ABSTRACT

This article explores how the fiction of Guyanese-born author Janice Lowe Shinebourne reveals the tension of articulating Chineseness as a cultural identity in a diasporic context. In particular, despite being “racially marked” as Chinese, Shinebourne's fiction resists essentialized concepts of Chineseness in favor of a more flexible understanding of identity that is profoundly aware of being shaped by the specifics of her Caribbean experience and of a more general history of the Chinese in the region. Ultimately, however, Shinebourne cannot simply ignore Chineseness; rather it is an identity that must be continually interrogated and negotiated. As such, Shinebourne's work affirms the understanding of diasporic Chinese cultural identities as being constructed within the tension of the possibilities opened up by localized experience and the limitations imposed by the continued salience of “race.”