiti had been an independent state for three generations" (1992, 20). What we can glean from this is that attempting to apply a social understanding to the events and episodes that have shaped the West Indian identity is an effort in futility as it has been existing and meandering far longer than the structured social science approaches. Beyond this, one must appreciate that culture cannot be understood or interpreted as fixed tradition tied to a place or to a people; rather it must be understood as historical, and as actively made and remade by people in response to their changing circumstances.

What we are able to do is understand the net effect of the route that has led to the current episode of the West Indian identity. Trouillot succinctly notes:

Today, as anthropology continues to nurture a legacy of tropes and concepts honed through the observation of societies once deemed "simple" (if not

primitive), outsiders continue to confront the fact that Caribbean societies have long been awkwardly, yet definitely, “complex” (if not modern). (1992, 22)

What Trouillot is alluding to, and I wish to echo and lend support to, is that the region cannot be seen or understood through the archaic or older western ideas of culture in anthropology, and I refer to Stuart Hall, who implores us to understand the West Indian identity as something that is not a constant and far from simple but rather, the understanding of culture as a mechanism of mediating identity.

Attempting to unpack the West Indies and the territories of the region allow me to build off Trouillot’s assertion of the region as heterogeneous. He notes “the Caribbean has long been an area where some people live next to others who are remarkably distinct.” And as I mentioned before, this is as a result of the history of the region with regards to the different ruling nations and the peoples that were brought there. He goes further: “The region—and indeed particular territories within it—has long been multiracial, multilingual, stratified, and some would say multicultural” (1992, 21). This, again, is as a product of the multiple comings and goings that is the shared history of the territories that make up the West Indies.

What is worthy of further understanding is that Trouillot is clear to refer to “particular territories” and not cast a broad net when referring to the heterogeneous nature of the region. Indeed, there are many parts of the region that are heterogeneous, but we must respect and acknowledge that there are regions and entire islands that up to present, remain highly homogeneous. As earlier, I would make the soft claim based on being from the region, that this dichotomy in the nature of the region lends itself to what it means to be West Indian. What I mean by this is that the smaller islands and territories that lack the resources of the larger territories have tended to be paid less attention to, and therefore they have been historically less frequented by the ruling colonies, which resulted in less investment both in terms of finances and manpower. What this means is in a more contemporary version of the West Indies, which pushes the notion of CARICOM and seeing the region as a united one, is that there is greater investment and attention paid to these previously sidelined territories, and more and more there is an erasure of homogeneity and a greater amount of the heterogeneity that defines the region.

My theoretical basis for the concept of the West Indies for the purposes of this research as I mentioned, is informed by the formation of the West Indian Federation in 1958. Appreciating the fact that many of the territories that made up the WIF have gone on to gain independence from the British Empire and eventually to lose the last of the shackles by becoming republics. To contextualize this, let us acknowledge that Barbados, having gained independence in 1966, cut ties with the British Empire on November 30th, 2021, during the research phase of this thesis, after 396 years of belonging to Britain, to become a republic within the Commonwealth of Nations. The renaissance of the region has facilitated the formation of the Caribbean Community and Common Market known as CARICOM.

In the post-independence era of the region, which followed the failure of WIF, the territories found difficulty in establishing footing being solely independent and autonomous. As such, the heads of the regional territories supported the formation of CARICOM. This is in part because as political and economic independence waned during the drawn-out phase of decolonization, a great emphasis was placed on cultural nationalism and cultural transnationalism, with specific attention directed to culture as a way to define oneself, instead of a political identification with one nation-state. Derek O'Brien notes, lessons were learnt from the failures of WIF in order to ensure a strength to the CARICOM body. He mused:

The legacy of colonial rule, including the abortive attempt at a West Indies Federation, resulted not only in a profound mistrust of any form of political union but also established the ideal of island self-government as the centre of the region's political culture. This is clearly manifest in the institutional structure and governance of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), which is based on the principles of intergovernmentalism. (2011, 630)

What this goes to show is that region began to understand the need to be hosted under a wider umbrella rather than for the territories to go the route individually. What this allowed in my opinion, is a duality. By allowing there to be self-governance while also belonging to a larger unit, I believe this lent itself to a sense of pride in the individual territories as well as the larger CARICOM unit. A critical point that I think is worth mentioning here, as it frames the relationship that evolved to give the contemporary West

Indies its nuanced distinguishability is that, in the post-independence era, Britain was attempting to join the European Economic Community, and to the territories of the West Indies, it would have felt as if the feeding hand was going elsewhere. As a consequence, O' Brien notes that regional unity was "reinforced" (2011, 647), as there was a sense among the territories that they wish not to be isolated and at risk, but rather to find safety and security in unity.

And again, as we continue to understand the West Indian region and its complexity, I refer to Trouillot who notes, "the complexity of the frontier makes the application of many models inherited from the guild simplistic- a realization often deterred in other regions of the world by gatekeeping and the adoption of unproblematized unit" (1992, 33). I refer to this because we must be willing to understand that to construct a narrative of what is the West Indies, we must be comfortable with the uncomfortable, unyielding complexity of the region. Let me dovetail this with Hall, who writes:

And I say that not because I think therefore that Caribbean people can ever give up the symbolic activity of trying to know more about the past from which they come, for only in that way can they discover and rediscover the resources through which identity can be constructed. But I remain profoundly convinced that their identities for the twenty-first century do not lie in taking old identities literally, but in using the enormously rich and complex cultural heritages to which history has made them heir, as the different musics out of which a Caribbean sound might one day be produced. (1994, 11)

The point being that we must appreciate that the Caribbean, the home of the West Indies, is one with a complicated and rattling history, and the more we come to terms with the history and heritage of the region, is the more the picture of the West Indian identity reveals itself. It is my assertion that the complete picture is yet to be seen but as West Indians home and abroad continue to unearth and appreciate their history, the picture becomes more complete. Continuing, it must be noted with importance, the West Indian diaspora as cultivators of the West Indian culture is able to facilitate the construction of the West Indian identity in the diasporas as a result of migration. The ability of the diaspora to produce, reproduce, and re-create concepts of West Indian identity and culture is a testament of the resiliency of the identity itself as I refer you back to my earlier assertion of pride and valor in the contemporary West Indian identity.

1.5 The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Dynamic

Five regions consisting of 25 incorporated municipalities make up the Greater Toronto Area with a population of 6.5 million people. The five regions are York, Durham, Peel, Halton and Toronto, with the city of Toronto itself contributing a population of just over 2.5 million people (Statistics Canada 2017). While the general census data for the 2021 census has been released, the data regarding Portrait of citizenship and immigration in Canada and Ethnocultural and religious composition of the population are set to be released on October 26th, 2022. As such, the data that will be used to discuss the GTA dynamic as it refers to the West Indian diaspora will be the most recent completed data set which was released in 2016.

In 2016, the population of the GTA was 5,862,855 people with 2,705,550 being identified as immigrants. Of this immigrant population, 404,515 people were from the territories that make up the West Indies. This accounts for roughly 15% of the immigrant population in the Greater Toronto Area (Statistics Canada, 2016). Considering that the population of the territories that make up the West Indies is around 43.2 million (World population prospects - population division 2019) and the world population in 2016 was roughly 7.42 billion people. It is worth noting that a population that accounts for 0.58% of the world's population contributed 15% of the immigrant population in the GTA. It is also worth noting that the West Indian population makes up a significant percentage of racialized population in GTA and in Canada.

Toronto is generally considered to be the most diverse city in the world, with a similar sentiment extended to the rest of the GTA which, if needed further contextualization regarding the veracity of this milestone, is that the GTA occupies a paltry 7,125 sq. kilometers. Canada has become home to many immigrants, with immigrant children being the fastest growing population in Canada, with one in every five school children being an immigrant child in 2005, with this projected to have become one in every three children by 2017 (Areepattamannil and Freeman 2008), projections that have been exceeded as immigration has continued to soar. According to Citizen and Immigration Canada, four in ten persons immigrating to Canada, choose Toronto as their destination for resettlement. This accounts for the high population of

immigrants in the GTA and lends itself to the extensive diversity that is present in the region.

As mentioned, there are 25 incorporated municipalities that make up the GTA and the reason that this must be considered when looking at diasporic communities as well as immigrant populations is that, according to Myer Siemiatycki and Engrin Isin, the highest concentrations of immigrants tend to not take up residence in the “traditional immigrant settlement area of the former City of Toronto, but in the post-World War II suburbs and edge cities of the city region” (1997, 78). Unpacking this, we can understand that Toronto has been the preferred destination for immigrants settling in Ontario but coupling this with the push of first world nations toward capitalism as suggested by Hintzen, and as has been seen in the current real estate prices across Canada, there is now a greater desirability and feasibility to settle in the outskirts of Toronto, which fall within the GTA.

With over 250 ethnicities present in the GTA with over 200 different languages present and spoken (Statistics Canada 2017), there is no doubt that there is some degree of validity in the claim of Toronto being considered the most diverse city in the world. What must also be considered for the scope of this thesis is that the role Toronto and the GTA in being a host to the multiplicity of diasporas cannot be understated. What I mean here is that the GTA is an area that is packed with a variety of cultures and diasporic communities and has been so for quite some time and as such it has evolved into a welcoming host for among others, the West Indian diasporic community. It is my soft claim, with further consideration and investigation needed, that the strength of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA is based, in part by the notable absence of a geographically specific ethnic enclave. To this end, therefore I focus my thesis on particular institutions and establishments that I believe have become important, because there is not the same kind of co-presence in a small geographic neighborhood. Instead, there has to be a more shared, dispersed sense of identity and as a result, the establishments place an important role as locations to gather, providing the cultural elements through which people, as Hall notes, organize and construct their identities and sense of self. This, in my opinion is due to the sheer number of different immigrant groups and communities that call the GTA home, and as noted, the small area it occupies. To contextualize this, the size of 7,125 sq.

kilometers would make it comparable to the second-smallest state in the United States of America, which is Delaware with an area of 6,446 sq. kilometers and a population of under 1 million (One World - Nations Online 2022). This is even more specific to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA which does not occupy a specific area much like the ethnic enclaves of Jamaica, Queens and Liberty Avenue in New York which are considered as ethnic enclaves for West Indian and Caribbean people.

1.6 Methods

The research for this thesis took place in the Greater Toronto Area, which as mentioned before is an area with over 47% of the population being immigrants. The GTA, being considered as the most diverse area in the world in terms of immigrants and a multitude of ethnicities, is home to a significant West Indian population—well over four hundred thousand of them. This made the GTA an obvious choice as the research site for this study to take place, when looking at the concept of diasporic consciousness and the expression of identity among the West Indian diaspora. In supporting this, according to Statistics Canada, as of 2001, 60% of Caribbean immigrants in Canada made their home in Toronto, with the second highest concentration being 20% in Montreal.

Data collection for this study involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Considering the participant observation, a method that is heavily relied upon on the social sciences, is a method in which, “the observer participates in ongoing activities and records observations” (De Roure, et al. 2015). As I noted earlier, I am a member of the West Indian diaspora, and this positionality meant that it allowed my research methods to be what they were in the sense that it allowed me ease of access to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA and familiarity with the language, parlance, and the establishments. In fact, I have been abroad for over a decade and regularly find myself engaging with members of the West Indian diaspora across the globe and finding niche comforts in the West Indian enclaves that exist in certain geographical locations. To situate this, I need to acknowledge that this served me well in this research and my ‘West Indianness’ here refers to what Hall refers to as the “I” or “enunciated self” (2001, 221). To properly grasp this, we must understand that I am a West Indian of East Indian descent with a British father and Trinidadian mother. I lived in Trinidad and Tobago for

18 years, followed by time living in Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and among West Indian ethnic enclaves in Queens, New York and Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Because of this my outward appearance in terms of the way I dress, haircut, beard, tattoos, piercings and jewelry all suggest that I am socially marked as West Indian to a fellow West Indian. Also, having lived in these places, I have an accent that is quite complicated, with persons being easily able to place it as being West Indian or Caribbean, but not able to place it to any island or territory, as it is indeed a mixture of varying influences, something I have done consciously over the years to help me fit in with different groups as well as to maintain that self-identification of West Indian.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews, these were utilized in the attempt to allow the respondents or interviewees to have a greater degree of latitude in their responses and answers to the interviewer. The openness in structure means that the format of the questions or prompts are not rigorously adhered to, and there is some flexibility on the part of the interviewer to use the responses of the interviewee to be able to facilitate the collection of data relevant to the overall ambitions of the study.



Figure 2. Municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area. Adapted from *Greater Toronto Area*, 2022. Retrieved May 4th 2022, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Toronto_Area

The data collection in this study took place in two phases. Initially, these phases were intended to be independent of each other but due to the timing of the changes in COVID-19 restrictions that were in effect in Ontario, there was some crossover. Initially, Phase I, which focused on semi-structured interviews, was supposed to take place between October 16th to October 31st, 2021. In this phase, the respondents had the option of choosing whether they would have preferred in-person or virtual interviews. On October 25th, 2021, Ontario lifted the majority of the remaining restrictions that were in place to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and this date was known ahead of time, so as interviews were being scheduled, all the respondents indicated that they would prefer to do the interviews in person, and all chose to meet at West Indian establishments. In Phase I conducted 10 interviews that each lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. The

interviews were conducted at various West Indian establishments throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

The 10 persons who were interviewed for Phase I of this research were selected after they volunteered to be part of the study that was made public on the social media profile of Chutney Soca artist and a close friend of mine, KI Persad, who at the time of writing has over fifty thousand followers on Instagram and over forty-seven thousand followers on Facebook. KI (his preferred stage name) is a multiple award-winning Chutney Soca artist that has collaborated with many other artistes across the globe. He is the frontliner for the band called KI and The Band, previously known as JMC 3Veni. KI is a Canadian born to Trinidadian parents and his father was the former frontliner of the 3Veni band. Growing up in the Chutney Soca music world, KI spent his childhood travelling back and forth between Trinidad and Tobago and Brampton, Ontario in Canada. Our friendship stretches back to 2009, when we were introduced to each other at a bar by a mutual acquaintance. Given our respective appreciation for the West Indian culture and other shared interests, our friendship has grown, and we share common territories of hanging out in Florida, New York, Guyana and now in Canada. Many persons reached out to be part of the study and the number was narrowed down to 10 with various factors considered such as age (ranging from 19 to 80), gender, country of birth (whether they were first generation or a consequent generation), and availability within the permissible timeline. Of the 10 persons, I decided to select interlocutors who had ties to the four largest English-speaking West Indian territories: Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, I chose six persons who were first generation with the others being second generation. The reason for this is based on an extrapolation of the age distribution of immigrants per *Statistics Canada*, which noted that the Caribbean community, which lends itself to the West Indian identity, has a population that is generally young and as such, I focused on an age distribution that was similar to the projections as possible, with the ages of the interlocutors being between 19 to 80 with at least one person in every decade of age in the spectrum. All 10 interlocutors were over the age of 19 given that the research took place in establishments that served alcohol and additionally, they would have been willing and able to give consent for themselves.

Phase II of this research focused on participant observation at West Indian establishments. This phase was supposed to begin on November 1st, 2021 and was originally intended to last for two weeks but was extended to November 30th, 2021 due to an unexpected need to travel on the researcher's behalf. However, given that the restrictions changed and there was a considerably greater amount of freedom, Phase II intersected with Phase I and there were both interviews and participant observation taking place across the timeline from October 25th to the extended final date of November 30th, 2021. During Phase II, five West Indian establishments were visited, and observations made. Three to five persons were spoken to and interviewed at each establishment and these persons consisted of both staff and patrons, and worthy of note is that at all the establishments visited for this thesis, all the staff identified as West Indian. To protect the identity of everyone, participants were given pseudonyms that are not reflective of their names, and staff members at all establishments were referred to only indirectly so as to have no elements of their identity revealed.

All the persons interviewed and spoken to had the option to decide whether or not they wanted to provide direct quotes for the study, specifically referring to whether or not they wanted to provide specific quotes to be reproduced in the thesis or whether they preferred to be paraphrased as there was no recording of the conversations. I believe that this approach was integral to the validity of the study as in the past I have worked with West Indian immigrants in urban areas such as Ft. Lauderdale and Queens, New York and I have found that, while there is an eagerness to being a part of research studies especially with a West Indian researcher, there is a bit of unwillingness and apprehension as it relates to being recorded or signing their names. To this end, I decided to get verbal consent, take notes in a discrete manner rather than recording the conversations, and give the interlocutors the option of how they wanted their words to be represented regarding providing direct quotes or not. Additionally, when working with a diasporic community, one must also appreciate that consideration must be taken that persons may be in a country on various documents and degrees of legality, and as a researcher there must be respect for the principle of non-maleficence.

Ten establishments were visited for the duration of the research in the areas of Etobicoke, North York, Brampton, Scarborough, Concord, Pickering, York and Toronto. (See *Figure 2* for geographical context). These areas were chosen because, as previously mentioned and according to Siemiatycki and Isin (1997, 78), the majority of West Indian immigrants flocked to the suburbs of the City of Toronto to establish their lives.

The establishments that were visited during the interviews in the research were chosen by the interlocutors as their preferred destination to be interviewed as in all cases, it was the West Indian establishment that they most often frequent. I made the conscious decision to try to visit as many establishments as I could with the only establishment that was part of both phases being Caribbean Cove, due to it being one of the most popular places in that area of Toronto for West Indian immigrants. The establishments chosen for participant observation were done so after consideration with Ontario-based West Indian entertainers, RumShop Chronicles and KI, as they advised me regarding the popularity, history and diversity of the establishments. I chose these establishments based on how long they were in existence. For example, Island Mix has been operating for over 12 years and Calypso Hut has been in operation since 1989. I also considered that some of these establishments had multiple locations of associated, similarly themed restaurants. For example, Caribbean Heat and Island Mix both have four locations across the GTA. I also tried to select establishments across the area itself to attempt to get an accurate reflection of the area. However, there is a far greater concentration of West Indian establishments in Peel, Durham, York Regions and Toronto, as compared with Halton.

Before I began participant observation at the establishments, I communicated with the managers and proprietors to be granted permission and they were open to being there when I was there in order to speak to me and introduce me to some of their patrons. At these establishments, my distinctive 'West Indianness' served the study well as there was no shortage of interactions and discussions that were initiated by patrons. This detail seemed to make patrons and interlocutors much more comfortable in speaking to me and revealing details of their lives as they see me as part of the shared transnational, diasporic community.

Finally, regarding the observation phase of the research, it took place in settings that were strongly fueled by alcohol and drugs, and I was under no misconceptions as to what is considered to be acceptable in these types of establishments. What I mean by this is that having been a patron at some of these establishments and other West Indian and Caribbean places over the years, I know that there is a strong reliance on substances and vices to facilitate having a good time, a detail that is based on my lived experiences both in the diaspora as well as in the West Indian territories themselves. I myself did not indulge in any of these vices nor is it in my practice to and in navigating this, I arranged with the proprietors and bartenders to serve me Coors Banquet and Heineken 0.0 in beer mugs while I was conducting my research. These beverages are non-alcoholic and by putting them in a beer mug, it would negate the possibility of fellow patrons noticing that they were non-alcoholic. The reason for this is that I did not want to seem like an outsider or a sort of pariah to the patrons which would have negatively affected the validity of the research process and the study itself. On top of this, I made sure that I would get the consent of my interlocutors prior to their inebriation and intoxication to the best of my ability, and I was unable to use some of the conversations that I had in phase II for this research as I do not believe that the persons providing the data were within their full capacities to give consent and provide the information, and it was at these points that I would quickly conclude the conversations, taking no further notes or observations.

1.7 The COVID-19 Pandemic Effect

The research conducted in the preparation of this thesis took place during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic that crippled that global community. There are far greater concerns than my research, but I would be remised if I did not discuss the effect of the pandemic on my research process and the effects on potential interlocutors which would have consequentially shaped the data gathered. The pandemic threw up many obstacles to life that impacted our freedom of movement and gathering. These are the two main components which I believe to have had some sort of effect on the research process as well as the data gathered.

Firstly, the protocols put in place to battle the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, Canada took many different forms and phases that were dependent on the number of cases and

the impact on the healthcare system. Across Canada, the initial impact of the mechanisms put in place to curtail the spread of the virus resulted in a minus twenty five percent (-25%) impact on GDP (Chakraborty and Maity 2020). The directives and advice of the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended a restriction on mass gatherings, with Chakraborty and Maity noting that across the world, governments implemented bans and postponements on “all types of religious, cultural, social, scientific, sport, and political mass gathering events” (2020, 5). This significantly affected the amount of travel or movements that took place outside of the home. According to Mahmudur Fatmi, “Overall, individuals made around 1.62 trips/day/person during COVID-19 compared to around 3.33 trips/day/person in the pre-pandemic period, which is a drop by more than 50%” (2020, 271). What this meant is that people were spending more time at home, with some of the contributing reasons being a fear of infection, their own health and safety, a lack of open options in terms of destinations to visit or frequent as well as mandatory shutdowns and closures.

In Ontario, as in many other places, there were several waves of the COVID-19 virus and at the time of writing, the province is battling with another wave. The difference this time is that given the effect that the protocols that were designed to stem the spread of the virus have had on the economy and the quality of life, there are far less restrictions in place, if any at all. The reason for this is that as a global community there is the desire to return to some semblance of normalcy and an acceptance of living with the COVID-19 virus rather than eliminating it.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on my own research was quite exhausting to deal with, as the REB proposal to gain ethics approval for the research was quite difficult to navigate and proved to many of my colleagues to be demotivating and provided a schism between what they desired to study versus what they were able to get approval to study, which is not meant as an inditement on the procedural process itself but it must be acknowledged that the COVID-19 climate did make the process difficult as there was a lack of clarity. After many edits and resubmissions, I was able to be granted my approval and in my specific instance, I was a bit fortunate with the timing of the feedback. Considering that the measures and restrictions that were in place were temporary and

fluid, with subject to change and there were regular updates and adjustments by the provincial government. What the situation meant was that initially my thesis research proposal consisted of a phase that would have taken place when there were still strict policies in place. However, by the time I got approval, this was not the case anymore as immediately following the granting of my approval, Ontario lifted almost all remaining restrictions on October 15th, 2021, which was at the start of my data gathering process. Because of this lifting of restrictions, an entire phase of my research which was to be done online/remotely/virtually was soon to be proven as obsolete as the release of restrictions meant that absolutely none of my potential interlocutors had any desire to meet remotely or online.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic kept people cooped up at home and restricted from human interaction for quite some time. What this manifested as was that there was a rebound effect after the restrictions were lifted, with a surge in engagement at establishments that survived the pandemic. To be clear, according to Statistics Canada, regarding the province of Ontario, 12% of businesses that were in operation in February 2020 are no longer in operation as a consequence of the pandemic, with a further 75,000 businesses at risk of closing due to the inability to recover as it relates to debt as a result of the pandemic and the associated policies and restrictions that were instituted. When I mentioned previously that I was lucky, I mean that I was able to conduct my research entirely in-person and all the establishments that I had done my due diligence and decided to visit, were able to survive the pandemic. Also, I was able to connect with a willing community of participants that were not put off by interpersonal interactions and any associated fearmongering that was indicative of the more stringent lockdown measures that were imposed during the pandemic.

Chapter 2

2 Let's Talk Some Sport

The Greeks believed that an athlete who had represented his community at a national competition, and won, had thereby conferred a notable distinction on his city. His victory was a testament to the quality of the citizens. All the magnates of the city welcomed him home in civic procession. They broke down a part of the wall for him to enter: a city which could produce such citizens had no need of walls to defend it. For the rest of his life, he ate at the public expense

– (James 1963, 156)

The afternoon of Saturday October 23rd, 2021, will be forever etched into the minds of West Indian cricket supporters across the world. It was the much-anticipated grudge match between the West Indies and England cricket teams, the opening group stage match for both teams at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The last time these two teams met in a world cup, the West Indies defeated England in 2016 to become the two-time defending champions, and as defending champions the first game is normally a repeat of the previous final. Well, as a cricket lover myself, I can say that this was a match that ensured that little research and a lot of mourning was done that day. The English team absolutely annihilated the West Indies, rattling them out for 55 runs and winning with 70 balls left. A match that is supposed to take roughly 190 minutes, took a little over 50 mins to be completed. As I stood there in in Windies Restaurant and Sports Bar located in Scarborough, surrounded by supporters of the West Indies cricket team, I couldn't help but think that we were about to surrender our status as World Cup champions. The West Indies team dramatically underperformed and were bounced out of the World Cup at the group stage with 1 win in 5 matches. But how did I get to this story? Let us back up and look at the importance of sport and specifically cricket to the sense of identity among the West Indian diaspora in the GTA.

I would like the reader to appreciate that in the conversations in this chapter to follow, consider the following—Cricket and the other sports are not simply seen as sports or as games, but rather it is the people watching and supporting, cheering on their teams and athletes. It is the process by which they come together to watch the games, the liming together, the investment of finances, time and other resources into teams and so much

more. In a broad sense, what this discussion is about is sport as a means of organizing the diasporic consciousness; the way it contributes to Hall's (1994) notion of organizing identity and creating a space for it to be created, re-created and expressed time after time.

2.1 West Indian Sport Casts a Wide Net

In an interview with a Matthew, 65-year-old Trinidadian-born Canadian who migrated from Trinidad to downtown Toronto in 1980 with his wife and 2 children, I learnt that the older generations of West Indians had a different perspective of appreciation for athletes from different countries than their own. When we met at Island Mix Restaurant and Lounge in Concord, he related to me that growing up, apart from cricket the next big thing was athletics and then football and he suggested this was based on the minimal infrastructure and equipment needed for the rudimentary versions of these sports. In conversation, I asked him what role he felt sports played in his West Indian identity and he explained that apart from the West Indies, there was a shared pride among West Indians both in the territories and in Toronto, in his own words, as they applaud and celebrate the accomplishments of the athletes from the region as though they share a homeland. He said that it is his belief that this a product of cricket because, "from a young age we are introduced to cricket, but to West Indies regardless of which country the player is from so we support the region rather than the country and maybe that's why we celebrate it the way we do." His example was that of the dominance of track athletes such as Arthur Wint from Jamaica and Hasely Crawford from Trinidad which are two of the first gold medalists from territories that belong to the West Indies. He said that growing up they learnt about Wint's Olympic gold medal in 1948 and celebrated it as if a Trinidadian had won it because it was someone that was from the region. When I think about this, I consider that maybe part of the appreciation that is shown to athletes from different countries that are part of the West Indian region has to do with the shared histories and experiences of these territories, many of which were subjected to the same realities that shaped them. This shared histories as we have seen, is vital to understanding the diaspora and the sense of self that is constructed within it.

This led me to think about other athletes and discuss them with him as we were able to make some headway in unpacking the concept at hand. I brought up the way the region

celebrated Hasely Crawford's gold medal in 1976 and he explained that this was in the height of the black power movement in the United States, and in his opinion this was informing a sense of shared consciousness throughout the West Indies as they were reflecting on the way they were treated by the colonial rulers, essentially talking about being seen through the lens of the "other," and the dominance of the athlete allowed for, according to Matthew "bravado, and we could hold up our chest high and say we people beat allyuh ass in what y'all think allyuh was good at, because we people better." He explained that when he said, 'we people', it meant West Indian people because again, like many persons born in West Indian territories, their first indoctrination into sport is into cricket and an introduction to the West Indies cricket team. We spoke about the likes of sprinters Ato Boldon, Asafa Powell, Richard Thompson, Kim Collins, Obadele Thompson, Usain Bolt and other as we spoke about that sense of regional pride. In this conversation we spoke about the Olympics where we regularly see athletes from Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica medaling in prestigious events and especially in the relay events as a team. I must note that there have been athletes from other territories that have established themselves on the internal stage.

Then came the revelation, in our conversation about Andre De Grasse, a Canadian sprinter who won the gold medal in the 200 meters and a Bronze medal in the 100 meters sprint events on August 3rd and 1st, 2021 respectively. Matthew told me he celebrated that as both a Canadian and a West Indian and I gave him a smirk because I knew exactly why he said that. Andre was born in the GTA, Scarborough and then moved to Markham, to a Trinidadian-born mother than migrated to Canada and his father is Barbados-born and migrated to Canada as well. Both of his parents were from the West Indies and were part of the West Indian diaspora; Andre himself was seen by other members of the West Indian diaspora as one of their own, a second generation Canadian-born West Indian. While the athlete himself may or may not appreciate this, the story of shared roots and histories with his family means that at least part of the diaspora throw their support behind him because they have something in common with him, a history.

Similarly, I remember when Jamaica qualified for the 1998 football World Cup and Trinidad and Tobago achieved a similar feat in 2006, there was a unanimous sense of

collective pride throughout the West Indian region. Sport is an avenue that allows the expression of one's feelings regarding injustice and unfairness, and we have seen that as a continuing narrative from Tommie Smith and John Carlos' Black Power protest in the 1968 Olympics to the contemporary Black Lives Matter (Evans et al, 2020) that stretches across different sports and has been championed by the West Indian Cricket Team and former captain, Jason Holder. I was shaped by this process as a young athlete playing many sports competitively that afforded me the chance to travel across the West Indian region. During the 2006 football world cup I was playing in a cricket competition in Barbados and one of the early matches in the competition was Trinidad and Tobago versus England. If I recall correctly, I watched this match in the hotel lobby with some teammates as part of a larger viewing party as it seemed like all of Barbados wanted a fellow former colony to pull one over on the former colonial masters. The game ended unceremoniously with Trinidad and Tobago losing due to a goal by striker Peter Crouch, who in the build-up to the play grabbed deadlocked- Trinidadian Brent Sancho by the hair, as seen in the image below, which FIFA admitted retrospectively, should have been called as a foul.



Figure 3. Peter Crouch and Brent Sancho at World Cup 2006. Adapted from *Peter Crouch is probably the most hated Englishman in our history* by R. Stevens 2015, BBC Online. Retrieved on May 7th 2022 from <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/32218076>

During an interview with ESPN in August 2019, Crouch admitted that it was a foul, and the goal should not have been allowed but he was content with scoring a goal for his country. I bring up this because the next day I played in a match against a team from Antigua and their coaches in conversation following the match made a comment that has stuck with me some 16 years after. It was along the lines of, the English were lucky it was football and not cricket, because they (the English) have learnt their lesson regarding 'pulling the black man down'. I bring this up because it is a reminder that even in sports that are played under a country banner, the West Indian territories support each other and acknowledge the role of sport in the social landscape even if they may not explicitly state it. The takeaway from this consensus approach brings me to the next point, which is sport is a powerful symbol for the West Indian community.

2.2 The West Indies Cricket Team

The West Indies cricket team played their first official match as an international team from June 23rd to June 26th, 1928, in London, England against the England cricket team. The West Indies Cricket Board, which controls West Indies cricket, consists of 6 major territorial memberships: Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Leeward Islands, and Windward Islands. The Leeward Islands consist of Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Montserrat, Sint Maarten and the U.S. Virgin Islands, while the Windward Islands consist of Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I give this background regarding the cricket team because the team holds a special place in the heart of West Indians, including myself as post the WIF, it is the only recognized entity that continues to represent the entirety of the West Indian territories under one umbrella.



Figure 4. West Indies Cricket Logo. Adapted from *The Home of West Indies Cricket*. Retrieved on May 5th, 2022, from <https://www.windiescricket.com/>

Members of diaspora communities are often considered to be like homeless persons or displaced peoples looking for a sense of community and identity which brings to them a sense of belonging and settlement. I draw upon the work of Janelle Joseph who notes that members of diasporic communities rely on “cultural production, such as sport, to feel at home or emplaced” (2014, 669). The cultural product of sport is one that tends to lend itself to a sense of togetherness as it brings people from different backgrounds together to support a common unit whether it be a team or an individual athlete. Kendall Blanchard notes that sport is a distinctive component of culture, and “it is thoroughly integrated with the other institutions that characterize any given culture” (1995, 145). Regarding the importance of cricket to the West Indian diaspora, what we must appreciate is that the team represents no fewer than 15 different countries all under one team, with each country having its own unique identity. The fact that the West Indies cricket team has persisted for over 90 years at the international level is quite impressive and speaks to its role as a contributor to the West Indian identity. As Joseph highlights, cricket is integral

when considering diasporas, as it contributes to the development of diasporic communities and diasporic consciousness (2014, 671). Let me be clear about this, West Indies cricket is something different than any sport to any national identity, as I have drawn attention to, and will continue to, it is the only sports team in the world that represents a region of shared history and culture as opposed to national identities and shared borders. In doing so, it lends itself to something uniquely different that must be appreciated for what it is. To this end, Joseph is specifically referring to ideas and concepts such as identity and belonging, racial and social groups which are the epitome of the evolution of West Indies cricket because, as mentioned the West Indian identity is one that is born out of the need for a sense of belonging.

Joseph's declaration of, "No other sport spans the English-speaking Caribbean as cricket does" (2014, 671) reiterates my point regarding the value of cricket to the West Indies, historically and contemporarily. In the region, it is what we (West Indians) grow up with as a part of daily life, lending itself to a sense of pride that has become, in my view, synonymous with the West Indian identity. Joseph brings up an important discussion that I think needs unpacking as we continue to contextualize the role of cricket to the West Indian identity, and that is,

Much has been written about the history of the West Indies team, which represents the entire Caribbean region in international cricket, and its role in (de)colonization and nation building, especially because of its synonymy with fairness, civility, and the opportunity for Black and Indian lower-class masses to gain accommodation with, and recognition from, the ruling White elite (Beckles and Stoddart, 1995; James, 1963). The rise of the West Indies team to the status of world leaders in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with the formation of the region's post-colonial identity. (2014, 671)

What must be understood here as a whole is that the West Indies cricket team epitomizes the West Indian identity in more ways than anticipated, a broad claim yes, but one that is clear when we consider the racial, social, socio-economic components as well as the shared history and evolution of the team, from a subjugated unit of island dissidents to a world power that took a particular pleasure in the demolition of the English team. The West Indies cricket team brought together the people of Indian and African origins that called the territories home, those who were brought here as a result of slavery and

indentureship. In the first instance, they played alongside white players who called the region home, but following the independence era in the early 1960's the Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean players of the region seized control of the West Indies cricket team, raising it to the top team in the world and taking a distinct pleasure in having a non-white team of former colonial subjects that destroyed their former colonial masters, much in the way that David Rudder refers to "We know who brought us here" in his West Indian cricket anthem, *Rally round the West Indies*, speaking of the Englishman team.

Much like Hall (1994) and others speak about the complexity of understanding the West Indies, the same can be said for attempting to grasp an understanding of the West Indies cricket team. What we have is that the team lends itself to a unit that is representative of the post-colonial dominance of the region in a sport that was brought to the region by the colonial power—the British Empire. And yet, the team is represented by players from different countries that have gained independence from what was once called the British West Indies. What I mean here is, there is a heuristic process to understanding the role of the West Indies cricket team and its contribution to the establishment and expression of identity among the diaspora. Consider, for example, how the vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Sir Hilary Beckles claimed, "West Indian people have made their greatest single cultural investment in cricket" (2012, 160). Building on the point, Beckles noted that cricket had been exported to the colonies under strained racial circumstances, referring to the slave trade and indentureship, and it is in the hands of those same former slaves and indentured labourers and their progeny, that the game of cricket was refined, adapted and re-exported (2012, 162) as a product of West Indian power and dominance.

Beckles posits, that within the global landscape, the West Indies appears to be seen as a nation that stands apart from others, seemingly as one that is built around cricket (2012, 162), a sort of nationalism without a defined nation but as mentioned before, to the region of independent territories. I echo this sentiment as it in a large part contributed to my self-identification as West Indian. Worth appreciating is the role of cricket in highlighting the social story that is the shared history of West Indians and that fuels the identification as part of the diasporic community. What I am attempting to say here is that cricket provides

an important lens for viewing or contextualizing a way to understand how people construct a sense of West Indian belonging and that it was also a key historical institution of social and cultural production that helped, from the post-independence era, around the 1970s onward especially. Building on this, I refer to Beckles, who notes that the West Indies cricket team was able to repurpose the meaning of the game, to highlight to a global audience, “the struggle for social justice and political freedom” (2012, 163) and he noted that the players weren’t simply seen as athletes, but rather as national heroes in much the same way that C. L. R. James referred to athletes being treated in his classic study of cricket and West Indian identity, *Beyond a Boundary* (see the epigraph to this chapter). Both men are making the clear assertion, that the cricketers took on a role that far exceeded the contemporary cloak of what an athlete is, they became heroes and statesmen that put the cause of a region, the West Indies, on full display to the world.

I established that I believe the West Indian diaspora is something of a stand, in a manner of embracing the otherness of the West Indian community and this is echoed through the West Indies cricket team. The team revolutionized the way the game was played and the views of the West Indies but what it also did was change the political and social discrepancies that had been inherent to cricket. Beckles noted,

Whites from elite families had opposed the abolition of slavery and the introduction of civil rights in the nineteenth century; similarly, they opposed political democracy and national independence in the mid twentieth. Likewise, they opposed the democratization of cricket culture with the consequence that the emerging nation found it difficult to embrace them as legitimate citizens. In the sphere of cricket, while they were willing to make concessions to the principle of meritorious representation, they were unwilling to relinquish control of the leadership. (2012, 163)

What I take from this is that the actions of the West Indies cricket team shaped the intrinsic nature of the West Indian diaspora as the diaspora continues to represent a stand against those things that were inherently marginalizing and segregating in cricket. I need to clarify that it is not my assertion that there is actively, deliberate discrimination against the West Indian diaspora or other diasporas for that matter, but rather the institutions that govern our social landscape, here in Canada, which was once a British colony, seems to

persist with circumstances resulting in the WI diaspora encountering structural racism within Canada, with different forms of structural racism and exclusion.

Before I return to a more contemporary discussion, let me post the following question, one that C. L. R. James asked in 1963 in *Beyond a Boundary*, “What do they know of cricket who only cricket they know?” (1963, ix). Let me explain through Thomas Fletcher, who notes that James is not speaking about cricket as a sport; rather, he is encouraging the reader to see cricket as having the “power to articulate the complexities of social identities in the contemporary world” (2015, 141). Let us appreciate that James was encouraging us to see cricket as something beyond the boundaries of the field, as a powerful and just tool in a world where West Indians felt powerless and unjustly treated.

2.3 The Spectator Event of Cricket

Now, let us return to the recent past, that dreadful Saturday 23rd of October 2021 that saw my hopes of the West Indies becoming the threepeat World Cup winners, beating to within an inch of its mere survival. I will try to keep my discussion specific to the sport itself but as has been established, cricket is a bit more than just a sport to West Indians, it is a way of life and an expression of identity. I sauntered into Windies Restaurant and Sports Bar about 45 minutes before the start of the match and as expected, it was crowded with patrons making their predictions for the match well known. All the screens were tuned in to the broadcast of the World Cup, but they were all muted. Instead, the resident DJ at the bar was playing strictly calypso music in the buildup to the match. I make this observation to establish two important points, the first is the inextricable relationship of West Indians with music, which is something that I will discuss in further detail in Chapter Three. The second point is that the music fit the crowd; what I mean by this is that the music was all pre-2000s, I can categorically class the music as pre-2000s as I knew all of the songs, owing to my appreciation of Calypso music and being born in 1991 but some of these songs dated back to the 1950s. Explaining the crowd that gathered to watch the game, let us contextualize this by appreciating that was 2pm on a Saturday afternoon, while there is a lot to do, these folks and I shared the common purpose, watching cricket. The space was filled with thick accents from across the West Indies, me included and shouting to the lyrics of songs like Lord Beginner’s 1950 classic

Victory Test Match that as a West Indian cricket supporter, is as important as the words to the national anthem of your country.

I would come to learn, the support for the West Indies cricket team was an important part of producing a diasporic consciousness for many of the 46,300 people in the GTA who identify as West Indian (Statistics Canada 2017), and this meant there was a healthy number of West Indies supporters in the GTA. The bar was well stocked, and they offered drink specials, growing up I learnt the cricket experience to be one that was synonymous with drinking alcohol, hanging out and a sense of revelry that I have only seen otherwise during Carnival festivities. Joseph observed something similar when she visited Birmingham, England to see a cricket match and encountered a group of West Indians at the grounds from early in the morning. She noted that the following exchange with the group,

“Is a rum an’ lime ting!” I was told, meaning that they came to drink alcohol and to lime, the Caribbean expression for hanging out. Another man mentioned, “The only time us ol’ blokes get together is cricket and funerals, isn’t it?” Due to their age, it is particularly important to them to socialize and make connections to their broader communities before they become ill or pass away, and to share their cultural heritage with younger generations before it disappears. (2014, 677)

Cricket brings West Indians together, and it does so regardless of age. A strong statement, but it is something that has been echoed time and time again with my interviews and continuously through my upbringing as a youth cricketer, on and off the field. I cannot minimize the value of the statement regarding the transmission of cultural heritage to younger generations, as I am a product of this, having developed my identity in large part due to being a toddler running around the grass banks of the Queen’s Park Oval in Trinidad and Tobago watching West Indies play Pakistan in 1994. Almost every aspect of the game that lent itself to my identity was taught to me by older people—grandparents and members of the older generations who ensured I understand what it meant to be a supporter of the West Indies cricket team, and what the team meant for the narrative of West Indian identity.

As I got settled into my seat to watch the game, I began a conversation with one of the bartenders, and she mentioned to me that while they are always busy at the bar, it gets a

bit more crowded and raucous whenever there is a cricket match on. As I delve deeper into my argument for cricket to be appreciated as mechanism of understanding and expressing one's social identity in terms of West Indianness, it must be appreciated that I establish cricket as a sport with a colonial past, and as a social and cultural form that can be seen as a reflection of the society and culture that birthed it, and in this case, it supported the formation of opposition or the 'other.' Building off this, I had to ask the bartender what the typical behavior was like as my interest into the raucousness was piqued. What she explained was that there would be a lot of shouting and yelling and people would become very vocal in expressing themselves. This is where my previous alluding to being West Indian and understanding the parlance comes into play, because there is a distinct style of communication that is West Indian that far exceeds the scope of discussion in this thesis, but what is worth mentioning is that the yelling and shouting was in West Indian vernacular, slang and parlance, with reference to obscenities and phrases that only hold value to those with a shared West Indian history and identity. I asked her what kinds of things I should be prepared to hear, and she let me know that a common comment that would be shouted when the team is doing well is "I is a West Indian!" I gathered this to be a way of identifying with the successful nature of the team as she specified this would be during the times that the team is performing well.

Let me expand on this self-identification a bit further because, the desire of a person to identify as something is a chosen expression of identity. Expressing oneself as West Indian in this circumstance is worthy of consideration, as the cricket team lends itself to a sense of identity and transnationalism, and the shared space that occurs at the viewing of these matches presents a community where one can express their identity, one that they share with everyone else in that space, to facilitate a sense of belonging in that space, with a notable absence of being considered as something 'other.' This is what Stuart Hall (1994) refers to when he discusses the way in which shared histories can help in organizing identity and culture. The coming together as a group lends itself to a sense of collectedness or group consciousness that can be seen in much the same light as diasporic consciousness as previously discussed. Gabriel Sanchez and Edward Vargas describe group consciousness as "a politicized in-group identification based on a set of ideological beliefs about one's group's social standing, as well as a view that collective action is the

best means by which the group can improve its status and realize its interests” (2016, 162), which I believe can be combined with Durkheim’s idea of collective effervescence to show that in these groups there is a common and palpable feeling or consensus emotion. And as I have gone to great lengths to explain, the West Indian identity (the group in this comparison) is one born out of political and social unrest and rearticulation. As the match drew nearer, the anthems began to be played, and given the nature of the West Indies team, there is no actual anthem. After playing *God Save the Queen*, England’s national anthem, *Rally round the West Indies*, a 1990 Calypso song by David Rudder, began to play; this song has been adopted as the West Indies national anthem and we all sang along proudly.

In a moment before the game began, the bartender and I spoke about her views on cricket. She said that before she began working at Windies, she never really said she was West Indian, but she always knew she was one; rather she would identify as being Vincentian; that is being from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. She explained that she moved to Canada in 2010 and when she started working at Windies Restaurant and Bar, she realized that, in her own words, there was more value to her being West Indian rather than Vincentian. I implored her to explain a bit more to me on this, and this conversation ran parallel to the start of the game. What she explained was that St. Vincent is a very small country and while she is proud to be Vincentian, when she moved to Canada, people did not know where that was, and she would have to tell them it is a Caribbean Island. She hated that people would ask her if it was like Cuba or Puerto Rico, and it was something she struggled with until she started working at the bar. She mentioned that early on in her time there, she noticed the larger crowds for cricket, and she asked the owner about it, he explained to her that the bar was named after the cricket team more than it was named after the region and that being a West Indian had, “perks”. Now, this may seem like a lot to unpack but what she explained was, it was not perks in terms of money or a job, but rather it is having people who see you as one of them. Going further, she explained that there was a sense of happiness for her when people ask her where she is from and she can say the West Indies, and while their appearance and accent may differ a bit, they reply to her that they too are from the West Indies. I take this to mean that there is a sense of happiness derived from having a sense of belonging to a larger

community. This is what Hall (1994) refers to when he pushes us to see the diaspora as something that facilitates growth of its members while fostering that sense of belonging due to shared histories and identities.

Returning specifically to cricket, the bartender said her West Indianness “acts up” whenever there is cricket, meaning that she is outwardly more West Indian, which she explained in terms of the food she would eat, the music she would listen to, the accent she would speak in, and the types of people she would socialize or spend time with outside of work. I think the takeaway here is that she is making the point that cricket allows her to elaborate on her West Indian identity in different dimensions of her life, and the choice she makes to associate with more West Indians when there is cricket, is something telling as she is choosing to insulate herself with whom she shares an identity, allowing her to exude something that is otherwise restricted or repressed.

2.4 The ‘Otherness’ of the West Indies Cricket Team

As I discuss this concept of identifying as West Indian facilitated through sport and the West Indies cricket team, I am reminded of an overarching theme in which the West Indian diaspora identifies as the ‘other’. Bluntly stated, when I use other, I am referring to the those that who are different and oppositional to the social standards of white settler Canadian identity. In effect, I am building on Sokefeld, who noted that when Western perspectives such as the white Canadian denies the individual based on otherness, there is something lost. He noted, “by being denied a Western self, anthropology’s others were denied a self at all” (1999, 418), and I believe that it is important to reestablish this other and highlight by way of Hall (2000) the way the other is integral to the West Indian identity. The reason for this specificity is when I look at the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, I am concerned with the juxtaposition of the diasporic community with reference to white Canadians. When the bartender chooses to identify as West Indian, she chooses to be the navigator of her own destination in terms of identity, being fully aware of her independence and agency. Marc Jeannerod and Elisabeth Pacherie discuss the idea of self-identification and acknowledge that it requires a consciousness, much in the same way that a group consciousness is beneficial (Sanchez and Vargas, 2016) for the group identity, it holds that a sort of conscious agency or activity is beneficial or impactful to

the idea of the self. This consciousness, they note, “requires the objectivity condition, which requires the agency condition, i.e., awareness of oneself as an agent” (2004, 115). The importance of this is that this is a choice that is made with deliberate desire to elicit an outcome that is non-detrimental. And going a bit deeper, I would venture to say that this is evidence of diasporic consciousness and agency, working together to produce a West Indianness, one that is actively and continuously produced and reproduced by the West Indian diaspora in GTA through the kinds of places, events, relationships, and cultural forms which I am investigating.

When Thomas Fletcher discussed C.L.R. James’ take on cricket as an opposition, it brought up the idea of stance and oppositionality that I believe is integral to the diasporic identity. As Fletcher puts it,

James (2005[1963]) noted how cricket—due to its position both as the cultural embodiment of the values and mores of ‘Englishness’ and its ‘missionary’ role within British imperialism and colonialism - occupied a central site in many of the anti-colonial struggles between colonizer and colonized. Sport (and cricket) therefore, must be considered, not only as sites where domination can be imposed, but also contested, redefined and transformed. Research should acknowledge the capacity for minority cultures to resist these ethnocentric discourses through, amongst other things, imposing (and exerting) their own ethnic identities on and through the game: what Appadurai (1996, 110) referred to as a ‘simulacrum of warfare.’ (2015, 150)

There is a significant amount to unpack here but let me contextualize it. Earlier in the text I noted that the bartender mentioned a common utterance when the team was doing well was “I is a West Indian” and allow me to connect the most recent ideas with this example. Firstly, there is the dynamic that individuals in the bar are well aware of their agency as they choose to identify as West Indian in specific moments. Which moments become important is quite telling when we view the diaspora. It is especially in moments when the team is successful, when they are able to show dominance, that people feel the strongest sense of identification. Recall, then, how James, in *Beyond a Boundary*, as rearticulated by Fletcher, implored his readers to appreciate that it is through cricket that West Indians are able to exert their dominance over the whites who once enslaved their people, thereby generating a sense of retribution and a reimagination of the warfare.

Building on this, I am reminded of an interview I had with Matt, a 46-year-old male, originally from Jamaica who was living just off Jane Street, Toronto. Matt's story was simple: he won a scholarship to study in Canada when he was eighteen. He moved here and never left. He married a white Canadian woman from Quebec, with whom he has three children, and is now an engineer at an airline company. I met Matt at Caribbean Palace and when I asked him about how he chooses to express his West Indianness, he showed me a tattoo on his left forearm. It was the West Indies cricket emblem. He explained that growing up he experienced the highs of West Indies cricket and even though he is proud to be a Jamaican, he is even prouder to be a West Indian, as in his own words, "I was born Jamaican, but the life I chose is West Indian." He situated this to me in explaining that he has been in Canada for almost 30 years and has not lost his accent, his taste for the food or his desire for the sport. He provided me with a bit more context explaining that he played in cricket leagues in Mississauga when he was younger and has been fortunate enough to travel to see West Indies play in Australia and New Zealand.

He pointed out that he grew up being proud of the West Indies cricket team, and while they may not be doing so well now, he still chooses to stand by that self-identification. He explained that being a Black man in Canada is already difficult, and on a larger scale I would assume the same sentiment can be echoed for ethnic minorities in general. For Matt, his own situation was similar to that of the West Indies cricket team—much like the West Indies cricket team were minorities and were driven to be better than the whites who once ruled them, he was equally motivated to be better than all the white people he encountered in academic and professional settings when he moved to Canada, as he took extra motivation from the assumption that they saw him as something other than themselves. When I asked him if the West Indies cricket team motivated him to fight for something that he thought he was entitled to or deserving of, he replied, "Being a West Indian in Canada, they think you deserve nothing, but like Viv and Holding, I take what is mine and I make a point of talking the way I do while I do it." Viv and Holding refer to Sir I.V.A. Richards and Michael Holding, two Hall of Fame West Indian cricketers from the late 1970s. I made a joke to Matt along the lines that C.L.R. James would be proud of his comment, and he responded by highlighting that *Beyond a Boundary* is a big part of the reason that he has the appreciation for cricket and the West Indies cricket team that he

does, and his life, which he qualifies as being a success, is in no small part to the motivation taken from James' own homage to cricket.

The conversation with Matt reminded me of a story that I was told by a patron at Windies Restaurant and Bar on the disastrous day in October. After the game, which as a West Indies cricket supporter, seemed like a horror movie, Jack approached me and asked me where I was from. We struck up a conversation. He found it interesting that he could not decode my accent as he overheard my conversation with other patrons. After extending courtesies, he started bringing time into the conversation, saying that we are in a "time" that West Indies are not successful, that there are "times" he is proud to be a West Indian and that other "times" he hates it. While it seemed interesting, I was focused on gleaning more insight regarding the sport dimension. I encouraged him to share his thoughts and what I learnt is that Jack, this 35-year-old, second-generation Canadian-Guyanese man, was one of the most passionate younger cricket supporters I have encountered. Jack explained that his parents are both Guyanese and moved to Canada in 1985, with him being born soon after. His parents were both municipal workers and left Guyana during the height of President Forbes Burnham's tenure, which to many Guyanese of East Indian descent, is a dark period in their history. Jack's family is of Indian descent, and he said his parents felt ashamed of being Guyanese when they came to Canada, so growing up they tried to "whitewash" him and his siblings. He explained that the only true connection that was left with anything West Indian at all was his father's love for cricket and he said from an early age he was indoctrinated into the love for the game.

Jack related to me that it was only when he started to get older and play cricket in the parks of Barrie where his family originally relocated to before he married and moved to Pickering, that he interacted with other West Indians. Growing up he said, "we were more Indian than Caribbean or West Indian but really we was just brown white people." His dad was a steadfast supporter of West Indies cricket and, like me, he learnt the history of the West Indian influence and experience of the game through elder persons at matches and at the parks. He said the first time he travelled to Guyana was to watch cricket, he was not born in Guyana and his parents did not raise him in that "style," so he did not feel a connection. Jack highlighted that he only took stead in his identity and

adopted West Indianness on a day I remember clearly. It was September 25th, 2004, the final of ICC Champions Trophy between West Indies and England in England, where the West Indies rescued victory from the jaws of defeat to steal the title from England in the most ridiculous of circumstances, as the game was completed in near-total darkness. Jack stated categorically, “after that day, I was a West Indian first and everything else after.”

2.5 The Pride of the West Indies

There is a connection worthy of further exploration between time as moments in time as it relates to memory and our history. For the purpose of this thesis, I acknowledge the duality of the way in which cricket serves as a reinforcer of identity for the West Indian diaspora, the first being among themselves, and the second being between different post-colonial diasporas. Cricket has given the West Indian supporters moments that lends itself to a sense of pride in identifying as West Indian. Pride is indeed a strong word, but it is my claim based on the feeling that are associated with the exertion and implementation of dominance over those who once dominated you as per James’ exultation regarding the success of the West Indies cricket team (1963, 162). These moments in time include but are not limited to the first test match in 1928, the first victory against England in England in 1950, the subject of Lord Beginner’s Victory Test Match, back to back World Cup victories in 1975 and 1979, 10 year run as number 1 ranked team in the world from 1976-1986, Brian Lara’s 375 and 400 runs which are both records for highest individual scores by a player, Courtney Walsh’s 519 Test wickets which was a record at the time, and in more recent times ICC Champions Trophy 2004, World Cup 2012, and West Indies cricket Men’s, Women and Youth teams holding all three World Cups simultaneously in 2016. These are just a few critical moments that cricket has given members of the West Indian diasporic community, moments in which they can express themselves a bit louder and more boisterous. I wonder if that contributes to the raucousness that the bartender was alluding to?

As I brought up the notion of pride, I feel obligated to contextualize it and to do this I rely on Beckles reference of Sir Viv’s autobiography, *Hitting Across the Line*. Beckles notes,

In his autobiography, *Hitting Across the Line*, Richards explained the link in his consciousness between West Indian cricket and identity: I believe very strongly in the black man asserting himself in this world, coming as I do from the West Indies at the end of the colonial era. I identify with black power, Rastafarian [sic] and all the movements of black liberations (1991: 146) ...Cricket has always been politics and especially for us in the Caribbean. Elsewhere he wrote that he would like to be remembered as a cricketer who carried his bat for ‘the liberation of Africans and all oppressed people everywhere.’ (2012, 164)

This is Sir Viv at his absolute finest in terms of what he stands for, during his playing days and after. Sir Viv was proud of his identity, lending itself to a strong belief in himself as someone who has the power and ability to take on the mantle of “oppressed people everywhere.” This is the sense of pride that being West Indian and being able to exert dominance on your behalf and on the behalf of those who have been oppressed or marginalized gives a person. This sense has been transmitted and relayed to the supporters of the West Indies cricket team. Members of the West Indian diaspora constitute an appreciable portion of the West Indies cricket team supporters. The success of the team lends itself to strong and powerful emotions (such as pride) which are experienced by the supporters that include members of the West Indian diaspora. This connection indicates that there is a deeply rooted sense of identity that inextricably ties the supporters, the team (and its relevant successes) to the West Indian diaspora, and it is this connection with identity that the members of the diasporic community choose to develop, express, re-produce and project.

I ask myself, is cricket a mechanism or dimension through which members of the West Indian diaspora can exude or express their diasporic consciousness? And I answer in the affirmative. I say this building on Fletcher, who notes that we can consider a diaspora as a sort of social condition or consciousness, and in doing so we must understand “migrant’ communities as existentially connected to a specific place of origin or an imagined body of people, which extend beyond the current dwelling place” (2012, 619). The point I am trying to make here is this: cricket allows members of the West Indian diaspora to express their sense of self, in terms of identity relating to themes of power and belonging in a proud manner, without abatement or fear of retribution.

The GTA is home to immigrants from just about every corner of the globe and cricket is considered the second most popular sport in the world with a fanbase of over 2.5 billion people. In 2016, 16.6% of the visible minority population of Toronto was of South Asian descent (Statistics Canada 2017), and South Asia is home to the densest population of cricket fans as the game is very popular in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and as far west as Afghanistan, with Saad Shafqat and Nadir Barucha noting that “in South Asia, cricket has come to bear the promise of delivering lasting peace to a region tormented by a half century of strife” (2004, 843). This made me think about how the West Indian diaspora felt about sharing something as important to their identity as cricket, with other people from around the world. I posed this question during one of my interviews as well as to a few patrons at Windies Restaurant and Bar. During an interview with Harry, a 58-year-old Barbadian male living in Vaughn, he divulged that in his younger years he used to travel to England, Canada, and the United States from Barbados to play cricket, before relocating to Canada after he got married at age 25. He mentioned that is the epitome of the West Indian diaspora in his own opinion as he has taken his culture across the world through bat and ball.

I asked Harry how he felt about the number of different backgrounds he now shared cricket with in the GTA, and he made it clear that in his eyes there is cricket and then there is West Indies cricket. You see to the reader they may not understand this so I will reiterate this—there is nothing like West Indies cricket anywhere else in the world within any sporting genre or format. It is a region of independent territories that share a history, not bounded by patriotism to a flag or country of birth, but rather bounded by a sense of pride in being the product of the history of the region, one of rebellion, fight and violence, an ethos that lives on in a West Indian in the contemporary setting and is allowed a rightful place on the cricket field, so see this not as other countries with sports and pride, because this West Indies cricket has never been about a country, it has been about a history and the West Indian brand of justice and retribution. I refer back to Sir Beckles’ discourse on cricket and what I am able to construct and have laid out in this data is that West Indians, both in the homelands of the territories and the diaspora, have a very different relationship with cricket, seeing it as much more than a sport, and instead a mechanism of addressing social injustices and seeking redemption. Harry went on to tell

me that he appreciates the fact that he can share the games and cricket with others from across the world, bring up an important point, which is that almost all (in actuality, he is referring to all the full-nation status teams that have international teams in all formats of the game) the cricket-playing countries are part of the Commonwealth and were once under British rule. In some way he said, there is a shared history between all the cricket playing nations and essentially the fans as well. He noted,

I can sit with anyone who knows the game and the conversation is easy, our British rulers made us all one, they decided that they would give this game to all the places they ruled in order to be winners, but we are resilient and in history West Indies was the first team to start battering the English and we did it with slaves, so I am damn well proud of that.

This stood out to me because in a single statement, Harry was able to address the entire history of the sport. I remembered something from the chapter entitled “Cricket and Cultural Difference” by Dominic Malcolm, Alan Bairner, and Graham Curry in *Cricket and Globalization*, which is “If cricket in the nineteenth century was inextricably tied to British colonization and Imperial expansion...the development of the game in the twentieth century can perhaps best be described as a process of de-colonization and the national self-assertion of formerly subaltern peoples” (2010, 232). Based on my own research and my own experiences as a West Indian, I think it is fair to say that the West Indies cricket team goes beyond de-colonization, contributing to pride in identity. Bringing these ideas together, I think cricket, for the West Indian diaspora (and specifically the supporters) in the GTA, is at the core of that sense of identity and community and is a mechanism of expression and propagation of that identity. Yet, it also connects them to a larger community of other former British colonies with which the West Indies have inextricable ties. Let us not forget the history of the West Indies, which is one of repeated arrivals from persons from other subjugated British colonies, especially in South Asia, which as mentioned, makes up 16.6% of the minority population in Toronto. As such, that relationship is something that cannot be excluded from the conversation but is worthy of further study under a more specific scope.

2.6 Socialization and Liming as a Spectator Sport

Sport in the West Indian territories and the diaspora lends itself to an event or dynamic referred to as “liming”—which is a practice that is a fundamental part of the West Indian diasporic culture. To understand what this term means I refer to Nakhid-Chatoor, Nakhid, Wilson and Santana in *Exploring Liming and Ole Talk as a Culturally Relevant Methodology for Researching with Caribbean People*, who consider liming to be

a scheduled or nonscheduled event where a group of people (friends, family, and acquaintances) take time to “hang out’ It is an activity geared toward relaxation and stress relief through the means of talking, eating, drinking or just doing nothing.... and considered to be the “melting pot” where viewpoints are constructed and reconstructed within a familiar setting and among familiar faces. (2018, 3)

It is a complex experience that is ubiquitous with the West Indian identity in the homeland and in the diaspora and the members of the West Indian diaspora rely heavily on avenues that facilitate liming in order to develop and express their sense of West Indianness. My belief is that the event or spectacle of sport brings people together and allows an open expression of themselves and while the conversations may not remain sport-specific, they allow conversation in an environment that is comfortable and facilitating of reassertion of one’s sense of self and identity.

To look at this dynamic through cricket I discussed it in more detail following the conclusion of my fieldwork period. On March 5th, 2022, I was liming at a popular West Indian restaurant and bar on Keele Street with the owner of the business, Ron and a few other older gentlemen. I developed a friendship with Ron following my fieldwork at his businesses. For decades he has been involved in cricket with the West Indian diaspora both as a player then as a supporter and backer. Ron moved to moved Canada in the late 1980s and has done well for himself owning a restaurant, supermarket, auto shop, and other investment businesses and he made it clear to me that he puts as much money as he can back into the West Indian diaspora, admitting that only his pittances go back to his homeland of Guyana. Ron is of East Indian descent and also left Guyana in the wake of Burnham’s reign and as such, does not wish to be heavily connected with the country of Guyana itself. Instead, he attests to finding comfort in being seen as West Indian.

The shelves were decorated with cricket memorabilia and team photos of West Indies as well as the teams that Ron played for or that he has financed. I asked him what it is he loves best about cricket, and he said it was the lime, going one to say, “you see the lime is what we yearn for, that sense of camaraderie and unity, whether black, Indian or mix up, cricket brings the lime.” This directly echoes Joseph’s experience watching cricket in Birmingham where she notes that the West Indian diaspora there referred to watching cricket as “a rum an’ lime thing” (2014, 678). These are two different geographically situated versions of the West Indian diaspora and the common theme is that of cricket facilitating liming.

The ubiquitous nature of liming to West Indians from a personal perspective makes it seem like something we take for granted, but now being part of the broader West Indian diaspora, I can understand and appreciate the need for mechanisms that facilitate liming. What Ron explains is that as a player you would lime after the end of the day’s play. I can attest to this myself, being a cricketer from the amateur to professional level over 16 years and serving as a director of the K Rampat Cricket Academy in Trinidad and Tobago. Ron went on to say that after he left the game as a player, he became a spectator and that the experience of watching cricket, especially in Canada, was something that allowed him to “rid myself of the shackles of the whiteness I need to put on in order to be successful in Canada.” This reminded me of something Matt pointed out to me which is that half his family is Quebecois, as his wife is from there, and his entire adult life has been built around Canadians, but when it comes to cricket, he said “it is no more Canada in me, only West Indian.” What Matt is alluding to is that he has spent much of his adult life in white spaces or spaces that are culturally coded for the Caucasian Canadian, and in these spaces, there is no liming or associated mannerisms of socializing. For both Ron and Matt, and many others in the diaspora, cricket allows them to shed the outer coat of a Canadian identity and instead show the underbelly of their identity and sense of self as that of West Indian.

As Ron explained it, in the cricket lime, there is no division of the group that is liming when cricket is going on—there is no division in terms of age, race, ethnicity or gender; everyone indulges in the process of being (becoming) West Indian, and the West Indies

cricket team allows for that umbrella definition of their supporters. He suggests that the openness and all-inclusive nature of liming when watching cricket is something that has evolved historically, referring to his experiences growing up in a highly racialized Guyana at the time. He explained that when he used to go see West Indies play at Bourda in Georgetown, “Black, Chinese, coolie and mix up all got along, nobody cared because we was there for the cricket.” He mentioned that in his bar, the same dynamic occurs, explaining that while people may come in to watch the games as groups sitting together at specific tables or booths, it is only a matter of time before the groups dissolve and the entire crowd becomes one with conversations overlapping and, in his words, it turns into a “big lime.” Sport, and specifically cricket, serves as a social facilitator for the West Indian diaspora in the GTA in as much as it creates an avenue for the expression of one’s sense of identity and self in an unincumbered and uninhibited manner in a setting that reinforces West Indianness through the language spoken and the cultural elements that are perpetuated through liming. The lime is the conduit for this experience of West Indianness as it relates to identity and the lime is hosted by the spectacle of cricket. To this end I support Joseph’s assertion that “the grounds offer a place for solidarity both to an elsewhere and to the Canadian nation state” (2014, 684) when discussing the playing of cricket, and I extend it, saying that the event of watching cricket and being a spectator offers a collective solidarity, a space to experience and express identity.

My declaration is that cricket is an unparalleled and compelling dimension of culture and identity of the West Indian region that unlocks conversations and ideas regarding politics, memories, and a sense of belonging. As we see that identity is something that is not stagnant, but rather ever evolving, I want to assert that such is the West Indian diasporic relationship with cricket. To this end Beckles, in discussing the state of West Indies cricket in 2012, saw the horizon of the shortcomings. Before I go further, when Beckles wrote, the West Indies were on a dismal run of form following the 2004 ICC Champions trophy, with eight years of utter failure and despondent performances. But mere weeks after the publication of his article was the first of the T20 World Cup championships for the West Indies. However, his message remains true:

What has happened in the post-Lara era is that the anti-colonial dream of building a legitimate, sovereign West Indian nation as a supportive environment for the West Indies team has eluded political leadership, collapsed under the weight of a cocktail of crass opportunism and mind-boggling mismanagement. The political consequence of this reality has been the emergence of a string of impoverished micro-states that cannot, after thirty years of independence, legitimise their existence in serious, sound and rational ways. (2012, 168-169)

As I have addressed, the new strength of the contemporary West Indies lies in the formation and prominence of CARICOM, and through a sub-committee set up for cricket, they have been able to begin to right the deviation from expectations as alluded to by Beckles. There is strength in the region reasserting the identification of itself as a singular whole rather than territories trying to make it on their own. This reinvigoration of a sense of unity is being transmitted to the West Indian diaspora, and there is a transgenerational appreciation for identifying as West Indian. This has led to the active construction and expression of a West-Indian sense of self that is reflective of a region that once put its white masters to the floor and is on the path to the 'simulacrum of warfare', but this time across more avenues than just cricket.

Chapter 3

3 The West Indian Food Experience

For every society, there is no more important set of cultural traits than the one related to subsistence. Food, and its necessary growth, gathering, and preparation is fundamental to the existence of human life. If one would like to know what lies at the very heart of a people, then surely food must be seen as its visible manifestation

– Ryan Schacht, *Food and Identity in the Caribbean* (2013, 15)

June 8th, 2018 was one of the most surreal days in my life; it was the day that my idol, the renowned personality, Anthony Bourdain, a man who shaped the very essence of my thinking and being, committed suicide. When I began the process of designing this research topic for my thesis, I did not think about the likes of Sidney Mintz, Mary Douglas, or Arjun Appadurai, but rather Anthony Bourdain and his television shows and books. In his book *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, he said,

Food is everything we are. It's an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma. It's inseparable from those from the get-go. (2000, 56)

The discussion that I will now engage in about the role of food in the West Indian diasporic expression of identity and self is driven by my appreciation of seeing food as inseparable from our lived experiences.

Food presents an interesting study as it represents and encapsulates similar and opposition feelings and emotions at the same, it provides a means to unity and division, harmony and discontent, joy and sorrow all at once. Sidney Mintz acknowledged that the food experience and the consumption of food is something that is critical to human existence, noting “next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined” (2002, 102), and what we will see is that the social life that is intertwined with the food experience is richly loaded with a sense of identity. He goes on to suggest of food: “Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food

serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart” (2002, 109). My assertion is that for members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA food is used as a conduit or mechanism for memory, nostalgia, the liming experience, and the reproduction of authenticity regarding the food and the experience.

When I speak about food and West Indian food, I am speaking of the food experience with particular focus and attention on the act of eating the food, whether alone or in a communal setting. I am also focusing on the liming dynamic that is created through the sharing of meals of West Indian food and the history associated with the liming and sharing of the meal (as opposed to the specific components of the meal and the relative history of said items). Particular attention is focused on the diversity of the cuisine and styles of preparations as a commentary on the history of the region that has been discussed in the introduction. Additionally, I look at the emotions evoked through the food experience and eating the food, the indulgences of the human senses and how these elicit emotions among individuals in the West Indian diaspora.

Food as an element of identity and culture is not to be understated. As Jon Holtzman notes,

it is an intrinsically multilayered and multidimensional subject—with social, psychological, physiological, symbolic dimensions, to name merely a few—and with culturally constructed meanings that differ not merely, as we naturally assume, in the perspectives of our subjects, but indeed in the perspectives of the authors who construct and construe the object of food in often very different ways, ranging from the strictly materialist to the ethereal gourmand. (2006, 362)

The food experience I alluded to above that I will focus on in this chapter engages with the complexity of food as stated by Holtzman. Similarly, when I consider the memory of food and the role of said memory in the different areas of this chapter, I view memory in much the same way as Holtzman, which is “the notion of experience or meaning in reference to the past” (2006, 363). Memory has an important relationship with food—it is a relationship that ranges from evoking feelings and emotions to one that is riddled in sensuality and desire. But my focus is as mentioned before on nostalgia, the reproduction of authenticity and the liming experiences, all of which rely on memory recall and association and to this end, Holtzman notes:

These relationships include embodied memories constructed through food; food as a locus for historically constructed identity, ethnic or nationalist; the role of food in various forms of “nostalgia”; dietary change as a socially charged marker of epochal shifts; gender and the agents of memory; and contexts of remembering and forgetting through food. (2006, 364)

Considering West Indies cuisine, we must first understand the social commentary that is encapsulated within food much in the same way that a conversation is had within the scope of cricket (as discussed in chapter 1) that centers around pride and dominance. The social discussion around food is very much in line with the aforementioned verdict of Holtzman (2006, 362), which is that food is “multilayered and multidimensional.” To contextualize this, Hanna Garth notes that the West Indian territories are considered as being an area of six races; Africans, Amerindians, East Indians, Europeans, Chinese, and Dougla (mixed African and East Indian) (2013, 77). The African and East Indian groups were the subject of oppression under the guises of slavery and falsified indentureship while the Europeans extend to those who were part of the colonial rules and those that came as merchants or of their own free will.

The food experience of the West Indies for the diaspora can be considered as being doubly diasporic—since the food traditions are formed from movement, migration, and mixing in the West Indian territories, and then again there is food that comes to stand as West Indian in the diaspora—a notion that will be discussed further in the chapter. Many of the actual ingredients used in West Indian cuisine came to the region through cultural exchanges throughout the phases of colonialism. The food of the region took on the identity of the region—creolized. Lynn Marie Houston in speaking on the food culture in the Caribbean and West Indian region notes, “the food culture of these regions has been distinctively marked by the European settlement and colonial influences and reflects the blend of European food cultures with immigrant and indigenous food cultures” (Food Culture in the Caribbean 2005, xvii). Despite the strong influence from the European food cultures, in keeping with the West Indian identity to fight back, West Indians creolized the foods which were once used as a tool of colonization. Vanessa García Polanco and Luis Alexis Rodríguez-Cruz recalled,

Primary accounts documenting the process of colonization in the Caribbean, especially in its largest island, formerly known as Kisqueya or Quizqueya and renamed Hispaniola by the Spaniards (today Haiti and the Dominican Republic), recount the impact of inadequate food for the Taínos. The early impact of famine and malnutrition on the Taíno is not well understood, but extreme labor with inadequate supplies of food and tainted water led to dehydration, malnutrition, and, at times, outright starvation. (2019, 26)

West Indian food should not be viewed in a vacuum and seen from a singular perspective, what I mean by this is, the cuisine of the region owes to a rich, meandering, and storied history - one that has been shaped continuously since the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the (re)discovery of the region. Through the various explorations of the West Indies, the Europeans brought plants and animals which they were familiar with, a point worthy of appreciation when we consider that food is a product of multiple influences. The delightful Candice Goucher noted,

Beginning in 1492, early European visitors and colonizers found new plants and animals common to the tropics of the Western Hemisphere. From the time of Columbus, foods circulated in the Atlantic world within the globalized context of maritime trade. The Columbian Exchange, a term coined by historian Alfred Crosby, emphasized the multidirectional and mutually transformative nature of these transfers. New lifestyles and cuisines also evolved from the movement of plants, animals, and microbes in the Atlantic. (2014, xviii - xix)

Many of the meals that have gained notoriety and have become identifiable as West Indian cuisine, came about through making the most out of the rejected produce of the colonial powers and plantation owners. The meals made the most of what was available and what was discarded by others, and I think this is what lends itself to the pride associated with West Indian food. The ability to take these abject items and produce something that is desirable and meaningful shows the ability of the West Indian people to resist and adapt, to make the most from their position on the margins of the plantations, marginalized from power and resources. They were able to show resistance against being placed on the edges and fringes of society, to call upon their creativity to produce the style of food and foster the food experiences that would shape a culture and have an influence on the global foodscape. Of this, Goucher said,

Improvised foodways held on to the familiar and embraced the new, transforming taste and technique. Through expanding global encounters, the peoples of four continents cooked and ate meals in which cultural meanings were created, shared, and sustained across generations. Metaphorically and materially, the culinary magic of the Caribbean itself took place in the great cauldron of imagined modernity. (2014, 7)

This diversity lends itself to a specific richness that is manifested through the cuisine of the region and considering food as a dimension of the construction and expression of identity in the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, it is important to note that the West Indies is an amalgam of different influences from around the world. P. A. Scott noted that for West Indians, the food experience is one of significant importance and pleasure as it played an integral role in the maintenance and fostering of relationships (1997, 211), with these relationships being critical as food is commonly seen as an emblem of regional identity that serves as a critical element to a sense of comfort to diasporic and migrant communities. Building on this I refer to the following excerpt from Young Rae Oum;

Sidney Mintz believes that there is no such thing as an integral national cuisine, because a style of cooking and eating would not be cleanly divided by politically determined borderlines. Cuisines are more regional than national, therefore a national cuisine only means “a holistic artifice based on the foods of the people who live inside some political system”. (2005, 109)

This is relevant in my discussion on West Indian food because I believe that the cuisine and food experience is reflective of history of the region, and it unifies the regional identity, dispatching any national or ideal concept. To take this further, Gillian Richards-Greaves notes food is a dimension that can be manipulated to “exclude, include, reject, accept, and otherwise influence each other” (2013, 75) as in the case of West Indian food, the preparation and consumption of the food in specific settings and contexts allows for the formation and reaffirmation of bonds between members of the community.

Food to a West Indian like myself is seen a bit different than the rest of the world. The entire food experience is much more than simply eating or socializing – rather it defines the interaction of the many West Indians. To this end Scott notes,

Compared with their White British counterparts, West Indians were more likely to present food and mealtimes as significant in the creation and expression of close relationships... food and eating traditions are therefore both functional and symbolic in the maintenance of family and social networks. (1997, 210-211)

This highlights the importance of the food experience as a facilitator of the expression of self to West Indians. It is my claim that this importance is the same in the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, as the community itself is one that is built in order to allow a space that lends to a sense of belonging and having the avenue to construct, reconstruct and express one's sense of self and identity.

This brings up my journey through the West Indian culinary options available in the GTA, which saw me push the limits of the physics of my bathroom scale. An internet search for West Indian restaurants in the GTA shows an almost endless list of possibilities, looking at the Yellow Pages website after searching for West Indian restaurants and food places, I saw over 260 listed and I know that a fair amount is not on this list. The interactive maps that pop up when the internet search is done shows just how many there are and the density of their presence on the overall landscape of the GTA. A person cannot walk or commute that far in the GTA before they stumble across a West Indian restaurant, bar, lounge, or eatery of some sort. In certain areas like Jane Street in Toronto, these restaurants appear almost consecutively along the street and are interspersed with West Indian supermarkets and groceries. I think about Caribbean Cove on Keele Street, and the owner, showing me that just a few doors down, he opened a West Indian grocery called Cove Supermarket, and Caribbean Palace on Jane Street being next door to Sohan's West Indian Supermarket. This reflects the growing presence of the West Indian diasporic community in the GTA landscape and is similar to what occurred when the West Indian diaspora started to take root in England, which Giselle A. Rampaul described as "colonization in reverse", noting:

It is also related to the cultural reversals consistent with the postcolonial theme, as the blacks become the colonizers, somehow symbolically appropriating and dominating the land of the whites through the introduction of their own culture and food. (2007, 59)

The Blacks she refers to are West Indians, who are seen as the ‘others’ and again it allows me to reiterate my assertion that the West Indian diaspora is one that allows a proud association with being different and being considered as something ‘other’ as it lends itself to a space and sense of belonging.

As I did the research for this thesis, I started to consider West Indian food not only as a dimension that allowed for the construction and expression of one’s cultural identity, but as something of a facilitator and source of nutrition to that identity, which I see as very much a living thing that is everchanging and rearticulating itself. Food allows for the conveyance of meaning, revealing new stories quite literally and figuratively, whether it is through the history of the food or the stories that are shared while partaking of the food, the enrichment by food to the West Indian diasporic identity cannot be understated. Rampaul notes of food and drink:

They help to reflect and indeed construct the particular history of the West Indies while also effectively conveying social tensions within West Indian society and providing a powerful means of portraying personal relationships. In this way, the use of food and drink images can reveal underlying social, cultural and economic ideologies that contribute to the interpretation of the culture. (2007, 64)

And I agree with her as the ensuing supports, that food to a West Indian is a powerful tool that is fueled by shared history of the territories of the region and its manifestation on the plate is a model by which a member of the West Indian diasporic community can interpret and understand themselves and their identity.

3.1 The Memory of West Indian Food

When I was about seven years old my paternal grandmother took on the challenge of teaching me to cook, and I remember her telling me that you eat with your nose first, so it was important that food smells good. I was reminded of this on Friday, November 12th, 2021, when I entered Caribbean Heat 3 on Finch Avenue in North York. On opening the door and walking in, the smell of Indian and Caribbean spices filled the air, ranging from turmeric and garam masala to the all-spice berries and pimento peppers. This was a precursor to seeing the menu itself which reinforced my initial sense of smell

and it made me wonder about the relationship between the food items and identity itself. In discussing this relationship, Garth asks:

When cuisine has long been linked to a place, how does the relationship between food and identity change as regional characteristics dissolve or people migrate away from their ancestral homelands? (2013, 2)

What I found in the West Indian diaspora in the GTA was a sense of nostalgia being established through the food experience. I refer to the experience as the nostalgia is established through the cuisine as well as the shared experience of eating the meal and the ambiance created through the senses of sight, smell, and taste.

The affective value of food and its smell comes from its ability to evoke nostalgia in a way that it constructs memories of home – the familial home and the territorial home - for the diasporic community. Through food, a person can be transported back to a world that was in the past. That moment in Caribbean Heat 3, I was transported back to my grandmother’s kitchen and while the food that I ate was not in the same stratosphere of flavor as hers, it was an interesting episode of reminiscence. On October 27th I sat down at Caribbean Heat 2 with Lisa, a 28-year-old Guyanese-born immigrant. At age 19 she got married to a second generation Guyanese-Canadian and migrated to Kitchener before making her way to the city of Toronto with her husband and daughter. I asked her about the feelings that she experiences when she has West Indian food (whether at home or in restaurant settings) and around that same time, the food we ordered, wontons, had just been served. Lisa explained that she feels like she is back her Guyana at times, not just at home where she grew up, but at the various restaurants and food stalls she would visit based on the type of smells and food she was ordering. She continued, saying that she grew up in the heart of Georgetown, the capital of Guyana and as such she was never far away from a different type of “Guyanese cooking” in her own words. She said when she was growing up, there was no difference between the various types of food in Guyana such as curries, jerk, Chinese-style, and Amerindian, as they were all seen as falling under the label of Guyanese food. It is only when she moved to Canada and started going to the various eateries that she realized there was a difference and a history behind the foods.

Lisa explained that even though she was not brought up to understand the nuanced differences, her husband filled her in, noting that he explained to her early on in their marriage that the West Indian restaurants in the GTA was “a sampling menu of the greatest hits from the area.” the area being the West Indian region and its territories. I asked her to clarify her comment about being reminded of home and she explained that the food itself and the experience of eating it made her think of being home, with home being that original homeland of Guyana. She went on to give the example, that when she cooks curry at the home in Canada for her family, they all gather around the table to eat together while the food is hot, and everyone picks out their favorite pieces of meat and the type of side dish they want. She said this is as close to “home” as she feels in Canada because she remembers being a young girl back in Guyana and waiting for her mum to finish cooking curry and then she would rush her siblings to get her preferred pieces of meat and ends of roti before they all shared the meal together. I asked her whether this made her miss home, to which she was able to explain that it was not so much about missing home as much as it was an emotional experience, as in a way it was recreating the past that she thought was foregone, and that filled her with joy. I said to her, “it makes you nostalgic, doesn’t it?” to which she responded by reaffirming that it indeed it does, and she says she regularly invites friends and families over to facilitate larger gatherings.

Her justification for this is that in Guyana—and from my personal experiences, most of the West Indian territories—the household consists of extended families and several extended-family households tend to live side by side or near each other. She explained that every weekend and for every occasion such as birthdays, anniversaries, and other milestones, all the relatives and friends in Guyana would get together to lime. A core component of the lime was the food, and it would not be the highlight, but it would be the constant. She mentioned to me that many times in organizing the limes back in Guyana, they would refer to it as “making a cook” because it was something that allowed the people to come together. She said that life in Canada has showed her a different side of family dynamics and she misses the large gatherings that were commonplace in Guyana, so she makes the concerted effort to “make a cook” and invite people over, attempting to summon the nostalgic feeling she previously alluded to. This allows me to explain a point

I think is relevant to keep in mind—the event of cooking at home (that is, at one’s house) in the GTA may not be the same as making a cook in the West Indian territories, because residence patterns, family relations, kinship ties are all different. I think that in response to this, the restaurant’s social atmosphere, then, re-creates a shared, public kind of atmosphere that helps remind people of the family connections and the relationships in terms of the social event and food experience. Lisa’s story elicits the concept of culinary nostalgia, but what must be appreciated is that must much like the West Indies itself, the story is much more complex. Anita Mannur notes:

The desire to remember home by fondly recreating culinary memories cannot be understood merely as reflectively nostalgic gestures; rather such nostalgically framed narratives must also be read as metacritiques of what it means to route memory and nostalgic longing for a homeland through one’s relationship to seemingly intractable culinary practices. (2007, 13)

What we must understand from this is that while food is an avenue to attempt to recreate and generate nostalgic feelings and emotions, it is something that is part of the identity of the person and the community to which they belong, in the case of Lisa, the West Indian diasporic community. I feel the need to frame this idea of nostalgia through food and to do this I refer to Mannur’s reference of Kathleen Stewart’s definition of nostalgia as “a cultural practice, not a given context; its forms, meanings and effects shift with the context—it depends where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present” (2007, 14). From this we can see that Lisa’s notion of nostalgia must be seen through the lens of her present and her views of what they conjure up in terms of memories of the past.

Returning to my visit to Caribbean Heat 3, I took a seat with a friend of mine to have some food, and I was reminded of what Lisa told me her husband mentioned to her regarding the menus at West Indian restaurants when I met with her in the previous month—that the menu was “a sampling menu of the greatest hits from the area,” with the area being the West Indian region. I paid attention to this a bit more and noticed that it was in fact very much the case with the menu made up of meals that were popular in some West Indian territories and not popular in others but all appearing on the same menu. Admittedly, the menu at the Caribbean Heat locations is comprehensive, but they provide the options that would appeal to customers regardless of which West Indian

territory they would consider to be their homeland. For example, dhals, curries and barbeque are very popular in Trinidad and Tobago, dishes like potato and egg balls, fried Bangamary and Basa fishes are strictly considered Guyanese, Jerked dishes are ubiquitously associated with Jamaica, fish and seafood dishes are more commonplace in Barbados and the smaller West Indian territories like St. Lucia and Grenada, and then there was the assortment of Chinese-styled foods that have spread throughout the region.

Allow me a bit of a digression to address the voracity of options that are provided by Caribbean Heat as well as most other West Indian establishments in the GTA. While there is a historical context to consider for each of these territories in the region and the foods that have become associated with them, the point to appreciate here is that there exists a predisposition on the behalf of the individual to consume a food that they are more familiar with rather than one they are not familiar with (Mannur 2007, 27). As a West Indian I have been told stories about why these foods are particularly popular in their respective territories, with jerk being a type of dish that was prepared in that way because it was made by runaway slaves in Jamaica who took refuge in the Blue Mountains and the cooking style limited the smoke so as to not give away their position (Bonadio and Poyser 2021). Seafood was more popular in Barbados because the island is mostly limestone and not conducive to farming and produce, so their primary source of nutrition has been the ocean's bountiful supply. Guyana is famous for Bangamary and Basa fishes because of the many rivers that flow through Amazonian country and the foods popular in Trinidad have to do with the almost equal split of East Indian and African heritages that make up the population. However, all of this information is simply contextual as the point of my digression is to highlight that the menus of these restaurants in the GTA are designed to provide options that offer a degree of comfort but also to offer familiarity that conjures up those aforementioned feelings of nostalgia as well as the actively helping to forge or re-create a shared West Indian identity through the process of bringing these all together in one common space—the menu itself—which then becomes a symbolic expression of diasporic consciousness of the West Indian diasporic community in the GTA.

In Caribbean Heat 3, I ended up in a conversation with a patron called John, he identified himself as being from St. Lucia but spent a considerable amount of his childhood in Jamaica before moving to Canada in 2000. He is an electrician and the reason he spent time in Jamaica as a younger person was because there were not many opportunities to get certified as an electrician in St. Lucia, so he had to seek alternative opportunities. He noted that at 47, to be able to live the life he is living in Canada, he would have never been able to do so had he not gone to Jamaica. I found this interesting, so I asked John what he normally eats at places like this, and he said that he has tried almost everything on the menu and does not have a particular favorite but what he does enjoy is the ability to eat different things. This pique my interest especially as I have lived in St Lucia as recently as 2017–2019, and there is a wide variety of foods that are presently available on the island. John explained to me that such an occurrence was not always the case, and, in his youth, St. Lucia was devoid of options.

The fulcrum of this dietary evolution in St. Lucia is not specific to that territory but extends to many other of the smaller territories of the West Indies. Mintz asserts that “food shifts are associated with a variety of economic and political changes ... broad social processes have led to culinary change” (2002, 104), and this lends itself to understanding that as those smaller territories have continued to develop through tourism, agriculture and finance, they have begun to appeal to a broader audience of persons. The smaller territories have seen an influx of persons from the larger West Indian territories and along with this is the coming along of the inherent culinary preferences. These preferences now mix and mingle with the local territorial cuisine and results in a fair model of West Indian cuisine being present in the territories. Now, consider than many of the immigrants that make up the diaspora that I engaged with in this research left their respective homelands or their parents left quite some time ago, prior to the economic boom in the region. It makes sense that the West Indian cuisine in the GTA is a bit of a new model or concept (but do note that some of establishments have been around quite some time but they are in the very few). However, as John explained, the fact that there are options makes it desirable.

I asked him, “How do you feel about being West Indian and having all these food choices?” He responded by highlighting that he enjoys it, and it gives him a sense of joy that there are options. He gave me a story about when he invited his colleagues from work to lime at Caribbean Heat for food and drinks. They asked him what kind of food and he said West Indian. Adding some context, he explained that he works with a company that is almost entirely of European descent, so they are not familiar with West Indian cuisine. He said that he felt a sense of joy when he was able to list out all the different options that would be available to them and said it filled his heart with joy when one of his colleagues told him that he has never seen such a wide-ranging menu for one place. This reminded me of Hall’s concept of pride in one’s identity so I asked John directly if he felt a sense of pride and he responded with a resounding yes, clarifying it by adding that he does not even bother to consider other types of food anymore because he is proud of the fact that he can eat something drastically different each day and yet still be eating West Indian cuisine. The variety of the West Indian menu is indicative of the region as Mintz notes that it (the region) was characterized by a long history of adaptation, which changes from the plantation system to a combination with European cultures and exchange between the territories themselves (1971, 28). The cuisine of the region is a manifestation of the region’s history and of the ways that Caribbean populations have actively sought to combine, recombine, and exchange to foodstuffs and culinary traditions produce a food identity that is a source of pleasure and pride to its diasporic community.

Mannur suggests that people’s desires to “fabricate authenticity are modulated by the anxiety to reproduce authenticity while trying to create a sense of home and belonging in adopted homes and kitchens” (2007, 15). Unpacking this, let us consider the idea of reproducing something that is viewed as authentic, with the obvious problem which is, who is the standard bearer for authenticity? What we must appreciate is that this notion of authenticity, when it comes to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, is one that is subjective to the individual and their respective notion of home in so much that home can be a variety of things ranging from a homeland of a specific West Indian territory to a concept of home that has been recreated for second generation onward immigrants to engage with from infancy. The point I want to get across here is that authenticity in this

case should not be considered as something stringent or factual but should be understood in the light of the emotions and feelings that it elicits.

3.2 A Re-take on Authenticity

This brings me to my interview with Jillian on Sunday October 24th at Caribbean Palace on Jane Street in Toronto. Jillian is a woman in her forties. She moved to Canada with her parents in 1982, at the time when she was quite young. Initially, the family moved to Barrie but after getting married, she moved to Eglinton Avenue in Toronto. She is originally from Barbados and her husband is from Bermuda; they have two daughters who were born in Canada. In organizing the interview, Jillian insisted that we meet early in the morning, at 9am when the restaurant was opening. When we met up, Jillian declared, “If we going to be talking about West Indian food, we have to do it over hot doubles”, so we went ahead and ordered doubles and had our conversation.





Figure 5. The updated menu at Caribbean Palace, @Caribbean_Palace (2022, March 23).

Retrieved on June 12th, 2022, from

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CbdhWcaJ1or/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

I began by asking her what her relationship with West Indian food is, to which she explained that being from Barbados, there is not a particularly rich food history to the country itself but instead the regional food was something she was more comfortable with, referring to the West Indian region. This dovetails nicely with John's view on West Indian cuisine but as I have noted earlier, the West Indian cuisine is becoming more popular in the GTA, and it is safe to say that it has been gaining popularity across the globe. There may be people that agree with Jillian and John, but my focus remains on the appreciation of West Indian food rather than territorial or island food. Having lived in Barbados myself, I asked her how does she feel about Cou Cou and flying fish, the national dish of Barbados? She responded that she is not a huge fan of it, that she does like flying fish, but she only has it on special occasions, like when her parents prepare it or she travels back to Barbados. This stands out because I must consider this with Lisa's conversation on making a cook for special occasion, as I see the connection with nostalgia and recreating the feeling of something authentic peeking through the words. What I found interesting about Jillian's comments is that the associated memory and

nostalgia felt nice (positive feelings) despite it be related to things that are not necessarily her preference—not her favourite food perhaps, but still there is associated happiness and positive emotions through strong links to memories of family and place that are connected clearly to the food.

Unpacking this further, Mannur suggests that the attempt to fabricate or recreate a moment that is authentic from our memory through food is one where we tempered by logic (2007, 15), meaning it is one that is limited in its scope of accuracy and authenticity. In this sense, I think about the special occasions that are being spoken of by the interlocutors. It appears there are certain foods that are tied to certain occasions or experiences in the past, and that when these events or occasions reoccur, there seems to be some sort of imperative to fulfil the experience through the food. Seemingly, the experience is mediated by food, lending to a form of authenticity and familiarity with the food both helps bring about those relations and attachments and outwardly expresses them. Appreciate that the foods of the region transition from being components of a national cuisine to one of West Indian cuisine as people shift their sense of identity too—be it through travel, migration, a diaspora consciousness, or by personal choice. This navigation of identity is thus mediated by people's relationship to food. This should not be seen as independent of the West Indian identity, as it must be appreciated that the foods being spoken about are West Indian, and the moments they are attempting to recreate are those occasions that are celebrated in a West Indian way. Food that is culturally coded as West Indian thus provides a feeling of authenticity connected to a remembered or imagined West Indian way of life and food thus plays a key role in the symbolic mediation of people's relationship with memories, as well as a sense of place, belonging, and identity.

As we got deeper into conversation, Jillian asked if she could speak openly and went on to explain that she has had a resurgence in her appreciation for West Indian and Caribbean food since she had children. She explained that growing up in Canada she was exposed to the food of the West Indian region by her parents, both in her family home and when visiting relatives. She pointed out that back in the 1980s there were far fewer Caribbean and West Indian restaurants and where she lived in Barrie was quite far from

any options. She explained that because of this she became quite familiar and comfortable with Canadian fast food and other types of cuisines she was exposed to at restaurants.

When I asked about the comment regarding the resurgence of her appreciation, Jillian explained that she wanted her children to appreciate food and she joked that “white people food don’t exactly have flavor or taste, so I don’t want to punish my children with bland food.” She qualified this by explaining that what she appreciates about the food of the region is that there is no shortage of flavor through seasoning and sauces. She mentioned that when we finished our interview, she would be buying food from the restaurant to carry home for her children and husband and showed me a text message on her phone that included the items that each person wanted from the restaurant. I asked her why they chose those specific items and she explained that growing up and visiting the West Indian territories, those items are what was associated with a Sunday morning breakfast, a time she said that “was for family.” I asked her if she felt buying the food made the experience more genuine and she said yes, because growing up her parents would buy the food rather than make it.

I consider there to be two points of note here. First, that there is an acknowledgement on Jillian’s part that the practice of buying foods for breakfast on a Sunday morning is something that she considers to be part of her West Indian heritage and a way of expressing her sense of West Indian identity. Second, that the simple act of buying from a West Indian restaurant on a Sunday morning has become part of her tradition as an immigrant in Ontario. This brought to mind the important role of adaptation in the cultural practices of diasporas. As Young Rae Oum notes in *Authenticity and Representation: Cuisines and Identities in Korean-American Diasporas*: “for all diasporic cultures, cuisine exhibits hybridity, multiplicity, and complex and ambivalent relationships with the origin” (2005, 120). There is a sense that the experience is genuine to both its original form in the West Indies and the form for the diasporic West Indian community, which I believe is the beauty of the dynamic of the diaspora as a community that allows for the (re)construction of identity and sense of self.

Food presents the West Indian diaspora in the GTA with an avenue to recreate a sense of home that ties a loose knot with nostalgia and authenticity, to create the community that Hall refers to as a safe space of comfort that allows for expression and belonging. Naidu and Nzuzi, in discussing the re-creating of home in diasporic communities note:

Maintaining home identity is not easy when one relocates to a country that is characterized by a number of different so called ‘ethnic’ groups, each with its own rich and complex cultural traits. When people are far from those they can relate to, they tend to long for home and all that they consider familiar. In their attempt to satisfy their longing for home, migrants attempt to ‘bring home’ to the receiving countries. They do this through re-territorialising their space and ‘bringing home’ to their current living spaces. Emotions are linked to memories, and often favorable memories are expressed through joyful emotions. (2014, 334)

The theme I think is being established here is that the emotions through memories are elicited through food. To allow me to introduce a popular “Calypso”-themed restaurant in Brampton, which I visited on Saturday, October 30th. It has been around since 1989, which is an exceptionally long time, especially when one considers that this was at the infancy stage of the West Indian diaspora starting to establish a footing in the GTA. The restaurant has remained a popular establishment through it all and has evolved with the times, with a weekday buffet and a revamped décor and menu.

I spoke to Paul, who identified himself as “the man in charge,” and he began our interaction by pointing out the ‘family’ part of the establishment’s name. He turned to the restaurant floor and gestured to me indicating that given that it was a Saturday, there were more families at the restaurant as compared to during the week when people are either working or at school. He also explained that later into the evening, I would see the atmosphere change to one that was more centered around the bar, as the establishment takes on more of a lounge feel. The owner reminded me that Brampton is a community that is almost exclusively occupied by immigrants and that West Indian immigrants make up a large portion of them. As established in the introduction, immigrants to the GTA have historically tended to choose the quieter suburban areas on the outskirts of the city of Toronto, and Brampton has traditionally been one of those areas. Brampton is an area where there are many different ethnicities, with immigrants from all corners of the globe, but there has been a steady increase in the amount of West Indian immigrants in the area

that is reflected by what Paul considers to be a “considerable boom in West Indian-targeting businesses.”

About the food, he pointed out to me that he had a responsibility to prepare good-tasting meals that were enjoyable, as his customers that chose to dine-in were doing so not necessarily for the quality of the food but for the ambiance and “feel” that was being (re)created by sharing a meal, having a few drinks and catching up. He went on further to discuss the COVID-19 protocols that were recently lifted and said that he was quite sure that during the ban on in-house dining, customers would take his food home, invite people over and replicate that type of environment at home regardless of the laws, because, as he put it, “nothing could stop we people from a good time.” Consider this along with the sentiments of others in this thesis, and a direct relationship about recreating home experiences through the food experience starts to appear.

Things have changed a lot since the restaurant opened in 1989, and Paul notes that one of the reasons that the establishment has remained relevant and successful is that during that era, there were few other West Indian restaurants, and the few that existed became pillars of the community in the sense that it was one of the few links to the home territories of the West Indies. When this is considered, I appreciate that it provided a space that went far beyond simply a place to buy prepared meals, rather it was a manifestation of the diaspora and a tangible expression of West Indianness. But times have changed, and the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed even further change with the world becoming one that is remotely connected. Jillian contextualized this a bit when she went on to explain that because of technology her children are better at cooking West Indian food than her and her husband, with specific praise going in the direction of popular West Indian social media chefs, Jason Peru, based in Trinidad and Tobago and Chef Devan Rajkumar, a Guyanese- Canadian chef based in Toronto. She maintained that West Indian food brought all the generations together, as when her children make dishes that they are excited to share it with their grandparents and ask them if it reminds them of what they ate growing up. What this highlighted was that the food of the West Indian region was being used to facilitate a cross-generational bonding experience that is unique and memorable.

There are layers here as we start to see the complexity of food to the West Indian diaspora and the first one to consider is the (re)production of a sense of identity through different forms of mediation. In this conversation with Jillian, I can acknowledge that there is a sense of pride in the transgenerational approach to food on her behalf, with her children reproducing food, as tangible aspects of the West Indian identity, and presenting it to her parents. This allows a rearticulation in the transmission of the dimensions of identity whereby the younger generations through the distinct avenue of food, can offer a sense of nostalgia and authenticity to the older generations. This is in essence the inverse of the norm or what is expected as it has become common for older generations to pass the torch to younger generations. But this notion of the younger generations re-producing speaks to the strength of the West Indian diaspora and ties in well with Hall (2000) as it relates to the notions on the organization of identity and the agency as it relates to the active re-production of the diasporic consciousness. What is seen here is that social media and the popularity it attaches to these traditional cultural and identity-defining practices incentivizes the re-creation and expression of the West Indian identity.

Further, I think the preceding account shows that it is worth acknowledging that there is a role for social media and platforms such as Instagram and Facebook in being conduits to the transmission of the cultural experience, or at the very least making it accessible for the younger generations. It does this by sensationalizing West Indian identity as something exotic. In doing so, social media can facilitate the experience of sharing a West Indian meal together, and in the contemporary societal landscape this is increasing rare and less commonplace. Building on this I would like to add my take and that is that social media is a key component of the diasporic community in dimensions that are still evolving. But, with regards to food, it creates an interesting event that I have noticed among my friends and family. Naidu and Nzuza note:

Food preparation is an important part of people's cultures and identity. 'Proper eating' includes the kind of ingredient used, the manner of preparing it, the manner of serving it, and the way of eating it. (2014, 338-339)

Traditionally, a recipe was something sacred to a family or household unit, in the West Indies each family had a distinct way of preparing meals and this was passed down of up

generationally base, but now what we see is with the advent of social media chefs, and in this case we are talking about the West Indian chefs, we see a more sophisticated, culinarily oriented approach being presented on social media by these chefs and what I have seen is that a person now is not restricted to the generational recipes, but influenced by these approaches seen online; in a sense there is a reconstruction of the concept of West Indian cuisine as it is drawing on influences from different places while still being focused on West Indianness. What this presents itself as in the long term is that members of the West Indian diaspora are able to disarticulate the meal itself and rearticulate it using different methods, ingredients and styles of cooking, but in doing so they are recreating a meal that is still authentically West Indian and "traditional" in nature. This is a manifestation of the use of technology in the reconstruction of a person's identity and in the scope of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA, it must be appreciated as this approach lends itself to an immigrant from the region having access to those experiences that allows for the expression of self and identity.

3.3 The Contemporary West Indian Food Experience

The notion of food being representative of an identity is something that is heavily invested upon in the West Indian diaspora. Mintz sees food as a mechanism through which the dimensions of identity are constructed and reinforced. As he puts it, "like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart" (2002, 109). I appreciate this view as it brings me to thinking of food in the West Indian dynamic as that different thing that is common and shared and the differences allow a shared bonding of a united yet distinct collective of individual identities. This brings me to the dynamism of a broader West Indian cuisine. After looking at quite a number of menus at West Indian establishments in the GTA, I can say that I echo Lisa's husband's assertion that it is essentially a sampling menu of what are considered to be the most popular dishes from the West Indian territories, coming from different islands and countries. Yet, all the food items have found a home on the menu—a sense of belonging in being different as it encapsulates the West Indian identity.

When I was speaking with Jillian, I pointed out that even though neither she nor her husband were from Guyana or Trinidad, they both seemed to be quite fond of the food from a place that caters more to that clientele, as was the case with Caribbean Palace. She agreed and noted that she knows that there is a rivalry among the different West Indian territories about whose food is better, with ever-present banter between Trinidadians and Guyanese regarding curries and Jamaicans vouching that their dishes are better than everyone else. She said, “they could fight all they want, but the real winners is we people because we get to enjoy all of it.” She explained that being Barbadian did not mean she could not enjoy the food of other West Indian territories; instead, it meant she could enjoy all of it without issue. As much as I agree with her, I can take it a bit further and say I fully support the sentiment that was expressed by David Rudder (1999) when he released “The Ganges and The Nile,” a song about the unity of differences in the West Indies. He sang: “Differences, there will always be. So let you be you, and I will be me. That’s the damn thing self that makes it sweet. Brother bring your drum, let we start to beat.” As someone who has been throughout the West Indian territories, very few things ring truer than Rudder’s sentiment; it is the inherent differences that stand as a strength of the West Indian identity, and it is something that should be celebrated. Tying this back to the food as a mechanism of constructing and expressing one’s identity, food brings people together and West Indian food brings West Indian people together regardless of the nationality of the dish or the type of restaurant it is being served at. I remember learning to cook with my grandmother and other older relatives and in the moment, they would tell stories, teaching me about how life was when they were younger. I would learn through what is considered the oral tradition of storytelling and these experiences are the ones that stick with me the most as all the persons that helped me to learn to cook have now passed away. For me, their memories, and the things that they taught me live on through food, through their recipes and the values associated with food.

The establishments discussed here are key sites for a West Indian food experience and they play an important role in the imagining of West Indianness in the diaspora. In doing so, the food experience at these establishments lends itself to Hall’s notion of diasporic consciousness to the extent that both the experiences and the establishments bring the diaspora together with shared ideas and concepts of identity that they can re-create, re-

produce and express as a community. In so doing, they contribute to a conceptual solidarity—a place and idea whose strength rests in its ability to be shared among the West Indian diasporic community. Mintz goes further:

Ethnicity is born of acknowledged difference and works through contrast. Hence an ethnic cuisine is associated with a geographically and/or historically defined eating community... Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity. Talking and writing about ethnic or national food can then add to a cuisine's conceptual solidity and coherence. (2002, 109)

I view the work of Mintz for this thesis with the mindset of national and ethnic identity referring to West Indian identity. And the discussion that has surrounded West Indian cuisine in the GTA since the 1980's is one that has proven to be a bedrock in the growth and prosperity of the community.

Allow me to discuss two conversations I had during my research that afforded me the opportunity to understand the evolution of food as a dimension of identity to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. The first conversation I would like to discuss was an informative and insightful interview with a 70-year-old Trinidadian-born Canadian who migrated from Rio Claro, a rural community in Trinidad to downtown Toronto in 1978. Vin migrated with his wife and four children and started a produce business that supplied restaurants with fruits and vegetables. He mentioned that he was quite familiar with the West Indian establishments that had been around for a long time because for quite some time he supplied many of them with produce. He said that at the time there was money to be made to support his family and that was the key factor to enter the industry, but he was able to gain a greater appreciation for the West Indian marketplace and realized just how much it facilitated a smoother transition to Canada. I asked him to explain that a bit further, he responded by saying:

If my family had to come here and only eat Canadian food, especially children who are picky eaters, I don't know how that would have turned out right, but because these few initial West Indian places had stuff that we were familiar with from back home, we were able to do it gradually, like the kids now eat more Canadian food but it is still mostly West Indian food and stuff, and the more places open up is the more choices that we have, so in my older age I grateful I never had to start eating like a white man.

He made it clear to me that he has seen a side of food that no one else can say they have seen, saying: “What these West Indian restaurants have done for us coming from the islands is the only reason we still here.” What he went on to explain to me was that if it were not for the West Indian restaurants being able to feed the diaspora, he does not think that the West Indian diaspora would be “as loud and proud” as they are, I would quantify this by saying that this allows for what Mintz considered to be the concreteness of the sense of identity as it provides a strong foundation upon that contributes to the (re)construction of one’s identity. He explained that to him, West Indian food is a point of pride, it simply tastes better than the other options that are available to him.

I asked him about the role he thinks food plays in the West Indian identity, especially among the diaspora and he was eager to comment, saying that it is the “lifeblood” of the diaspora. Vin went on to explain his perspective, stating that to him, the entire human experience is based around food as it is core to human survival, but it is also core to socialization. He explained that growing up in a rural community in Trinidad, there was not much to do in terms of keeping yourself occupied and he recounted that a lot of his childhood was spent climbing trees to pick fruits and going hunting for different types of small animals as well as fishing. Bonding with friends and peers was facilitated through the process of getting food and when they would sit down with whatever haul they had, they would talk and catch up, telling stories and dreaming about what life would be like in the future. He explained that even though now the food is readily available, what remains is that socialization over meals. Vin opened up to me about his personal relationship with food, saying that all his children have moved out and have their own families and his wife passed away five years ago. So, he regularly makes West Indian meals and invites his children, grandchildren, and other family members over to his house to share and reconnect, alluding to the transgenerational nature of food.

One comment that he made which stood out to me was that “even though we have WhatsApp app and things like that to keep in contact with each other, it doesn’t compare to sitting and eating and talking nonsense with each other, the food and picong does go hand in hand.” Picong refers to a type of satire or comical banter and is a word that is truly Caribbean and West Indian in origin (Esposito 2017, 2). Let me consider this in

juxtaposition to Jillian and her daughters, who rely heavily on social media and technology to enhance their sense of their West Indian identity. Firstly, there is an age difference with Vin being over 70 years old and Jillian being in her 40s with younger children. There is an appreciated difference in the use of technology and that contributes to Vin's belief, but I also think that having had a larger family for quite some time and that he now lives alone, the solitude plays a role in his comment. Additionally, this difference is something I appreciate as food can be seen as something that brings people together, passes on knowledge, and helps make, express, and solidify one's sense of identity and community. The takeaway from this is that in some cases, technology and social media might allow for new ways of experiencing West Indian food, but for other people and in certain circumstances, it does not; in part because it fails to replicate the physical co-presence, the sociality of liming and cooking that are the integral parts of the West Indian food experience.

Vin highlighted an important point that has been repeated in several forms throughout this research and that is, West Indian food is a facilitator to the diaspora. What this means is that West Indian food facilitates bringing people of different generations together to socialize, share stories and learn from each other. How it does this is worth discussing and I draw attention to my previous points to articulate this. West Indian food lends itself to the creation and perpetuation of a diasporic consciousness (as discussed by Hall) as well as a sense of conceptual solidarity (as discussed by Mintz). This allows the members of the diasporic community to be able to foster a sense of identity articulated around or enhanced by the food experience on multiple levels of mediation. The levels are those of social media, the up and down transgenerational transmission, the food itself as an experience, as well as the establishments that facilitate the collective experience and liming. These mediations allow the members of the diasporic community to come to develop a sense of identity that reminds me of Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am—in the sense that the members of the diasporic community are able to reproduce their notions of West Indian identity through the avenue of food in different ways, allowing them to re-situate their sense of self as West Indian and, in so doing, to be or become West Indian. Thus, specifically West Indian food is desirable to the diaspora even more than other types of food that may bring novelty and newness. The utilization

and appreciation of the cuisine of the West Indies to engaging with a culture or sense of identity provides members of the diaspora in the GTA with avenues for learning about, transmitting, and adapting their foodways., As Dal Molin in *Teaching Culture Through Food* highlights: “Cuisine is not simply food; it is a social product, an aesthetic artifact, and a cultural tradition that reflects the geography, agricultural practices, values, and customs of a society” (2022, 25). It is essentially an amalgam, and the availability of the food experience and cuisine lends itself to encouraging the younger generations to the food and the shared experiences that go hand in hand.

The second conversation I want to highlight was with the owner of the restaurant on Keele Street. He also owns Cove Supermarket in the same complex as the restaurant and has become a pillar in the West Indian diasporic community in his many years in Canada. I interacted with him numerous times throughout my research and had a continuing conversation on all things West Indian. A bit of a backstory is that Ron has been involved in the food and restaurant business since he came to Canada in the late 1980s and the restaurant was opened three years ago, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic while his grocery has been in operation for over 15 years. Out of the grocery, he started a West Indian food catering business, and this spawned the restaurant. His menu has a bit more variety than most other West Indian restaurants I have encountered in the GTA, and Ron mentioned to me that he has travelled throughout the West Indian region to learn how to authentically make the dishes that are popular in the different territories.

I asked him about this evolution and what was his motivation and he decided to relate a story that reintroduces the notion of authenticity. He told me that he visited Guyana in 2017 and was liming at a bar in Berbice with friends when a person walked in selling ripe plantains he had just picked from a government-owned estate. The group of friends bought the plantains, and the owner of the bar took them and made plantain wedges. Ron explained that they tasted so good that they tracked down the person they bought the plantains from to go get more of them because they wanted to make more of the wedges. He said that there was just something about it that made it seem, in his own words, “authentic to the experience.” When Ron was opening his restaurant, he did so with the plantain wedges being front and center of his marketing. He reached out to me after the

interview and shared a story about how one of his competitors in the West Indian food industry in the GTA reached out to him to find out how the plantain wedges were made and if there is some secret behind its popularity. He did not share the recipe but instead suggested that the person goes to Guyana and learn it from there.

I asked Ron what his driving force is, and he explained that he is caught up in the happiness he brings his customers as he tries to recreate the West Indian experience. He explained that even though his customers are from various places throughout the region, his food is designed to remind them of home. This concept of home food holds value in multiple ways. As Naidu and Nzazu note:

we see that ‘home food’ is one of the main (traditional) ‘artefacts’ that migrants use to evoke memories of their home space and re-territorialise their host space. Through preparing and eating ‘home food’, migrants are able to re-experience the emotions associated with their sending country and family members. (2014, 339)

I continuously refer to the ‘re’ in terms of construction and the authors use a similar style, because as previously stated, when looking at cultural identity, it is not something stagnant or singular in nature, but rather it is something that is evolving and adapting, changing, what the experience of an individual’s identity is. In order to appreciate this change, we must see it as something under constant evolution, being reimaged and reconstructed as the factors such as space occupied, availability of resources and technology continue to change.

Through the food experience, a complex relationship with a homeland is established and the way in which that shapes an individual evolves over time. But I urge the reader to appreciate is that the complexity in this case is reflective of the nature of the West Indies. Let me unpack that further, as I discuss the West Indian diaspora in the GTA and the relationship with food, it must be seen that the food, like the region, has a complex history and is representative of a complex diasporic community that has continued to evolve and in doing so continues to reconstruct and express themselves in terms of inherent West Indianness in identity through the safe and comfortable spaces created by the food experience. Naidu and Nzazu expressed the sentiment that “home food triggers lived memories and plays a significant role in connecting migrants to their country of

origin as well articulating a sense of self and their cultural identity” (2014, 339). When I combine this with the work of Mintz and Hall, I can conclude that food is far more than a connection. I articulated a relationship between food and memories earlier on in this chapter, whether indirect or direct, the West Indian food experience lends itself to the articulation and contributes to understanding one’s sense of self as it pertains to identity and in this case, the way they reinforce, reproduce and express it in a way that pays homage to the diaspora as a community by providing members with a way to express, share, affirm, feel—even to taste—diasporic consciousness and solidarity.

Chapter 4

4 Vibing an Identity: Music to the West Indian Diasporic Ear

*Oh now, I said, you feel no pain, now
 One good thing about music
 When it hits you (You feel no pain)
 Feel no pain
 Hit me with music now, oh now
 Hit me with music now
 Hit me with music, harder
 Brutalize me (Hit me with music)
 This is!*

– Bob Marley and the Wailers, *Trenchtown Rock*, 1971.

During my fieldwork I asked myself what I should expect to see in the relationship between the members of the West Indian diasporic community I was interacting with and West Indian music. What I saw was a strong and passionate relationship with music of the region which allowed an insight into the ways it informs the sense of self and identity. Music extends to become something global that members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA shares with other West Indian diasporic communities as well as the West Indian homelands itself. However, it is the re-creation of the musical experience and the way it has reconstructed and rearticulated a sense of identity in the GTA that I will explore further in this section. Framing this thought, I refer to begin, Thomas Solomon in *Theorizing Diaspora and Music*, who comments:

Music in diasporic communities has demonstrated how music can function as a sort of social “glue” connecting diasporic communities widely dispersed around the globe ... highly mediated popular music genres have served not only to connect diasporic communities to their homelands, but also to each other. (2015, 205)

To properly appreciate the extent of this statement I will expand on the genres of music that have become a valued commodity of the West Indies. I believe that music, as a

dimension of a culture, is integral to that sense of connectedness and sense of belonging. These elements of culture and in fact culture itself is a signifying practice, one that signifies identity. Lawrence Grossberg notes:

Culture is never merely a set of practices, technologies or messages, objects whose meaning and identity can be guaranteed by their origin or their intrinsic essences ... Cultural practices are signifying practices. Following Volosinov as well as the structuralists, Hall argues that the meaning of a cultural form is not intrinsic to it; a text does not offer a transparent surface upon or through which we may discern its meaning in some non-textual origin, as if it had been deposited there, once and for all, at the moment of its origin. The meaning is not in the text itself but is the active product of the text's social articulation, of the web of connotations and codes into which it is inserted. (1996, 157)

The active product here that I am discussing is West Indian music and here it can be seen as a part of the social experience of identifying as West Indian. Hall (2000) notes the importance of an element of culture is more dependent on its role in cultural relations, with an emphasis on the social field in which it is incorporated. The effect of this is that music is precisely the key element of West Indian cultural identity that is at play in almost every part of the life of the individual that lends itself to a sense of belonging—as a component that is core in understanding the West Indian diaspora, as they are continuously navigating the urbanized metropolitan landscape of the GTA to find where they belong and where there is comfort in being a part of the whole.

The epigraph to start this section is the chorus from “Trenchtown Rock” from the legendary Bob Marley, and I urge you to keep in mind the repetition of being ‘hit’ by the music. This points to a key element of many styles of West Indian music, which are often about or seek to invoke that feeling of being “hit”—hit by the rhythm, hit by the lyrics, or hit by the ineffable vibes that it creates. It is the way the music is able to affect the emotions. Many people use music to “people alter their mood states, match their current emotion, comfort themselves, relieve stress, meet psychosocial needs, validate their affiliation with a valued group, or celebrate social events or rituals” (Sedikides, Leunissen and Wildschut 2021, 2). Thus, when Marley sings about the hit, or when I refer to the way music ‘hits’ people, I mean to invoke the ability of musical forms to elicit and navigate a wide range of emotions in listeners—a range of feelings that are

dependent on memory, context and the song itself. In this case, the song itself belongs to the reggae genre, perhaps the most famous but only one of many popular genres from the West Indies. Reggae is most clearly associated with Jamaica, where it originated, but like the other genres throughout the region, it has been shared throughout the territories, gaining varying degrees of popularity and prominence while remaining a powerful genre to the West Indian diasporic communities. When considering musical genres for this study, I refer to my scope of study that focuses on the English-speaking West Indian territories, and I give particular attention to those genres and that have had wide global influence, such as calypso, reggae, zouk, ska, soca, chutney soca and dancehall.

Moving further in this conversation, it is worth knowing that there are national connections, specific historians that link music styles to certain countries and eras and contexts. and this means that there is a certain degree of preference and competition among the genres bias pertaining to the types of music that are more and less popular to certain West Indian backgrounds, which misses the point of the music as something that helps creates a transnational, diasporic identity. Reggae and ska are a source of pride for Jamaicans while the same can be said regarding Calypso and Soca for Trinidadians. Similarly, Guyana has a sense of shared ownership with Trinidad regarding chutney and chutney soca whereas Trinidad has staked its claim for shared ownership of dancehall. What this means is that there is a mixture of preferences but a shared sense of ownership and pride in the music of the region.

Relating to the diasporic community, Solomon notes, that “a focus on musical production and consumption can provide an inroad to understanding the actually diverse identities and allegiances found within diasporic communities” (2015, 213). This echoes the sentiment mentioned above by Grossberg (1996) and Hall (1981) in that music as an element of culture lends itself to understanding identity, and in the context of this thesis when I discuss music, I am referring to the experience of West Indian music as something that people listen to both actively and passively and the way they interact as listeners in different contexts as it relates to what is evoked. I will be looking specifically at how music is experienced by individuals as well as how it is used and experienced in establishments to create a space that feels uniquely West Indian. As will be seen the

evocation of emotion and memory among members of the West Indian diasporic community in the GTA through the mechanism of West Indian music contributes to ideas of comfort, familiarity and a sense of place and belongingness.

To the West Indian diaspora in the GTA; the group of persons that consider themselves as part of this community feel a sense of belonging to it, holding it as something near and dear—a sense of identity both individually as well as collectively as a diasporic group. Lidskog considers music to be something ‘special’ for diasporic groups, explaining that “For these groups, music may have a special meaning. It can, in various ways, strengthen the identity and cohesion of a group and create a diasporic consciousness among its members” (2017, 28-29). He extends this idea to explain that this may be accomplished through various ways, noting that

music becomes an important medium for maintaining contact with the culture of the home country. The musical practices of diasporic communities are often related to the culture of the homeland. Another way is that music can be a medium for contacting and engaging in cultural exchange with diasporic communities in other countries. A third way is that in groups and communities with political, religious, and social heterogeneity (and perhaps even social tensions), music may provide social cohesion; members can, despite their differences, unite around common expressive music practices. Music can thus create identity within a group despite its members’ heterogeneity. (2017, 30)

I will have more to say about Lidskog’s discussion in what follows below but let me begin by noting some key points. First, we should note that there is a similarity between the maintenance of a diasporic relationship that is based on contact between community members and the territorial homelands on the one hand and the diasporic community’s relation to home through music on the other. Second, music serves as a facilitator amongst the West Indian diaspora and other communities in the GTA. And third, music serves an important social role in the creation of a sense of belonging to a community that has a shared history. This chapter will look at the role of the West Indian music experience as it relates to its role in fostering a sense of nostalgia. It will continue with a discussion on the creation of comfort and conclude with a conversation on the role of music in the West Indian pastime of feteing and liming—the socializing event of the region and its culture.

4.1 Recalling a Time Gone By: Evoking Nostalgia

West Indian music is much like West Indian food in that it is a combination of individual countries or territorial identities coming together to contribute to one larger identity. Through popular and social media such as through movies, television shows, YouTube and other platforms, the general suggestion seems to be that there is an assumption about persons from the West Indian territories regarding them being fun-loving, easy-going and more or less being a partying people. As one of those persons, I can say there is a fair degree of accuracy in that simplistic generalization, and I am happy to reinforce it. Let me relate the experience I had at Tropical Nights Restaurant and Lounge to add a bit more context. I visited this Scarborough establishment twice in a week, on Sunday, November 14th and Friday, 19th because when I went on the 14th, I saw the flyer for a musical performance on the 19th that I simply was not going to miss. On November 14th I visited on my way to another bar just to get a quick bite to eat, but because of the vibe I ended up spending some more time than expected and saw the poster for the performance on the coming Friday.

The music made me stay. As I entered the establishment, my thoughts were drowned out by the blaringly loud music that was playing on speakers both inside and outside. A bit of detail here is that there is both an inside area and an outdoor patio, but given the time of year, the patio was closed. The loud music reminded me of being in the bars in places like St. Kitts and Jamaica, where it is quite common to have to shout to communicate with persons in your immediate proximity. When I consider the volume of the music, I think about why it is desirable and to this end I draw on Welch and Fremaux who noted that there were four main themes related to loud music, which were, “arousal/excitement, facilitation of socialization, masking of both external sound and unwanted thoughts, and an emphasis and enhancement of personal identity” (2017, 350). For me, that initial reaction of feeling like I was back in the West Indies conjured up feelings of nostalgia. For me, this sense of nostalgia also had to do with the type of music being played, which was West Indian music, specifically soca music.

Nostalgia is experienced through the senses, and music lights up the ears, it creates a feeling unlike any other; remember I asked you to keep in mind how Bob Marley used ‘hit’ repeatedly? Well, it is my claim that the loud music aroused me, and coupled with the genre of music, it all ‘hit’ me, making me harken back to my younger days living in the West Indies, filling me with nostalgia. Barrett notes that there is a connection between musical-derived arousal and nostalgia, explaining, “arousal has been identified as a component of emotional experience that could be easily manipulated” (2010, 391), and further explains that this arousal facilitates the retrieval of memories, in effect allowing for feelings of nostalgia. These memories can be simple or complex, as for my upbringing, I was exposed to the full complement of West Indian genres given my diverse familial background, and being an athlete, travelling the different territories, I embraced all the revelry and festivities that went along with the West Indian music scene.

I am not alone in having these feelings and sentiments, I bring up my conversation with Denise, a Trinidadian-born, 32-year-old woman living in Pickering, married to a second-generation Grenadian-Canadian husband with two daughters under the age of five. Denise’s story was a bit different from most other interlocutors as she has been in Canada just over ten years, migrating after completing her undergraduate studies at University of the West Indies (UWI), through a work opportunity. I met Denise on Friday, November 12th, at around 9pm at T.O. Lounge in Toronto. Her husband and friends were also there, forming a group of seven people who were all quite fond of the bar. The establishment was very loud, and we struggled to reciprocate pleasantries before she called out to the owner who, after a brief conversation, allowed us to use a back room. Denise explained that she frequents the establishment weekly and has a good relationship with the owner and as much as she wanted to be a part of my thesis work, she was not willing to give up her “Friday night lime,” saying it would be “uncultured” of a West Indian.

Early in our conversation I asked her what she thinks is important to the West Indian diaspora in terms of building identity, to which she assertively replied “music.” She said that no other experience makes her feel more at home than the music of the region, saying that she listens to it almost all day, regardless of what she must do. She pointed out that it is something she has not hesitated to “indoctrinate” her children into from an

early age, so I asked her to expand on her use of that particular phrase. Denise explained that home for her is only ever going to be Trinidad and the West Indies. She said: “It is the only home I want to know, everything else, being here in Canada and whatever is to come, those are all extras, home is home.” She then said that as a parental unit, she and her husband feel the same way, so they have decided to embrace the nostalgia and actively re-create that sense of home and allow their children to be subjected to repeated exposure of West Indianness.

I asked her if she would say that there was something about listening to West Indian music that made her feel nostalgic. She agreed, and went on to explain that when she listens to West Indian music it is indeed a connection to home and she juxtaposed this to other forms of music by pointing out that when she wants to feel “more Canadian,” like when she is hanging out with, as she describes them, “bleached white’ friends,” she would listen to “white” music prior to hanging out with those friends, as a way to get her mind straight. Essentially, she is relating the West Indian music to the home experience she desires and is actively trying to recreate, with anything else being part of a distinct experience for her which requires a deliberate act of preparation. She went on to explain that growing up she would go to certain bars and parties in Trinidad while she was at UWI, something we sidetracked into as being from Trinidad and being similar in age to her, we hung out at a lot of same places in Trinidad without ever crossing paths. Denise said that her experiences with music during that time in her life added to her sense of nostalgia now, as did the fact that she was having a conversation with another “Trini” about music while West Indian music blared throughout the lounge around us.

Focusing on the feeling of nostalgia, she explained that while it is starkly different than her experiences growing up, the music reminds her of those times when she would be out partying and liming with her friends—something she attests to greatly missing. The music, she said, is her way of feeling at home and remembering those experiences when times are not always pleasant. Denise further explained that when she is hanging out with the group of friends that accompanied her to the establishment on the night of our interview, which are all some degree of West Indian; the music makes her remember the past and that “lightens” her mood, allowing her to be more relaxed, making the point:

“the music makes me calm and relaxed, it makes me relive my younger days and think of home, which is supposed to be relaxing and something fond to look back at, especially on a wintery night like tonight.” To this end, her view is supported by Sedikides who reiterates that:

Nostalgia, as we mentioned, is a self-relevant emotion, incorporating personal, meaningful, and mostly positive autobiographical memories. Indeed, the literature indicates that music is a potent source of nostalgia. Music that was popular during an individual’s youth, and thus likely nostalgic, shapes one’s lifelong musical preferences. (2021, 3-4)

Denise alludes to the nostalgic component of music playing a role in the choice of music and the type of musical experiences she tries to engage with – pointing out that in her adulthood, those choices are based on the emotions and feelings that are associated with it from her younger years. She made explicit mention that her past experiences and the music associated with it continues to shape her music preferences. In doing this, she is reproducing that environment filled with West Indian music here in the diaspora, a way in which she can express herself comfortably, without fear and consternation. Lidskog (2017) asserted the role of music in maintaining a connection with the homeland culture and through the nostalgia that is elicited by the West Indian music experience for Denise, her interview supports that the music allows her to embrace the familiarity of her homeland with multiple references to it in the conversation. She is not limited to the experience in the diaspora itself but instead sees it as a way to actively re-create the home culture that she craves.

Our conversation continued, moving beyond the scope of the nostalgic component of music to include other ways that music features prominently in the West Indian diasporic community. When Denise and I referred to the nostalgic impact of music and the way it made us remember “home,” we were describing the way in which music reminds us of social experiences. This is a key part of how people relate to music according to Simon Firth who notes in *Music and Identity* that

Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in

the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (1996, 109)

For both Denise and I, what music is doing is allowing us to connect with a story of ourselves from the past and in the process, evoke memories of the past that allows us to engage in our present in a certain way. It is a connection of the mind and the body, a connection between a story we remember and the way we perform as actors in that recreation of the story. As per my previous mention of the “re-”, music, through the elucidation of nostalgia, allows a *re*-imagination of the past in relation to the present. In the process, a West Indian past that is linked with home can be *re*-created in the present, and it is this recreation that Hall (1994) alludes to as integral for the cultural identity of a diasporic community, as it informs the notion of agency and facilitates the organization of a shared or collective identity out of the individual identities of the members of the diasporic community.

This idea was echoed by a patron I encountered at Caribbean Cove. The female patron came up to me and asked me to dance with her to certain songs. I was a bit skeptical because I had just walked in and in the West Indies, you simply do not dance with someone else’s companion even if it is solicited. I initially refused and made my way to meet up with Ron, when he said that the woman who approached me was a regular and was single and unattached. So, after exchanging pleasantries with some bar-regulars I had become acquainted with, I took up the woman’s offer to dance with her. We danced to several songs and one that stood out was Kevin Lyttle’s “Turn Me On.” This is a dancehall song from 2002 and I have fond memories of behaving explicitly lewdly in dancing to this song, as the lyrics offer instructions of on how to behave and if I recall correctly, it was extremely popular during its prime. In an attempt to answer the question “What is Dancehall?”, Sonjah Stanley-Niaah writes:

A music? A social movement? A space? A profile? Most people familiar with Jamaica’s dancehall might feel the rhythm, hear the sound system drum... Dancehall’s story is ultimately the choreographing of an identity that critiques aspects of Western domination. It is the latest manifestation on a continuum of New World performance cultures... Dancehall functions as ritualized memorializing, a memory bank of the old, new, and dynamic bodily movements, spaces, performers, and performance aesthetic of the New World and Jamaica in

particular. Continuities of performance, masking, philosophies of space, political processes, and fashioning of selfhood exist, and parallels can be drawn. (2004, 102-103)

The genre is not unlike others from the West Indian region, as music genres there are typically born out of social commentary. Themes central to both cricket and West Indian literature, notably the concept of redemption and retribution, figure prominently in many of the musical styles. Uniquely, the genres of the region are able to retain this element of commentary to them while being presented in a catchy rhythm or tune that is appealing to not only the West Indian audience but an increasingly global audience.

The song—“Turn me On” evoked memories of the dances and parties I attended in my early teens and a specific relationship I had with a female friend growing up who has since become a musical artist in Trinidad and Tobago. I asked the woman in Caribbean Cove what made her pull me to dance with her and we began to converse. She was younger than I was—a 28-year-old Trinidadian who had been in Canada for about 15 years. The song had been popular when she was younger and she explained that I reminded her of the kind of guys she would have crushes on when she was younger, explaining the tattoos, piercings, beard, hairstyle, and clothing were very appealing to her and that dancehall songs, especially “Turn Me On,” made her remember with fondness the freedom and appeal she had felt growing up in Trinidad. I joked with her and asked if it made her feel nostalgic about her youth, and she said yes, contextualizing it by saying that the music “hits” her in a different way and makes her feel emotions that she cannot explain. I did not go much further than this because the point was established, and much like her and many others I spoke to, West Indian music evoked an ineffable emotional cascade.

4.2 Something Just Feels Right: A Sense of Comfort

The West Indian diaspora community in the GTA has gone through an evolution since it gained a noteworthy presence in the 1980s in terms of changes and growth as indexed by the size of the population, prevalence of businesses and the overall presence of West Indian elements in society. An aspect that has made the changes possible is the development in technology that leads to more access to resources, of which music is an

important one. The West Indian music experience seems to generate a feeling among the persons I interviewed and interacted with that gives them a sense of calm and comfort. The consensus among them was that with West Indian music, something just feels right—owing to it being part of their individual and collective identities. Technology is brought up to emphasize that the access to West Indian music in the diaspora has lent itself to the value it provides as a source of comfort to the community, much in the same way I described social media doing for the role of food (see chapter two). Solomon argues that music is a “a particularly powerful tool for imagining and living out diasporic identities” (2015, 205). Music provides the ability for connection and re-connection to something that is familiar and comfortable and that is conducive to the construction and expression of identity. The first aspect that he points out is that developments in technology have made music much more portable and the process has become inexpensive in terms of production, dissemination, and consumption. What this accomplishes from my perspective is that it facilitates the re-production of a homeland experience that is a source of comfort to the diaspora. As Solomon qualifies further:

Diasporas thus provide a compelling example of the deterritorialization of culture—the disconnection of culture from the territorially discrete, geographically bounded sites of its purported origin. Members of diasporic communities, even when spread over many parts of globe, use the possibilities of contemporary communications media to coordinate expressive practices and to engage in the same musical consumption habits. (2015, 205-206)

The deterritorialization of culture is evidenced in the availability of the music as facilitated by technology with multiple streaming apps and websites as well as social media platforms and YouTube. These technologies, combined with websites like TuneIn, the availability of international radio stations on the internet, and streaming and podcast services have all made music global and transnational in new ways, allowing geographical distinctions and borders to be navigated and transcended with ease. Pertinent to this thesis, technological resources contribute to the construction and expression of one’s identity in a community that is insulating the individual and creating a sense of belonging by providing the avenue of elements that organize and structure the diasporic community. Solomon extended this point a bit further in much the same way as I discussed with the role of social media and food, noting that the digitization through

formats like CDs, MP3, MP4, AAC, WMA, Vorbis, FLAC and more have sped up the process as well as increased the ease of access through the aforementioned apps, websites, and platforms. As these advancements have occurred, the interaction with music as a shared space has also changed from earlier periods: Whereas in the 1980s, to share a song, a person had to dub the cassette or lend the person the actual physical recording, in the process being deprived of it themselves, now music is a commodity that is easily shared around the world at the touch of a button. Therefore, music has become a more commonplace element of the shared space of West Indian identity and culture in the diaspora as it has become omnipresent.

The feel-good effect of West Indian music to the people I spoke with is premised on being something that is both in the shared physical space they occupy in the restaurants and bars as well as the shared transnational space of the West Indian diaspora. They are not alone in their consumption of the experience but share it with others physically and with a shared history and cultural identity. Members of the community experience a sense of connectedness both through in-person events that involve dancing and listening to music at the same time, through liming and hanging out, and also in mediated and long-distant ways through a variety of music-sharing platforms. According to Solomon, music presents an invitation or an opportunity for an individual to be part of a pleasurable experience and to do some as part of a larger community. He explains:

It feels good to be part of a dancing, globalized community; and there is both pleasure and a certain reassurance or validation of one's own sense of self in knowing that people on the other side of the world whom one identifies with in terms of ethnicity and culture are grooving and dancing to the same sounds. The shared affinity for music's associated with the homeland becomes the basis for an affective community—a community based on emotional attachment to cultural practices and products—that is mapped onto (and partially constitutes and maintains) the diasporic social formation. (2015, 206)

Essentially Solomon is saying that music provides the opportunity to be part of a euphoric experience as a member of a community, in this case the diasporic community that dissolves borders and distinctions between the diasporic person and the homeland through music. It allows a member of the diasporic community to be a part of the homeland cultural experience and community. This creates a sense of comfort through

safety and belonging to the members of the West Indian diaspora through transnationalism and what Jose Manuel Sobral (2018) refers to this as “long-distance nationalism.” This sentiment supports that of Solomon—that this shared experience and sense of community through the pleasures intrinsic to music is essential for the diasporic social formation, what I refer to (following Hall) as the diasporic community. Barbara A Misztal in *Collective Memory in a Global Age* states of memory:

Although memory is a faculty of individual minds, remembering is social in origin and influenced by the dominant discourses. In other words, while it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act as even the most personal memories are embedded in social context and shaped by social factors that make social remembering possible, such as language, rituals and commemoration practices. (2010, 27)

The transnational aura and the diasporic consciousness form the collective that allows memory to have meaning, context, and value to the person. Building on this, Sobral notes that “memory operates not only through discourse and the display of symbols that are reminders of the homeland, but also in an embodied way, such as through dancing and eating – both of them manifestations of a habitus, in Bourdieu’s terms, acquired in the homeland” (2018, 55). The experiences as it relates to music is acquired in the homeland by persons that only share history and homeland. In doing so, they express the memories associated with the musical experience in a manner that tag them to a larger community, with a sharedness and a bond of identity or belonging to the West Indian diasporic community. There is the formation of a shared collective memory among the West Indian diaspora. Of collective memory, Misztal notes, “is not just historical knowledge, as it is the experience mediated by representation of the past that enacts and gives substance to the group’s identity. Memory helps in the construction of collective identities and boundaries, whether these are national, cultural, ethnic or religious” (2010, 28). As such, the collectiveness and shared nature of the memories created through the West Indian music experience assists in the construction and expression of the collective identity.

Solomon’s framework lends itself to a discussion on understanding the role of music in the West Indian diasporic consciousness in the GTA, in the way it transcends borders, allowing for a rearticulation of what is assumed, allowing for re-creation and expression.

Recounting a personal experience allowed me to realize just how much the element of comfort serves in the reinforcement of the West Indian identity. Comfort, according to Heather Chappells and Elizabeth Shove, “might be used to describe a feeling of contentment, a sense of coziness, or a state of physical and mental well-being” (2004, 3). My mother’s sister and her family live in Markham and we do not necessarily have a close relationship. Because of familial obligations, I was invited to their home for a Sunday breakfast just before I began my fieldwork in early October 2021 and begrudgingly, I attended. My mother’s youngest sister is married to the son of Trinidad-born Canadians who migrated to Canada in 1951 and moved to Scarborough; the children and grandchildren are all born in Canada. When I entered the home, there was the distinct smell of West Indian curries being prepared in the kitchen and Sundar Popo blasting through YouTube on the television. Sundar Popo was a popular musical artist from Trinidad and Tobago and is touted as the founder of the Chutney Soca genre that is growing in popularity throughout the world. Peter Manuel in *Chutney and Indo-Trinidadian Cultural Identity* speaks of Popo as a vehicle in the popularization of the genre and notes of modern chutney:

What is dramatically new about modern chutney is not its form but its flouting of the social inhibitions previously restricting dance, and its recontextualization as a form of public culture enjoyed and performed by men and women together. Accordingly, as a socio-musical phenomenon, its emergence has been conditioned by the broader transformations taking place in Iri.do-Trinidadian society since around 1970. (1998, 25)

Sundar Popo’s real name is Sundarlal Popo Bahora, and he was born and lived in a village known as Monkey Town, Barrackpore in the south of Trinidad, the same area where the grandparents grew up. Striking up a conversation with the grandparents as I have always been a person to get along better with older persons, I asked them if the engagement with music—playing the older chutney songs loudly throughout the house—was a normal practice and the grandfather said yes, insisting that it was his way of feeling like he was still back home in Trinidad some 70 years after having left the country and migrating to Canada. Here, there is the combination of comfort and nostalgia, with the memories evoking strong emotions, reinforcing the notion by Sedikides, that music elicits positive autobiographical memories. The comfort the grandfather comments on in our

conversation reminded of Solomon's notion that comfort is achieved through the memory of music, and what we see is that memory being tied to a sense of identity. The grandfather explained that he has been playing the music since it was on vinyl records and that all his children and grandchildren know the songs and sing along with them, and soon enough his great-grandchildren will follow suit. He spoke glowingly about the evolution of the musical landscape of Trinidad and Tobago and the role music has played in helping him remember what it feels like to be back home. The feeling of being back home that is being evoked is one of remembering the homeland and according to Sobral, "remembering the homeland is neither reduced to commentaries on their history nor to discourse in general. They dance, listen to music, eat, touch each other and experience the togetherness of a (imagined) community. In sum, they perform nationality" (2018, 57). The grandfather continued that while he may be too old to travel back and forth, he is grateful for the technology that has allowed him to keep up with the music in Trinidad and elsewhere in the West Indies, including Guyana, which is becoming an increasingly important site for in the Chutney Soca music. He mentioned that he has experienced the birth of many new West Indian genres throughout his lifetime, and they have mostly all gained a place in his musical preferences. He reminded me that he migrated to Canada prior to the formation of the WIF and the independence era in the West Indian region, so his concept of the region was one with a greater sense of sharedness and unity among the individual territories as the broader British West Indies umbrella still covered much of the region and was a pillar of identity.

The conversation lacked any true structure, and it must be considered that the grandfather was an older person. I reached out to get some more content from some of his comments in March 2022, but unfortunately, he had passed away a few weeks earlier. This coaxed a memory from the back of my mind, and I remembered him telling me that he had been in Canada a long time and in all truthfulness, when he came there was not much in the way of being anything else besides an immigrant in Canada, but the music was his way of finding a degree of comfort; in a place that I am assuming would have otherwise been uncomfortable to him. This comfort is what Solomon refers to as an essential component of music, as it connects to a greater concept, something that is shared with the homeland. This occurred early in the narrative of the synthesis of the West Indian diaspora in the

GTA, as such while there were the beginnings of a diasporic consciousness, there is a lack of presence as it relates to the number of persons, institutions, and resources, with those present searching for parts of “home” that they can connect with such as the music.

Considering this interaction, the effect created by music in as much as it extends to producing a sense of comfort through providing the environment for the re-creation and expression of a sense of self-identity that is not a façade but rather reveals true or sincere elements of an individual from the perspective of the version of themselves that they chose to project or present. It is my supposition that part of the comfort that is supplied by music is that it allows for the recall of events and experiences that lend themselves to the construction of memory, allowing for the re-production of the emotions involved in the experience, which in effect, create a sense of comfort. This is closely associated with the evoking of nostalgia, as it allows for the connection with something familiar that gives happiness and fills the individual and the collective with positive feelings and emotions. This is the cyclical nature of the music experience because as Lutz Jäncke notes, “because emotions enhance memory processes and music evokes strong emotions, music could be involved in forming memories, either about pieces of music or about episodes and information associated with particular music” (2008, 3). The emotions and memories associated with West Indian music for members of the diaspora allows them to be transported back to the homeland (Solomon 2015), and further it develops a sense of camaraderie and allegiance to the diasporic community. The sense of home that is created lends itself to a sense of comfort, that produces a setting that is rather relaxed in terms of the vibe and energy, much like it is and has traditionally been across the West Indian territories.

On Saturday, October 16th, I met with Allen at Island Mix Restaurant and Lounge in Vaughn, adjacent to the Vaughn Mills Outlets Shopping Mall. As we were about to begin the interview, he commented that the vibe was being set for the interview by the music, and he made reference to my accent and the music combining to make him feel comfortable speaking to me. He explained that he felt like he was having a conversation with someone at a “rum shop” at home in Guyana. There are a couple of points to unpack here. The first was that he noticed the music as playing a role in creating a comfortable

experience, in effect eliciting similar emotions as it did for Denise and for my relatives. A note of clarification is that “rum shop” is a Guyanese reference to a bar, so he is referring to the setting and additionally, he makes note of my accent which he says combines with the other parameters to allow him to feel comfortable. This is how I was introduced to the concept of comfort through music, and I asked Allen his thoughts on the role of music in feeling comfortable with his identity. He explained to me that there was a time when music was not such a big deal to him, relaying that during the early 90s, when he moved to Canada, he was quite happy to just find West Indian food. He mentioned that the priority when he came to Canada was survival and he viewed West Indian food as a luxury owing to its then scarcity and his limited finances. However, as he became more established and found a routine in life, he felt that he was able to afford and engage with aspects that he previously considered to be luxuries and he started going out to the few West Indian bars available at the time, which in turn reintroduced him to music.

Allen went on to say that there has been an increase in the popularity and presence of West Indian music because a lot of musical artists from the West Indies, regardless of genres, are able to travel to Canada and perform at venues. My belief is that this surge in popularity has to do with the increased accessibility to the music through technology and from the fact that it is now more financially and logistically feasible for artists from the West Indian territories to travel as well as share their music. To add to this, there are far more festivals featuring West Indian artistes in the GTA as well as the annual Caribana festival, which will be discussed further below, with a focus on how these events lend themselves to ideas of pride and revelry. Another reason Allen pointed out that music has taken up a significant role in the West Indian identity is that there is now global appeal for the music with many regional artists collaborating with American and Canadian musicians that have established popularity, mentioning that when he was growing up there was no chance that you would hear an American or Canadian on the same song with a person from the islands. He made sure to point that West Indian music lends itself to a group dynamic in the diaspora—evoking collective memory and the associated emotions of comfort, nostalgia and a sense of home (Misztal 2010). In doing so it contributes to a consciousness, allowing the individual to share the musical experience with others that they share a collective identity of West Indianness with in a borderless, transnational

way. In the way Allen described it, music brings the “others” together— that is, the West Indian diaspora—creating a sense of diasporic consciousness, which as Hall (1990) notes, in turn organizes the sense of belonging and cultural identity. In supporting Allen’s perspective, I am reminded of Lidskog’s assertion that

music is a constitutive part of culture and hence is important for individual and social identity formation. It can serve as a space and practice that binds group members together, so that they understand themselves as belonging to each other and maybe even having a specific task or mission to accomplish. (2017, 25)

In effect this is what I gathered not only from my observations but also from my interviews. My relatives were able to understand themselves as part of a whole at home; Allen was able to do so at West Indian bars throughout the GTA; Denise was able to show that sense of belonging to the community through the music; and my experiences in on Keele Street echoed this sentiment—West Indian diaspora members are bounded together by the desire to re-create a comfortable space for the re-articulation and expression of identity. The notion of comfort in relation to West Indian music, which has been a recurring theme above, can be further explained by Chappells and Shove’s account of a feeling of contentment (2004, 3). This sense of comfort and a feeling of contentment has two sides to it—the first refers to the how the West Indian music experience seems to (re)produce a sense of identity and engagement, which in turn facilitates or brings about a feeling of comfort in the present. The second refers to how the experience mediated by music creates an atmosphere, a vibe, a social sentiment or feeling that is communal and shared among the patrons and the members of the diaspora in as much as it fosters a safe place that brings a sense of comfort to the individual. The perspectives of comfort in this sense are similar while also being distinguishable, in essence they are two sides of the same side of coin on the discussion with comfort.

Later, that same Saturday, I met up with another interlocutor at the same venue. Kelly is, a 27-year-old second generation West Indian immigrant living in Vaughn. She wanted to meet for drinks at the Island Mix in Vaughn because to her, it is the best atmosphere and that was conducive to talking about the topic of West Indian identity. That immediately echoed the sentiment of the earlier conversation I had with Allen who alluded to the music specifically as creating the best vibe, synonymous with atmosphere. Vibe is

important to the West Indian identity as it is a concept that encompasses the enjoyment and euphoria of the individual as a part of the space they occupy. When I met with my interlocutors on that day, Ontario was beginning to come out of stricter COVID-19 protocols and bars were beginning to resume operations that were more akin to regular rather than takeaway services. Since Kelly referenced atmosphere, I inquired about her relationship and indulgence with West Indian music; she explained that ever since she could remember, her parents exposed her to all varieties of West Indian music ranging from Reggae to Soca music, exposure in her perception referring to listening to it in the home which then presented as actively seeking it in social contexts.

After asking her about music and memory, a certain song came on that grabbed my attention. It was a soca song from Grenadian-born soca artist, Iwer George called *Savannah* which is a very popular fete song. George had long relocated to Trinidad for greater opportunities in the music industry, and I remembered in David Rudder's "Trini to D' Bone," he interludes by saying "Welcome, welcome one and all to the land of fete, "Trini to D' Bone". This caught my attention because the patrons at Island Mix absolutely lost it when "Savannah" started playing and as far as I could notice, almost every patron inside was singing along and clinking their drinks with each other in a party atmosphere. The song reminded me of a fete in the West Indies. The fete, according to Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, is the premiere sites for examining the cultural expression of the Caribbean identities, nothing that the fete itself takes the form of a large party music is played, with live performances, DJs and well-known singers (2008, 66). Without missing a beat, Kelly clinked glasses with me saying "cheers to West Indies to the world, them can't do it like we."

As we continued talking, Kelly told me that her relationship with music emanated from her early and repeated exposure to it, which encouraged her to visit her parents' homeland of Trinidad and Tobago to experience Carnival in 2017 and 2019. She explained that she has been going on Caribbean music boat cruises and attending parties in the park and she said that since she could remember she has been attending and participating in Ontario's Caribana festival. Allowing her to continue, she mentioned that the main reason her parents ensured her exposure and interaction with West Indian music

is so that she can be proud of her heritage and culture. When I asked her why music was the mechanism for this, she suggested it was because music is something that is universally enjoyed and to her, there is something special about the music and the way it makes a person feel. She explained by saying: “It started at home, being exposed to it continuously then I had my own interactions with it and the truth is it just makes me feel safe, makes me feel at home and comfortable to enjoy myself .” This reiterates the duality of comfort discussed earlier in this section, and ties together with Hall’s notion that in order for there to be a proper understanding of one’s cultural identity, there must be a comfort in the space created, in this case explained as making Kelly feel safe, at home (effectively nostalgic), and comfortable.

She went on to note that while some of the older genres such as Calypso and classical Chutney are slower in tempo, the newer genres are much higher tempo and lively, which she feels lends itself to a sense of enjoyment by what she terms “the younger generations.” She recalled that the last West Indian party she attended prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was called “Die By The Rum 7.” These West Indian parties are promoted events that are held at venues such as nightclubs, halls and outdoor parks. Featuring a combination of music from across the West Indian region, the party was embraced by all sectors of the crowd, regardless of age, gender, home country or heritage—with everyone feeling welcomed and enjoying themselves, at least in her opinion, based off the energy and vibes she felt. Kelly mentioned that there was “revelry,” which is a concept that I think encompasses a major role of music to the West Indian community. Revelry essentially refers to the ability to be unhindered and free or comfortable in a social environment. This connects with the second side of the duality of comfort discussed above, in that here there is a focus on the *atmosphere*—the creation of a space to vibe together—that in turn contributes to the shared sense of belonging and pleasure among the patrons.

The creation of a comfortable space means that it must be one that facilitates an expression of one’s identity in a way that feels safe, and this is something that music does well for many people. As Lidskog notes:

Music can be used as a symbolic identifier of a social group, both by the group's members but also by the surroundings (its non-members). Music not only functions to express and maintain pre-existing identities, it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones. (2017, 25)

Simply put, West Indian music allows it to be made clear that the diasporic community is occupying the space. This in turn allows for the construction and expression of their individual and collective identities. The space is one that is vital to the West Indian cultural identity among the diaspora; it gives a social context for the re-creation and re-articulation of diasporic identity and a safe haven of sorts that fills itself with a pro-West Indian ethos that makes the members of the community feel like there is freedom to express themselves as they see fit, in regard to the extent of their West Indianness. Kelly mentioned as much when she said regardless of the setting, to her it seems like West Indian music somehow always makes the ambiance better. She explained that if she goes to a West Indian bar that does not have the music blaring loudly or if there is some other sort of music playing, she will leave. To Kelly, music serves an even more important role as it allows her to connect with her family and the older generations that experienced life in the islands even though she was born in Canada. She said that when they do travel to Trinidad and Tobago, it is typically in larger groups of relatives across different generations and even though she does not have a certain type of closeness and familiarity with her relatives in Trinidad due to her living in Canada, the music serves as the great equalizer of sorts, as it provides a commonality to bond over and reinforce the relationships.

The concept of the group, meaning groups of West Indian immigrants together as well as a manner of reference to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA with whom I interacted during this research, became an important aspect in understanding the individuals and the way they navigated the white space of Canada to establish their sense of self and identity – and in this case, allowing West Indian music in the GTA to give the diasporic community a sense of comfort. Belonging to a larger shared group and contributing to the creation of a space to navigate one's identity and sense of self. This group dynamic makes it possible for individuals to feel a sense of safety in belonging, of being part of the larger whole—the diasporic community—and it allows for the expression of one's

self in the group collective. Key to this sense of belonging and identity are the cultural and social practices of liming and feteing, both of which are ubiquitous to West Indian identity.

4.3 Proud to Lime and Fete: The West Indian Existence

Being a West Indian in North America provides an interesting dilemma. In my case, if I choose to identify through my “Indianness,” I am cast as being from the subcontinent, but when I open my mouth to speak, I am cast as being from the Caribbean or the West Indies, and if I choose to be identified by my country of birth, there is a spectrum on which I am received, from hostile and recalcitrant to with opened arms. The point being, there is a hierarchical order as it refers to how North Americans accept people like me with a mixed identity; the way I choose to present and identify myself either closes or opens doors for me. However, it is not always about self-presentation; there are times that structural and societal elements are at play and an identity is ascribed.

In order to obtain a better understanding of what West Indians faced when they migrated to Canada, I looked at the history of the Caribana Festival, which is considered the largest West Indian and Caribbean cultural festival in North America and is held annually in Toronto. David Trotman in *Transforming Caribbean and Canadian Identity* offers up a history lesson on Caribana and explains that prior to its first celebration in 1967, Toronto had a discernable lack of respect for Black residents—a mode of racialization that casts a wide net by categorizing all non-whites from the West Indian territories as Black (an othering rooted in structural system that privileges whiteness). Trotman explains of the early years of Caribana and its formation that even though Canada and “Ontario in particular, was still in a sense—at least culturally—an open frontier on the verge of change. It was still possible for any incoming cohesive group with a critical mass to put a mark on the Canadian cultural space” (2005, 186). Black immigrants were given less of a status even though they would have been more skilled and educated. I build off Trotman’s claim because as he continues, he notes that the change in immigration policies lent itself to an increase in the West Indian immigrant population, beginning especially in the period from 1965 to 1967. As Trotman notes:

The older restrictions were removed and greater numbers coming as individual immigrants or in the family-sponsored category swelled the numbers of the community. Moreover, large numbers of Caribbean immigrants who sought refuge from the growing racism in England formed a stream of second-phase Caribbean migrants who brought the experience of adjustment as immigrants in a white metropole. (2005, 187)

In the lead up to the start of Caribana in 1967, this policy shift combined with increased migration to create the key social context led to the foundation of the festival. The influx of West Indians through migration, with their ability to understand and navigate the systems that existed, facilitated the first Caribana, which would become a fixture in the cultural landscape of not just Ontarians but North Americans and West Indians across the world. Trotman notes of the first Caribana:

In 1967, in recognition of the national celebrations to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, a small group of Caribbean immigrants decided to apply for permission to parade on the streets of Toronto in a mini carnival as their contribution to the celebrations. (2005, 188)

Trotman further argues that given the success of the first venture, the organizers went on to form the Caribbean Cultural Committee (CCC), which has become responsible for hosting the Caribana event annually. Allow me to reinsert the West Indies in this conversation, reminding the reader that the Caribbean plays the part of hosting the West Indian territories. The cultural identity is very similar and in most cases as noted by Trotman regarding Caribana festival, a reference to Caribbean as Anglo-Caribbean (2005, 180), which is synonymous with the British West Indies and the contemporary encapsulation of the West Indies. Summed up, during that period of time, most migrants coming to GTA were from the Anglophone (English speaking) Caribbean, and thus from the former British West Indies.

Caribana became a point of pride to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA and I suggest that it continues to be one, given the ever-increasing popularity of it. Each year I have noticed more and more artists traveling from their respective West Indian territorial homelands to perform at Caribana and the masquerade bands that are popular in Trinidad and Tobago's carnival have started to set up Caribana bands to meet the demand of the revelers. It has become a festival that takes over parts of the GTA, temporarily changing

the landscape with the West Indians and tourists coming out in large numbers, changing the sights, smells and sounds typically associated with the GTA to one that mirrors that of the West Indian territories such as carnival's mecca, Trinidad and Tobago. Focusing on the music which shares the responsibility for the reproduction of cultural identity that has been discussed, it should be appreciated as a mechanism of creation of something new in terms of a source of pride and passion. Solomon discusses this, claiming:

Music should not be interpreted to mean that music primarily works to preserve a culture, that is, that it mainly functions to stabilize and fix a cultural belonging and collective identity. When music is expressed in a new cultural context, it tends to absorb new musical elements. These transnational flows – both in the home country and in the diasporic communities – mean that music is not only spread but also makes an imprint and has an influence that destabilizes and develops cultural identity. (2015, 30-31)

The development of cultural identity is supported by the voracity of the data that supports the establishment of a sense of pride in the identity through music. Music lends itself to a proud, party-like identity that is centered on socialization and self-expression in a group dynamic.

To resume the conversation with a focus on pride, let me return to that personally unforgettable afternoon at Windies restaurant—Saturday October 23rd, 2021. I referred to two songs in the earlier section on sport (chapter one) that served as West Indies cricket anthems. These were Lord Beginner's "Victory Test Match" and David Rudder's "Rally round the West Indies" and in that section I referred to the sense of pride that is afforded to us (myself included) by identifying as West Indian through the successes of the West Indies cricket team. Similarly, there is a sense of pride attached to identifying as West Indian because of the music. Now firstly, let me focus on the notion of anthems, and as I referenced, prior to the start of the game, for the English, they played "God Save the Queen," for the West Indies, they played "Rally round the West Indies." The latter has been adopted as the anthem of the region and the team, but in actuality it is a Calypso song, as is "Victory Test Match." Allison Ramsay notes that the genre of calypso music is "known as an African-based art form that developed in the West Indies, calypso also spelt in the form of cariso, and kaiso, is a popular satirical song in rhymed verse ... commenting on any recognized figures or aspects of Caribbean social life" (2019, 171).

As much as the song is an anthem, it is a social commentary. Understanding this is important because I need the reader to understand what I have been asserting and reasserting throughout this thesis—that the West Indies is a complex enigma. The anthem of the region, a source of distinguishable pride, is in itself a social commentary, and the West Indians I have interacted with during my research as well as others I have met in various settings, are extremely proud of it, taking pride in being born out of the conditions of insularity and associated dark hours of history and being what we have become.

Of Lord Beginner's song, Ramsay discusses its role in an early installation of pride in the West Indian identity with the claim that the song,

told the story of a moment of liberation for the West Indian—a conquest in the nascent anticolonial struggle. In 1950, West Indians defeated England, at the cricket grounds at Lord's. It was the West Indies first Test victory against England on their turf. In his song, Lord Beginner portrayed the important role of the bowlers Ramadhin and Valentine and captured the reaction and joy of the West Indians who attended this victorious match. This scene at Lord's was, as Lord Beginner states, "bound to go down in history." (2019, 173)

The takeaway here is against the backdrop of history, and the victory which became immortalized in song lends itself to an unparalleled sense of pride in the first victory for the West Indies against their colonial masters in their own country. Ramsay goes on to note: "Cricket can be considered as one of main forces of regional identity. Trinidad's David Rudder's "Rally Round the West Indies" has held anthem status for West Indies cricket since it was penned ... It calls for constant support of the West Indies team in good times or bad" (2019, 174). Recall that in chapter one, I argued that cricket is part of the West Indian identity and its history in the region is a history of the region itself—the sport serves as a social mechanism of exploring the history of the region. It provides joy, pride, and a reason to lime and fete to West Indians—essentially, the meanings invested in cricket for postcolonial diasporic consciousness are carried on into musical genres and some specific songs. Some songs are about history, identity or commentaries on the colonial past, while others are about sport and the pride associated with it. Ramsay notes: "While some calypsoes celebrated the success of regional unity through cricket, other calypsonians called for accountability and more to be done for regional integration to be

truly realized” (2019, 175). These songs have been a continuing narrative on the musical landscape of the region and the West Indian diaspora plays a much larger role than simply that of consumer; rather they play the role of facilitator. West Indian music seems to be uniting the different West Indian territories to exemplify a power and pride that has been encompassed by the cricket team. Using Caribana to explain, the centennial celebration that facilitated the start of Caribana in 1967 opened a space for West Indian immigrants to do something other than remember the colonizer; instead, they were able to celebrate their own identity. This manifested a sense of Caribbean and West Indian identity in Canada. Out of this multiculturalism approach, a space was created for diasporic identity that did not need the symbolic defeat of England (as is the case with the West Indies cricket team) to produce it. Instead, it required other cultural elements, notably music, food, and a sense of the identity of the West Indies.

When I was younger, I was told that if I am proud of something, I should not keep it to myself, essentially, I should be loud and proud. I wonder if this is the unofficial West Indian motto, because whether it be in the region or in the GTA among the diaspora, the pride is manifested through a loud party-like atmosphere. The West Indian way is the feteing way and I hold any disagreement with contempt because as a product of fete culture, I know it when I see it—feteing is key in everyday life of the West Indian, and so the smaller interactions and socializing at the restaurants and other establishments is important, it would be missed if we only looked at the more obvious big festivals like Caribana. I recall when I entered Island Mix in Pickering, the music was fantastically loud and being late on a weekend it just fit that this was a West Indian bar. I began speaking with a senior employee, Randall and he explained that the music was creating the atmosphere, or a vibe and he went on to highlight that without the music blaring in the background, the ambiance would not be the same and that when patrons walk into the bar, it would, in his words, seem “dead” or lacking energy. This is important because as a West Indian, that is not allowed per Soca artist and humanitarian Machel Montano, who in 2011 sang “The Vibes Cyah Done,” in which he sings that it is nearly sacrilegious for there to be no vibe.

Randall went on further to make it clear that without the ambiance that the loud music provides, potential customers may not be comfortable and may even leave before settling down to hang out with their friends and acquaintances. He gave his opinion on this and said that through his experience he believes that West Indians need the energy and vibe to be comfortable, saying, “if it is not a lime, they want no part of it, it is un-West Indian.” I believe this to be a sense of pride and feeling of ownership of the social practice of liming. The music blaring loudly is part of this and I connect this with Welch and Fremaux, who propose that loud music serves a purpose as it relates facilitation of socialization (2017, 2). Randall highlighted that in his opinion, the element of music is often taken for granted by people from the West Indian homelands, but immigrants have a special value for it, as they grow up listening to that type of music then on moving to Canada, are bombarded by a type of music that seems alien and different. As such he believes that West Indians in the diaspora value the music exponentially more since it serves to provide the element of comfort.

Going further into that sense of pride and the active reinforcement of it through the musical experience, I return to my conversation with the bartender at Windies, remembering that she pointed out the crowd tends to become raucous, and to reiterate what I stated then—my belief is that the raucousness is a product of the alcohol-fueled revelry that is part of the liming experience. Regarding the level of the music, I asked her if they ever lower the volume of the music. She said only when sports are on and even then, it is not turned off completely but instead remains playing in the background. She went on to tell me that in the past when the volume may have been lower, patrons would ask if they were in mourning or at a wake, the assumption being that the lower volume created a somber and austere atmosphere which is unbecoming of a West Indian environment. This reintroduces the reasons for loud music as noted by Welch and Fremaux, and in this instance all four reasons which are arousal/excitation, masking of unwanted thoughts, facilitation of socialization and enhancement of personal identity (2017, 2), were at play.

Music is integral for the West Indian lime. Being a West Indian, I can say that I have never been to a lime in over thirty years where the space was not filled with the blasting

of West Indian music. The music, in all its loudness, *hits*—inducing a freeness in the individual. The genres of music in the liming and socializing experience are dependent on the group; it holds that the older generations would be more likely to listen to music from their era, with some genres being older than others, such as reggae and calypso, while the younger generations tend to be enamored with the more fast-paced offspring of these genres such as dancehall and soca. Adding further context, I refer to Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar’s discussion of the genre of soca music as it relates to the diaspora. She notes:

It can also be argued that soca, due to its link with Carnival, acts as a pressure valve by inducing a catharsis that actually allows people to survive oppression and stress. Soca can be a healing force, especially for people who face daily racism, hardship and a sense of exclusion and alienation from the Canadian mainstream. (2008, 75)

Unpacking this, I want to point out first that the catharsis is achieved quite differently in the West Indian territories, as she explains that soca is a means of cultural resistance and it provides the avenue for cathartic expression through what I qualify as liming but she qualifies as freeing up, which she explains further, noting: “this ‘freeing up’ is an important re-claiming of the Caribbean body, particularly the racialized body, from a long history of abuse, subjugation and exoticization” (2008, p. 74). What I hope to properly relate to you is that West Indian music, through the informal communal experiences of liming, freeing up, and feting allows for an expression of self and one’s identity and allows a person to show off their West Indianness. This experience, in which music is central, is what Hernandez-Ramdwar calls a cathartic experience.

Returning to the most celebrated aspect of West Indian culture in North America, the Caribana festival, I must acknowledge that while Caribana does provide the spectacle of all things West Indian and Caribbean, it is not the only avenue where this is accomplished through music. Earlier on I referred to my experience at Tropical Nights and how I made a point of returning when there was a musical performance. As it happens, this is quite a common occurrence and not just at Tropical Nights and the other establishments I visited, but across the West Indian establishments in the GTA. The commonality of these performances and the fetes and parties associated is part of the West Indian experience

being recreated in the GTA-based diaspora. Hernandez-Ramdwar comments on the West Indian's desire to lime and fete:

No matter what one's racial or ethnic origin, gender or sexuality, colour or class, place of birth, body size or age, everybody "gettin on in de fete." For the most part, once a really good fete reaches a certain level of energy, "nobody studyin nuthin." (2008, 71)

Across several conversations with West Indians in the GTA, I was able to grasp that every week regardless of the season and weather, there are live music performances and parties at establishments and at venues across the area with one rule governing them all, it must be a West Indian party. As noted, for the West Indian, feteing is a priority—it is an expression of cultural identity that allows for an unencumbered celebration and embracing of "otherness."

The contemporary Caribana celebrations are a facilitator of the West Indian musical experience as it relates to the diaspora. Unfortunately, it did not form part of my research as it was cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Trotman refers to Caribana as the Toronto Carnival, and he echoed sentiments I have expressed and that has been reasserted in the work of Hernandez-Ramdwar and others, which is, "Carnival as a bacchanalian event assumes a liberal attitude towards drinking as many participants fuel their energies with the copious use of alcohol in order to facilitate the liberation of their spirits" (2006, p. 190). In short, Caribana is heavily reliant on being a lime or fete to represent the vibe and energy needed.

Caribana as a street parade with the weeks of festivities and events are meant to mimic Carnival in the different West Indian territories, with my personal experience being it most closely attempts to mimic the Trinidadian carnival, which is world acclaimed. The entire festival, which is considered to be a music festival, is reflective of that volatile West Indian identity and Trotman quantifies this by stating that the feteing and partying was something that the GTA policing departments were not ready for. He notes of the ensuing oppositions:

This conflictual tug-of-war between the imported cultural tradition and the realities of the host society has given occasion for harsh exchanges between the

authorities and the community and self-reflection on, among other things, the meaning of multiculturalism and diversity as well as Caribbean identity and the community's sense of its position in Canadian society. (2005, 191)

This suggests that the West Indian diaspora community's position maintains a focus on music—it extends and facilitates a sense of pride and expression among the West Indian diaspora. Of the value of Caribana to the new generations of West Indians in the GTA, Trotman attests that he believes they face a struggle to find a sense of belonging and purpose in the Canadian landscape and Caribana provides an escape, albeit temporarily, from this. If the focus was solely on Caribana, a significant appreciation of the West Indian identity present in the GTA would be ignored. My thesis shows that there are other elements that are as important to the diasporic consciousness of the West Indian immigrants in the GTA. I spread the focus on different elements and the experiences had by the West Indian diasporic community in relation to these elements through different avenues and establishments. Trotman claims:

Their networks and alliances go beyond the Caribbean and, despite the racist pressures they face, in many little ways they are struggling to transcend the stultifying pressures of race. They seek inclusion in the Caribana potpourri as embracingly as they are assured that hockey is theirs. They move between rap, hip-hop, reggae, and calypso as effortlessly as they have embraced the Jamaican patois as their lingua franca in defiance of those who have sought to demonize Jamaican youth and by extension all of them. (2005, 193)

Unpacking this requires bluntness. The Canadian landscape presents its challenges, as alluded to by many. What Caribana has done is what music has done as a whole, which is it has taken the shared social commentaries and histories of the region and created an artform of genres that lends itself to the creation of comfort and pride.

In the end, then, West Indian music serves multiple roles, but when it comes down to it, the music allows the West Indian diasporic community in the GTA to be able to come together and reinforce the sense of community. There are different ways that music helps mediate that sense of community across scales, social interactions, and contexts. In the process individuals are able to express themselves and there is the rearticulation, re-creation, and unhindered display of one's identity and sense of self. West Indian music gives the diasporic community a way to connect with the homeland that is stress-free,

that is colored in liming, feteing and partying, in so doing it is ensuring that there is a great degree of nostalgia, comfort and pride in being a West Indian in the GTA.

5 Conclusion

In an unusually emotionally charged encounter during one of my visits to Caribbean Cove, a friend of the owner, Raja, whom I met several times, said he wanted to contribute a comment to my thesis that he hopes makes it into the final draft and here it is in all its profane poignancy:

Padna, let me tell you something plain as fuck, you see the whites here, they greedy and thirsty just like them forefathers. We ones taught us pride and to work hard, theirs teach them to take what other people work hard for. So when I tell you that I will push to make we people better and be proud of that rather than give the thieves them anything, there is a reason why. Boy Baju, find out the truth what we faced when we first got here.

I acknowledge that this may not be the most palatable presentation of the point, but I need to draw the reader's attention to the topic at hand, which is that the concept of West Indian pride is because of the historical and continuing practices that marginalize a community because they are seen as being 'other.' The pride of the West Indian is because they are the "other" and as this conversation will show, the music of the region provides a support and means of expression and reassertion of that pride. Raja's crass presentation of thought reminded me of Hall's deconstruction of those that "other" West Indians, in which he acknowledges that the "othering" of the West Indian is yet another attempt to subjugate them as something lesser as it relates to power and knowledge. Hall noted:

Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. But this kind of knowledge is internal, not external. It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm. (1994, 225-226)

When considering cultural identity especially for the West Indians, the oneness that is created must be appreciated. Throughout the thesis I have relied heavily on the scholarly work of West Indians and in particular Stuart Hall. Combining the ideas of Raja and Hall, the message I discerned was that there is power in owning one's identity as 'the other', in so much as it gives an identity that is held onto strongly. Hall defines cultural identity as:

One, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This ‘oneness’, underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbean-ness’, of the black experience. It is the identity which a Caribbean or Black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation. (1994: 223)

It is my contention through the data presented in this thesis that there is a strong sense of “oneness” and identity among the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. This has been accomplished through both active and passive processes that have served to allow for members of the community to re-create, re-construct, and re-articulate a sense of identity. The West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area is one that epitomizes Hall’s concept of identity as something that is fluid and evolving. The community that the diaspora has created and fostered is one that continues to be reimaged and rearticulated so that it continues to serve its members in being a safe space that provides a sense of belonging as it relates to comfort and a sense of self.

The history of the GTA is important to consider in this study. The GTA has been host to many immigrants since the second world war and through Canada’s changing immigration policies, it has remained a popular destination for immigrants. For there to be the creation of identity, there must be something fixed, a ground provided to “organize our identities and our sense of belongingness” (S. Hall 2001, 7). The GTA, with over 2.5 million immigrants or more starkly, over 47% of its population being immigrants, has over 405,000 persons from the West Indies, so we can say that there is a certain and definite structure or grounding that the GTA supplies to West Indian diaspora.

The West Indian diaspora in the GTA consist of a diverse group of persons from many territories but what they all are bounded together by is the shared history and this is something that has continued to shape them and create a group consciousness. This is again, as I mentioned in the introduction, a contemporary concept of the West Indies that has an assumed understanding of a complicated and meandering history that has evolved into a current entity that is projecting itself out of a tainted history as a colonial

afterthought – from the failure of the WIF to the evolving unit of power of valiance as CARICOM. There is a resurgence in pride as it refers to identifying as West Indian and what this research has shown is that in relation to the groups that were studying and interacted with, there appears to be a pride that dispenses with categorization themes such as age, gender, country of origin and so on, essentially reinforcing the point that there is a greater degree of pride in being part of the collective whole of the West Indian identity.

My research at the establishments made me realize just how important these brick-and-mortar places truly are to the diasporic community. They provide places that attempt to re-create or at least allow the customers and visitors to feel like they are in the West Indies. There is the attempt to have something that is purely West Indian, allowing the West Indian diaspora to re-create the feeling, atmosphere and vibe with which they are familiar. How this is done in my opinion is that the members of the diaspora check their “Canadianness” at the door prior to entering. What I mean by this is that all the expectations and social expectations of being a Canadian or living in the GTA are suspended, and there is an emphasis placed on embracing the West Indianness of the space. Hall notes of identity that it is situated, fluid and contested. He contends that identity is subject to change and is not stationary - as society evolves so does the identity of the individuals. Identity he notes, must be organized through the bonds shared by the members of the community and in this case, the diaspora (1994, 222). The component of identity being situated is worthy of appreciation when considering the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. Unlike other diasporic communities in the GTA, such as the Italian or Chinese communities, there is no ethnic enclave or designated area (no ‘little West Indies’. Instead, to appreciate the identity of the community I have looked at it through three dimensions of food, sport and music. However, to examine these dimensions I needed to appreciate something that I must now extend to you, the reader, and that is the role of the establishments as the places in which the sense of West Indian identity in the GTA is situated. The establishments do not refer only to the ones I visited but to the hundreds other that exist and include restaurants, bars, groceries, mini marts, paraphernalia stores, community centers and places of worship – constituting a social infrastructure for the West Indian diaspora in the GTA.

Extending further, let me address the brevity of the ensuing conversation by drawing your attention to the recent work of Caroline Shenaz Hosein in *Racialized People, Women, and Social Enterprises: Politicized Economic Solidarity in Toronto*. She categorically states that “Canada’s social economy has been important to the lives of racialized minorities, and the stories about it need to be diversified” (2021, 23). Going further, while there does exist data of sorts regarding minorities, it does not represent the roughly 50% of Toronto population that is minority. As such, I acknowledge that there is a cursory and reflective nature to my conversation on the establishments.

The role of the establishment to the West Indian diaspora in the GTA in my opinion is as a place of facilitation for the construction, rearticulation, re-creation, and expression of one’s sense of self and identity. The establishments play a complex role as facilitators of the West Indian experience and elements of the cultural identity, but beyond that they are part of the community itself —“Diaspora businesses exist when individuals in the diaspora create them” (Harima and Vemuri 2015, 33). As is the case in the West Indian diaspora in the GTA. The diaspora does not exist as an ethnic enclave where there is a geographically defined attempt of reincarnating the country of origin, but rather the literature as previously noted highlights that West Indian immigrants have set up home dispersed in the suburban areas surrounding the city of Toronto. As a result of this, there is a wide range of West Indian establishments scattered across the majority of the GTA. This is simply because despite their location, there is a need for these diasporic businesses wherever there are members of the West Indian diaspora with this need being one spurred on by the value placed on having a safe place for the expression of oneself.

The establishments I visited have an unenviable job in that they attempt to recreate the notion of the West Indies, but what we must all appreciate is that the West Indian identity is an amalgam of different individual identities that lend itself to the creation of something larger and as such persons from some territories are not genuinely exposed to the wider cultural identity of the region. Beyond this, I consider that the proprietors have to attempt to create something that is marketable and appealing because at the end of the day there is the economic component to these establishments. Many of these establishments are not subsidized or assisted by the government and even though they

serve an important social role, they must remain sustainably profitable; as private enterprises, they must navigate between their responsibility to the community and economic stability. I visited the establishments I did because of their value to the community. Think about the position the owner of the restaurant in Keel Street has taken up in the West Indian community, then think about Caribbean Heat and Island Mix, which have been able to open up multiple locations as they continue to successfully create a product and experience that connects with the diaspora., And then there is the historical entrenchment of Calypso Hut since 1989 and the social role of sport for the Windies Restaurant. What I am trying to highlight is that there is a need for these establishments, with the nuanced need of each one being slightly different but belonging to the larger need as an institution of socialization for the West Indian diaspora in the GTA as they are an interesting mix of private and public institutions—privately owned and for profit, but spaces where the members of the West Indian diaspora comes to socialize and serve the public interest as harbors of West Indian cultural identity and consciousness.

What the establishments I visited have attempted to do is create a sampler or an exhibition of highlights of the West Indies in terms of the menu and the environment, allowing a focus on West Indianness. The menus are filled with national and popular dishes from the different West Indian territories while the ambiance and decorations or aesthetics in most of the establishments is gear towards the bright lights and airy feel that is associated with bars and lounges in the West Indies. The thing that ties these experiences together is the music that is played, as previously stated, blaringly loud to recreate an experience that is ubiquitous with the West Indian vibe and energy. These things reproduce an experience for the patron that is facilitating to them being able to express themselves. I noticed people dropping off their Canadian-accent and hearing a variety of West Indian dialects intersect each other in these establishments, that became filled with profanity, vulgarity and laughter as the limes ensued. Further to this I must reiterate that these establishments have become akin to community pillars with the community here being the West Indian diasporic community. There is no doubt in my mind that the fruitfulness and relative comfort of the West Indian diaspora, which I phrase as a result of the number of the population and their proclivity to continue to

expand and grow, is directly influenced by the establishments creating the proxy of institutions that allow exposure and development of the diaspora's individual and collective West Indianness.

Undoubtedly, there is a lot that goes into the creation of a space for a community such as the West Indian diaspora, but it must be appreciated that there has been a concerted effort by the establishments to create environments that pay homage through mimicry—attempting to re-create as close to a true version of a West Indian experience as possible. This is especially important when the value of the lime and fete to the diasporic community as it pertains to the re-creation of something that is akin to a homeland. To be clear, “home” is something worthy of consideration by itself in much greater detail and the notion changes per the interlocutor and the experiences one has, but here the homeland is the country of origin or in this case, the West Indies as a larger whole rather than the individual territories.

These limes and fetes are social gatherings that facilitate a sense of group consciousness and a sense of belonging. Based on the data gathered, I would claim that they positively mediate an experience that lends itself to a sense of identity as a West Indian in the diaspora. When members of the diaspora can identify *as part of* the diaspora, it allows them to choose and highlight the aspects of their respective agency that gives them a degree of comfort and belonging. It allows them to view and present themselves in a way that is as true a representation of themselves, and therefore I emphasize the ‘*re*’ when connected with the fluidity of identity as proposed by Hall. What I mean is that the conditions of society fluctuate and identifying as West Indian and belonging to the diasporic community offers a safe space and allows people to navigate the different dimensions of their identity, to *re*-create, *re*-construct and *re*-imagine their sense of self and express it in a safe, reinforcing and supportive environment.

As the data showed, interlocutors choose to express themselves in a variety of ways when it comes to place of origin and a sense of belonging, but being part of the West Indian diaspora dissolves differences and gives the person the choice of how they wish to be viewed and represented. The persons that were part of this study took a great degree of

pride in being seen as West Indian and the journey that they have been a part of in terms of the relative success of the community in the GTA. The important role of the establishments cannot be understated, as they facilitate this expression of identity. Across the experience I was impressed with the establishments as they set the tone for a sense of welcoming and inclusiveness for all West Indians regardless of territory of origin. What this reflects as is the variety in music, food and other dimension that lends itself to the inherent notion of West Indianness.

In moving through this research, I engaged with many theories and scholars but had specific focus on the notion of identity as presented by the West Indian scholar, Stuart Hall. There was a deliberate attempt throughout the thesis to focus on the academic work of West Indian scholars—something I considered to be fundamental to the overall validity of the study. The argument made and supported throughout this thesis is that the elements of music, sport, and food serve to help members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA create a sense of self; constructing and expressing an identity that highlights their West Indianness.

Through the different chapters, I have provided citations of academic scholars from various field to contextualize and support the data gathered from my research. From this I was able to draw conclusions about the role of the individual, the engagement and experience of the elements (music, food, and sport), as well as offer insight into the dynamic that is created and facilitated by the establishments across the GTA. The various cultural elements lend themselves to a sense of diasporic consciousness that is predicated on emotions—comfort, nostalgia, and pride—that are celebrated and experienced through the unparalleled West Indian socializing events known as liming and feteing.

Doing research in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging, to say the least. In the first instance, it seemed like there would be no possibility of in-person research but thankfully just as I was about to start my research, the protocols began to change. Even then, there was still a bit of a taboo associated with hanging out and gathering in larger groups, which I think extended to West Indian establishments. Given that I do not have a reference point for the vibe, energy, and crowd size prior to the pandemic (except from

personal experience or the secondary literature), I do not know the extent of it, but I know that there was one from my interactions with proprietors and patrons. I faced a few limitations and challenges throughout this research, with the most notable one being that during the time of research the main West Indian cultural event, Caribana, had been cancelled. Adding to this, there were no parties, fetes or large events as there had been significant provincial restrictions on large gatherings and recreational events.

Nevertheless, this allowed me to focus on how people *talked about* these experiences and how they *felt about* them, even if they were not always able to attend them or host them. It provided me with insight that I may not have had the opportunity to gain if the festivals and events were being held. What I learnt as well is that doing research during the winter months in Canada is not exactly a good idea—especially when dealing with West Indians, who are a sun loving people accustomed to temperatures exceeding thirty degrees Celsius, 365 days of the year. These were some things that were beyond my control, and I think if circumstances were different, I would be able to gather a greater breadth of data. In the future I think this topic warrants further investigation with specific interest placed on the engagement of the West Indian diaspora with Caribana and the establishments – with consideration on the economics and monetization of the cultural elements of identity.

In summation, the data suggests that members of the West Indian diaspora in the GTA actively engage with the cultural identity elements such as sport, food, and music as a means of creating a diasporic consciousness and a shared “oneness.” The shared component is predicated on the members of the community being viewed as “others”, something that brings them together, a sharedness that extends to a shared history and experience. This allows an organization or structure to the diasporic consciousness that facilitates a comfortable and safe space for the expression of a sense of self and identity by members of the community. This is facilitated by the establishments—brick and mortar spaces that create transnational, borderless shared West Indian spaces for the members of the diaspora to express themselves. In so doing, identity is re-articulated and re-constructed continuously, because cultural identity is not stagnant—it is everchanging and evolving. The sense of West Indian identity among the diaspora is being

continuously reshaped, and this allows for engagement with the elements of the identity across the spectrum, with expressions of West Indianness through the community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: REB APPROVAL



Date: 6 October 2021

To: Professor Greg Beckett

Project ID: 119356

Study Title: Assumed identities and the construction of self among the West Indian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

Short Title: West Indian Diaspora - construction of self and identity

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 05/Nov/2021

Date Approval Issued: 05/Oct/2021 19:31

REB Approval Expiry Date: 06/Oct/2022

Dear Professor Greg Beckett

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Interview Guide	Interview Guide	21/Jul/2021	1
Email Script REB	Recruitment Materials	21/Jul/2021	1
Verbal Consent Script	Verbal Consent/Assent	21/Jul/2021	1
Participant Observation Guide_BM	Participant Observation Guide	17/Sep/2021	1
Verbal Script for in person recruitment_BM - Clean copy	Oral Script	17/Sep/2021	2
Letter of Information and consent_BM - Clean Copy	Verbal Consent/Assent	05/Oct/2021	3

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Curriculum Vitae

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Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Adelphi University
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2012-2015 B.A. (*magna cum laude*), Honors College.

The University of Western Ontario
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Honours and Awards: Presidential Scholarship – Academic Excellence
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Related Work Experience

Teaching Assistant
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Indian Caribbean Museum of Trinidad and Tobago
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Maharaj, Badarinarayan A. (2011). *Coragyps atratus* (American Black Vulture or Corbeau). The Online Guide to the Animals of Trinidad and Tobago, [University of West Indies - The Online Guide to Animals of Trinidad and Tobago](#).