

Frank Birbalsingh, ed. *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*. Toronto: TSAR, 1989. pp. 264. \$20.00.

As a survey, study, and interpretation of the Indo-Caribbean experience, *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* is likely to remain an important resource book for both students and scholars. For most readers outside the Caribbean, indentureship and displacement are probably terms that encapsulate in spatial and temporal ways the diaspora that drew approximately a million people from India to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century. The collection of essays put together by Frank Birbalsingh is a salutary reminder of the complexity of the displacement, the contribution of the Indians to the countries they helped to shape, and the role they played and continue to play in the political and social fabric of the nations that make up the Caribbean. In more specific terms, Birbalsingh points out that "the views of the contributors of different ethnic and political backgrounds collectively bring out the complexity of factors or race, colour, and class, a demonic trinity that bedevils every serious discussion of Caribbean subjects" (9).

What is impressive about the collection of essays (originally presented as papers at York University as part of the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference in 1988) is the range of subjects they cover: history, culture, politics, literature, religion, gender, and even cricket. The essays and panel discussions show balance, insight, and a depth of understanding without a desire to establish homogeneity. They do not romanticize but they do celebrate the Indian contribution to the Caribbean. No attempt is made to circumvent controversial issues, and opinions are given with honesty and conviction. Cheddi Jagan's essay, for instance, provides a wealth of information about the troubled politics of Guyana without transforming the essay into shrill propagandist prose. If Jagan's essay draws attention to the manner in which politicians exploited race to sway nationalist sentiment, Rishee Thakur's essay entitled "East Indians in Caribbean Historiography" takes a different but complementary attitude by historicizing the conflict and demonstrating the construction of a history that made possible such divisions. He rightly points out that "race and culture simply served as mechanisms through which imperial policies were translated" (210).

The title of the book has been chosen with care. If the notion of "indenture" invokes a specific East Indian experience as against the African, the term "exile" establishes the common ground of displacement and marginalization. The dual focus, in the final analysis, leads to a holistic and optimistic viewpoint about the Caribbean. George Laming's essay, for instance, achieves precisely this balance. Having asserted that "if labour is the foundation of all culture, then the Indian in Trinidad was part of the first floor on which the house was built" (47), he adds that the commonality of the experience of exile must serve as a

unifying factor in the Caribbean. Sam Selvon expresses a similar sentiment when he remarks that he is often assumed to be black and that he feels good about it "because that is what I mean when I say I'm trying to supersede racial or insular barriers, and to conceive of the whole Caribbean area as one unit" (142).

The essays on literature form a small but significant portion of the book. They deal with a wide range of authors, including Sonny Ladoo, H.G. DeLisser, Ian McDonald, Michael Anthony, Earl Lovelace, and Wilson Harris. Among the essays written by writers, those by Arnold Itwaru and Cyril Dabydeen are of particular interest, with both focussing on the politics of exile. Having asserted that emigration to Canada has intensified the sense "of silent and unrelenting homelessness," Itwaru concludes: "If we do not deal with this dilemma, . . . we remain no more than antic men . . . who embrace, dress themselves in, configure themselves and are configured by, the means of their own destruction—and are, sadly, proud of it" (206).

To attempt a synopsis of all the articles would make this review inordinately long. Suffice it to mention that the book, in its depth and scope, in the significant information it provides, and in its awareness of the complexity of the *crossing of the Kala Pani*, is probably the first of its kind and that Frank Birbalsingh has done an excellent job of editing and introducing a timely and seminal collection of essays on the Indo-Caribbean experience.

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Ian McDonald and Stewart Brown, eds. *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1992. pp. xix, 236. US \$10.95. pb.

Anthologies of Caribbean writings often take suggestive titles such as *News for Babylon* or *A Shapely Fire* or *Creation Fire*. In that context, the title of this recent collection, *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*, carries no overt or covert significance although the collection itself is quite impressive. Most of the collections with catchy or suggestive titles have one thing in common: their desire for one kind of exclusivity. Thus, Ramabai Espinet's *Creation Fire* (1990), though pan-Caribbean, contains only women's writing; John Berry's *News for Babylon* (1984) puts together works of West Indian poets living in Britain in the same way Cyril Dabydeen's *A Shapely Fire* (1988) projects the works of the West Indian diaspora in Canada. Ian McDonald and Stewart Brown, the editors of *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*, are more than usually aware of "the anthologist's power . . . to exclude" (xvii) and they have exercised that power pretty much sparingly. This one, too, is intended as a pan-Caribbean volume and contains works by poets living in the Caribbean as well as abroad. The poetry here, however, is prominently contemporary. Usually, the most recent works of established poets have been selected, and even more typically, it has included many emerging and young poets. In the editors' words, "it is the range and variety [of