

"The Quiltings of Human Flesh"
-
**Constructions of Racial Hybridity in
Contemporary African-Canadian
Literature**



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Für Peter, mit Liebe

Exotic

*After first blackening me up
they dragged me through the mud
wanting ultimately to make me black
absolutely uncalled-for
to look on the dark side.*

Exotik

*nachdem sie mich erst anschwärzten
zogen sie mich durch den kakao
um mir schließlich weiß machen zu wollen
es sei vollkommen unangebracht
schwarz zu sehen.*

(May Opitz)¹

¹ Opitz, May. "Exotic" *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women speak out*. ed. May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, Dagmar Schultz. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. p. 142-143.

'RACE' MATTERS': A PERSONAL NOTE ON BELONGING

We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', positioned.

(Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora")²

Testifying ...

I am white. A woman. Heterosexual. A single mother. A teacher. Working-class background. University-educated. Burdened with the historical legacy of two world wars. Bearing the memory of an (almost) carefree childhood and youth in East Germany. Struggling with the post-reunification effects on two formerly separated Germanies. Victimized? At times, maybe ... Privileged? Undeniably. Privileged by skin color. Privileged by language. Privileged by education. Privileged by a position within the Western academia. Influenced, maybe biased, by western (academic) standards. Racist? Of course.

It is painful to acknowledge one's own racism. Yet it is true. I argue that we all have been racialized in one way or the other. Having grown up in a supposedly 'raceless' bubble within the borders of East Germany, it was easy for a child like me to develop a healthy self-esteem, even as a woman. It was effortless to live with the whiteness of my skin in East Germany. Racism was a problem that would occur elsewhere. After all, I was taught to respect other people at home and I was rejoicing in international encounters at East Germany's socialist schools along with other students while we were proudly declaring our will to dedicate our lives to the advancement of peace and harmony in the world. How could anyone with such an all-embracing socialization be racist? And yet, I repeat: We do have a racist legacy that must be acknowledged. We carry with us images that have been influenced by racialized ideas. Imperceptibly, negative representations of blackness or other

² Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London et al: Arnold, 1996. pp. 110-121. p. 110

visible or constructed differences have conquered our subconscious, branched out and rooted firmly – only to be uprooted again with much effort.

In our childhoods, we harvested racialized stereotypes because back then they helped us to draw the dividing line between good and evil and which assisted us in the process of positioning ourselves somewhere along this line. Did we not play "Cowboy vs. Indian", always eager to rescue the poor and helpless white farmer's wife from the hands of brutish wild Indians? Did we not laugh into the face of Wilhelm Busch's poor "Moor"³, which a cute monkey played harmless tricks on? It was only fun, was it not? Were we not afraid of the "Black Man" who would come and steal innocent children in the darkness? Was it not true that Africans were cannibals? Was it not about time we introduced them to civilization in order to rescue them from the wilderness? Would we not join in with the children's song of the "Ten little Negroes", who would engage in a macabre competition of dying in the funniest ways? Did we not wonder about and envy the cocoa skin color of the girl whose fuzzy hair would attract the hands of adults almost naturally? Why was it the kid would most likely sit in the back of the classroom? And why did she speak excellent German without the trace of an accent? Well, it sure was a blessing the child was allowed to grow up in Germany, not in the hazardous jungle of Africa, was it not?

Like many German children and young adults I was ignorant and misguided. Ignorant of the versatile and productive 500-year-old history of Afro-Germans. Misguided by children's books that left us with the imprinted image of the Indian warrior riding across the prairie with feathers in his hair, wielding the bloody hatchet in his hands. Misguided by history books which deliberately excluded the politics of colonization and which celebrated

³ Cf. Busch, Wilhelm. "Fips der Affe." *Wilhelm Busch: Die schönsten Geschichten für jung und alt*. Rastatt: Moewig Verlagsunion, 1991. pp. 49-80. For further details on everyday racism in Germany cf. Opitz, May. "Everyday Racism in Books for children and Youths." *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women speak out*. ed. May Opitz, Katharina Ogunttoy, Dagmar Schultz. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, pp. 127-144; Cf. also Becker, Jörg. *Alltäglicher Rassismus: Afro-amerikanische Rassenkonflikte im Kinder- und Jugendbuch der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1977.

Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of the Americas. Misguided by geography books that were more reluctant than willing to give details on Africa's manifold cultural, technological and social achievements but focused on the swollen bellies of starving children instead.

In the formation of a personal identity human beings have to carve out a space for themselves and these images and representations of the Other instinctively guide their decisions. In order to be accepted as a member of a community, we have to express our loyalties unmistakably. We were striving for the center, since that was where we wanted to be. This process implicated the power of excluding others from our personal realm of living. We were creating our own periphery. In an environment that appeared to be almost exclusively homogenous in terms of skin color, the process of racialization is often barely noticeable to those in the center. Those branded with phenotypical difference; however, remain invisible at the margins and visible among the blind.

I accept as true that each person living within the western world has been racialized in one way or another and it is therefore impossible to believe anyone could free himself from internalizing racial prejudice. Racism is flickering in all of us. Surely and fortunately, we are able to re-examine what we believed to be reality. Certainly, it is possible to replace old images with new, positive representations. Without doubt, even societies are subject to change: Racialized ideas upheld as true for long have publicly been called into question, school books have been revised to be more inclusive of alternative, long repressed perspectives. Children songs have veered into oblivion. Those muted in the past have given voice to their experiences, claimed the right to make their stories known. Yet racism continues to have an impact on the everyday lives of people, it continues to assign power to some while suppressing others. 'Race' still matters.

The decision to take on the project of examining constructions of identity in African-Canadian literature mainly evolved from one single book: The blurb of Suzette Mayr's second novel *The Widows* (1998) promised a humorous but simultaneously thought-provoking journey into Germany's past and Canada's present, and I was eager to read it. It had not been the first book that fascinated, scared and provoked me at the same time, which challenged my own 'racial' and gendered identity, and triggered important moments of self-realization. Yet *The Widows* certainly drew my attention to the significance of 'race' within the social and cultural frameworks of both Canada and Germany. I realized that it was much more comfortable and less troubling to examine the literature of a culture you do not feel emotionally attached to, but it was impossible to examine questions of German-Canadian identity in the light of 'race' and racialization without addressing the very same concerns in German culture and history. The realization of one's own racialization might be harsh and unpleasant, but it is essential.

Subsequently, I wrote my master thesis on Mayr's *The Widows*, pondering upon questions of personal identity formation within the German-Canadian community. It was eye opening to me that Mayr's work was not listed under German-Canadian writing but rather under headings like Caribbean-Canadian literatures or Black Canadian women's literature. Apparently, 'race'-matters. Now, several years later, this has changed and some scholars have acknowledged Mayr's German background as well.⁴

⁴ Cf. for example Wolf, Doris. "A Past Which Refuses to Become History: Nazism, Niagara Falls, and a New National Identity in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Etudes en Littérature Canadienne*. 27:1 (2002): 135-56; Cf. also Wolf, Doris. "Dividing and Reuniting Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters: The Black Motherline, Vergangenheitsbewältigung Studies, and the Road Genre in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*." *Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture*. eds. Antor, Heinz et al. Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter, 2003. pp. 271-94; Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "Multikulturalität als Stärke der zeitgenössischen kanadischen Literatur." *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*. eds. Konrad Groß, Wolfgang Klooss and Reingard Nischik. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2005. pp. 310-336; Bast, Heike. "African-Canadian Literature and the (Post-)National Imaginary: Tracing a Black Literary Tradition in Canada." *Canada in Grainau/Le Canada à Grainau: A Multidisciplinary Survey of Canadian Studies after 30 Years*. eds. Klaus-Dieter Ertler and Hartmut Lutz. Frankfurt et al:

Picking up a Ph.D. project, my focus shifted even more towards issues of 'race' and its interrelatedness with categories like gender, sexuality or class. When I became aware of Lawrence Hill's novel *Any Known Blood* (1998), my keen interest in constructions of racially hyphenated identities was raised. Spending several months in Canada thanks to a scholarship of the Association for Canadian Studies (GKS), I started roaming the bookshelves of university libraries and alternative bookstores to find more examples of African-Canadian literature in which the authors would approach this thematic realm by either creating fictional characters that lived out meridian/liminal/borderlands identities or by reflecting on their own, autobiographical experiences. After about a year of meticulous and at times frustrating research my textual corpus had grown substantially and certainly not all of the novelists, dramatist and poets I encountered could be given the space they ought to have in this Ph.D. project.

However, the significance of 'race' for the analysis of their texts would also cause great discomfort in me. I felt as if I was venturing into forbidden territory, approaching a highly sensitive and controversial topic as an outsider, yet being aware of the privilege of whiteness and my Westernized academic point of view. Was it not presumptuous or even patronizing to approach this field of research? In the manifold conversations with Canadian authors of mixed-race my dilemma became more severe and I experienced feelings ranging from insecurity to anxiety and shame, although none of the writers had ever given me any reasons to justify these feelings in me. Quite the opposite was true: all of them have been incredibly supportive, encouraged me in proceeding with this project and were eager to talk about their experiences since the subject of mixed-race identities had scarcely been unearthed before within Canada's literary landscape, the exception being Métis literature and culture. Some of the writers I met in the course of this project have even become

Peter Lang, 2009. pp. 257-281; Bast, Heike. "Borderlands in Us – Exploring Female 'Mulatto' Figures in Contemporary Canadian Fiction." *Focus On Canada: European Perspectives/Regard Vers Le Canada: Perspectives Européennes*. ed. Elke Nowak. Brno, Czech Republic: European Network for Canadian Studies and Masaryk University Press, 2003. 99-124.

dear friends of mine who have enriched my personal life beyond belief and I am very grateful for their friendships.

Balancing the Personal and the Political ...

Writing about 'race' is always political. But it should also be personal. To me it is political because I feel the need to speak up against racism. To me it is personal because I have to recognize my own whiteness as a racialized category. I am also aware of the fact that my analysis has limits – historical, temporal, spatial, even personal ones. Firstly, the corpus of texts enclosed in this study is confined to rather recent publications of African-Canadian authors, mostly covering releases of the 1990s and ending with the publication of Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man* in 2003. Without doubts, expressions of 'racially hybrid' identities reach back to the beginnings of writing in Canada. Only a few glimpses may be offered here by looking at novelists, poets and dramatists of the 1970s and 1980s like Truman Green or Arthur Nortje, Maxine Tynes or Walter Borden for a brief, yet significant, literary contextualization. Other writers and artists are still awaiting their discovery in the infinite depth of communal archives by meticulous and ambitious researchers of African-Canadian literature and culture, like for example Karina Vernon or Wayne Compton.

Even if less than a fraction of the writings about the 'racial' hyphen and its implications can be examined within this project for reasons of space and time, it is mistaken to envision representations of mixed-race identities as remarkable, singular inventions in the age of globalization. Rather they must be acknowledged as deeply grounded in all discourses about the Other. They imply and demand a historicization in (Canadian) history (see chapter 3) and a theorizing of 'race' – including its correlation to categories like gender or class – and the process of racialization as well as a contextualizing of some of the other

'isms' which next to racism continue to have an impact on the lived realities of 'racially' hyphenated individuals in Canada (see chapter 2).

Another difficulty was imposed by the rapid growth of African-Canadian literary production – and its inherent versatility. In order to ease my dilemma and to conciliate the divergent and often contradictory voices of African-Canadian writers, it was helpful for me to equate my analyses with a quilt in the process of making. Certain fragments of this fabric will and must be torn apart or substituted, others will be added, and some will overlap to form a new pattern. It represents a temporary state of achievement whose ideas will be subject to change. This thesis cannot and is not intended to give definite answers on the state of racially hyphenated writers or to essentialize the experience of the racially mixed Canadian. Rather the principal objective of this study is to reflect upon a wide variety of representations of biraciality or 'racial hybridity' in contemporary African-Canadian literature in order to examine various constructions of identity as presented in the writings of different African-Canadians. This objective requires an (admittedly limited) historical review of the 'mixed-race' experience(s) in Canada and a critical evaluation of the social categories that have uniquely shaped these experiences. Importantly, 'race' is only one criterion that continues to have an effect on social hegemony. Gender, class, sexual orientation, age and other socio-political or biological criteria intersect in multiple ways and "neither of them alone can explain social, economic, political and cultural inequality."⁵ In consequence, it is essential to recognize these intersections and to underline that each voice of African-Canadian literature is usually expressed in response to some of these inequalities. Each voice speaks from a unique point of reference that does not necessarily correspond to those of others.

This study is therefore only one way of reading these novels, dramas and poems, a perception guided, maybe even manipulated, by an outside angle and a European, western-academic point of view. Being aware of this restriction, I

⁵ Karrer, Wolfgang and Hartmut Lutz. "Minority Literatures in North America: From cultural Nationalism to Liminality." *Minority Literatures in North America: Contemporary Perspectives*. eds. Wolfgang Karrer and Hartmut Lutz. Frankfurt/Main, 1990, p. 13.

voice my ideas on constructions of biraciality and hyphenation in African-Canadian literature with the full knowledge of my position as an outsider: I do not claim to offer a book of truths. Instead I would like to follow Robert Miles in the desire to "offer the book as an expression of my own committed opposition to racism, without apology or reservation."⁶ I argue that it does not solely matter from where we speak. It is neither our origins nor our abilities that show who we truly are. It is our choices.

Furthermore, it was of chief importance to me to maintain a balance between my personal views and the positions and beliefs of the African-Canadian authors themselves. In this endeavor I act on a suggestion of Karrer and Lutz who warrant the voices of marginalized groups in their discussion of 'minority literatures' in North America as invaluable opportunities to learn from and cherish them as moments of genuine respect and as chances to increase one's level of awareness:

Rather than strictly applying outside definitions, it is more illuminating to listen to what the people say about themselves, how they, as individuals, belonging to one or several racial groups, see themselves in relation to their world and the people surrounding them. This allows for an experience of cultural and social flexibility and transcendence [...].⁷

Taking these arguments in consideration, I decided to conduct interviews with Wayne Compton, Suzette Mayr, Lawrence Hill, Kim Barry Brunhuber and George Elliott Clarke and some other authors whose works will be explored in the following.⁸ Many fertile ideas sprang from these conversations, yet not every interview could be included in the appendix for reasons of space or

⁶ Miles, Robert. *Racism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. p. 5.

⁷ Karrer, Wolfgang und Hartmut Lutz. "Minority Literatures in North America from Cultural Nationalism to Liminality." *Minority Literatures in North America: Contemporary Perspectives*. Frankfurt/Main et al: Peter Lang, 1990. pp. 11-64. p. 12.

⁸ The interview with Suzette Mayr is included in the appendix of this thesis. The interviews with Compton, Brunhuber, and Hill will be included in the published version later on because they have not yet given their written consent to the publication of the interviews.

because their excessive length was out of scale for transcription. I am grateful and indebted to all of the authors who dedicated their time and energy to support this project; those who even offered their friendship cannot be thanked enough.

A quilt is a text. It speaks its maker's desires and beliefs, hopes, and fears, sometimes in a language any reader can understand, but often in an obscure language available only to the initiated. Quilts and texts are inseparable.⁹

⁹ Elsley, Judy. *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting*. New York et al: Peter Lang, 1996. p. 1.

1. INTRODUCTION: 'SOLE OR WHOLE' - QUILTING THE RACIALIZED SUBJECT

You have to find some meaning not on the sides, but in the seam in-between. We're troubled, and I'd rather be trouble than an image.

(Gerald Vizenor)¹⁰

Entering the discourse ...

In world literature, readers increasingly encounter the phenomenon of 'mixed-race' or 'racially hyphenated' identities: Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), Hans Massaquoi's *Destined to Witness* (1999), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) or J.K. Rowling's world-famous 'half-blood' *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) are only a few examples to be observed.¹¹ "What does it mean to be mixed-race/mixedblood/halfbreed/mestiza/hybrid/hyphenated?" is therefore also the question Calgary feminist and scholar Aruna Srivastava probes in her editorial to "HypheNation" (1996), a special collective issue of *Absinthe* magazine with a thematic focus on mixed-race identities.¹²

The voices of the authors who participated in "HypheNation" engage their readers in dialogues on Canada's racialized geography and culture, attune them to issues of 'race', and racism and stress the implications of interracial

¹⁰ Vizenor, Gerald. "Interview". *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak. American Indian Lives*. ed. Laura Coltelli. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. pp. 154-182. Cf. also Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Hanover et al: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

¹¹ The term 'half-blood' is employed by J.K. Rowling to distinguish groups of people in a society made up of purebloods, halfbreeds and muggles (i.e. non-magic folk). For a critical view on issues of 'race' and hybridity in Rowling's Potter series consult Ostry, Elaine. "Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J.K. Rowlings's Fairy Tales." *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*. ed. by Giselle Liza Anatol. Westport, conn.: Praeger, 2003. pp. 89-102; Gupta, Suman. *Re-Reading Harry Potter*. Basingstoke, Hampshire et al: Palgrave Macmillam, 2003; Bryfiński, Dedria (ed.) *Political Issues in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series*. Detroit et al: Greenhaven Press / Gale, 2009.

¹² Cf. Mark Tadao Nakada, Louise Saldanha, Arun Srivastava. "Editorial." *absinthe* 9, no. 2 (1996): 4.

relations. "To be mixed-race", Srivastava argues, "is to feel [racism] differently."¹³ It means to be juggling with socially imposed racialized hyphens – hyphens which might not be visible or even wanted but which, nevertheless, continue to have an impact on racially mixed people's lives and their position within the social framework of Canadian culture. It implies to be constructed as different and to be alienated from respective communities of desire. Being racially mixed predicts the struggle of carving out a space in Canada's officially multicultural and yet whiteheadian imaginary.¹⁴ Mixed-race Canadians claim a space that doesn't marginalize racial mixing but eviscerates restrictive Manichean constructions of identity in order to promulgate wholeness and self-defined individuality. "People of mixed-race trouble the waters," B.C. poet Wayne Compton admits, "and that's probably a good thing."¹⁵ "People of(f) colour," Srivastava mockingly suggests, or "people of pigment" as novelist Lawrence Hill ironically proposes, oscillate and span the transition(s) between a variety of intersecting, shifting and at times competing discourses. In consequence, the surfacing of bi- and multiracial voices is about to change Canada's literary and cultural landscape.

The articulation of complex and fluid Canadian identities by mapping interrelated and overlapping spaces must be regarded as a strategy of resistance with regard to dominant conceptual paradigms. One of these paradigms is the concept of Canadian multiculturalism. It intends to be a policy/ideology seeking to preserve the various ethnic heritages of all Canadians and embarked on shedding the homogenous image of Canada as a French/English settler nation by rising above essentialized notions of identity. However, the existence

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf Himani Bannerji, "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'." in *Literary Pluralities*. ed. by Christl Verduyn. 125-151. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998; Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*. Stratford, Ont.: Mercury P, 1992.; Lutz, Hartmut. "Canadian Multicultural Literatures: Ethnic Minorities and 'Alternatives'". *The Canadian Alternative*. ed. by Klaus Martens. 37-51. Würzburg: Königshausen, 2003.; Wilson, Seymour. "The Tapestry of Canadian Multiculturalism." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 26 (1993): 645-69.

¹⁵ Wayne Compton, (interview with Myler Wilkinson and David Stouck). "The Epic Moment: An Interview with Wayne Compton." *West Coast Line* 36, no. 2 (2002): 135.

of racist ideologies, the impact of 'race' as a socially constructed category and the social reality of class divisions have long been ignored in Canada's multicultural discourse. Multiculturalism may thus implicitly camouflage asymmetrical power relations and divert attention from economic and social inequalities. A conscious shift towards 'race' relations and a critical investigation of racism in Canadian society did not occur until the mid and late 1980s and was primarily launched by members of so-called 'visible minorities'.¹⁶ With regard to literary production, it was not until the arrival of Linda Hutcheon's and Marion Richmond's landmark anthology *Other Solitudes* in 1990 and Smaro Kamboureli's collection of multicultural fiction in *Making A Difference* from 1996 that 'writers of color' exhibited a multitude of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds and gained public and academic recognition.

Nevertheless, an overemphasized eulogy of mixture and hybridity is certainly not altogether unproblematic. There is no such thing as a fixed, biologically determined mixed-race identity. To celebrate mixed-race identities as a new form of innate superiority would lead to hazardous and fatal consequences, since notions of purity and authenticity would gain control by the reinforcement of essentialized racial categories like 'black' and 'white'. The conviction that the blending of different streams of 'blood' will only result in what David Parker and Miri Song criticized as the "mystical alchemy" of cultural practices in *Rethinking Mixed Race* (2001) is likewise suspicious and must be negated.¹⁷ In order to outline the dangers of essentialism it is utterly important to acknowledge that 'race' is nothing but a socially constructed idea predicated upon the perpetuation of a white-dominated hegemony in racist societies. Certainly, 'race' is neither suitable nor helpful as a category of

¹⁶ The term 'visible minority' is loaded with imperfections since it assumes that members of cultural groups are purely a numerical minority. In "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality" Wolfgang Karrer and Hartmut Lutz successfully encounter the difficulties accompanying the term.

¹⁷ Parker, David and Miri Song (eds.). *Rethinking Mixed Race*. London et al: Pluto Press, 2001.

biological differentiation. In consequence, it must be emphasized that all societies that recognize 'races' are thus inevitably racist societies.

Roaming the territory ...

How do racially mixed individuals see themselves, how do they describe and evaluate their experiences? How do they position themselves in relation to dominant culture? What are the signifiers that determine their lived realities? How does dominant culture, on the other hand, view racially mixed Canadians? How does 'race' as one of the major signifiers relate to other categories like ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or age? Can a history of 'racial mixture' in Canada be outlined and how does it correlate to the history of the US? Which role does Canadian multiculturalism play in the shaping of racially mixed subjectivities? All of these questions will emerge while roaming the field of mixed-race literature. So far, few analyses within the academic discourse on African-Canadian literature and culture have so far focused on the exploration of mixed-raced subjectivities in Canadian literature.¹⁸ Within the academic discourse on African-Canadian literature and culture and within the various ethnic communities, the historical intermixture

¹⁸ Hitherto the dramatist, feminist activist and scholar Michelle La Flamme provided the only comprehensive study on mixed-race identities in Canadian literature. Her Ph.D. project *Living, Writing and Staging Racial Hybridity* (2006) may serve as a valuable starting point for explorations of mixed-race subjectivities in the context of contemporary Canadian literature. La Flamme introduces the concept of the 'soma text' as a special form of embodiment and focuses on the racialized gaze and its impact on the experiences of racially mixed people. Her priority lies on the analysis of autobiographies and some selective dramatic texts; however, she does not limit her examination to texts by black/white writers. Admittedly, my own study of mixed-race identities in African-Canadian literature consciously neglects the historically rooted intermixture of First Nations People and African-Canadians. I am well aware of the shortcomings that this gap produces. However, it shall not indicate that such literature does not exist: George Elliot Clarke's melodic masterpiece *Quebecité* (2005) and the dramatic works of Michelle La Flamme and Maxine Bailey are only a few examples to be named. Cf. La Flamme, Michelle. *Living, Writing and Staging Racial Hybridity*. [Microform]. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2006.

with other ethnic groups has long been ignored or at least marginalized as regards those individuals' calls for cultural and social recognition.

Most significantly, it must be understood that any attempt to sharply define the nature of mixed-race identities must fail. Universally, valid mixed-race subjectivity cannot be described because it does not exist. Hence, the experiences of racially mixed individuals must always be read within the specifics of historical and cultural contexts; they must be placed within the particulars of a certain region, examined from the specific angle of a generation, and understood from the perspective of the immigrant and the native-born African-Canadian. This project can only offer a momentary glimpse of how racially hyphenated identities are being presented and discussed at the beginning of the 21st century. The voices raising their concerns in this paper may coincide with many other lives of Canadians; they may offer moments of acknowledgement and recognition for others; they may also contradict the voices of other racially mixed Canadians. It is important to understand that many of the fictional accounts of the racially mixed Canadian authors in this study will appear entrenched and pervaded with personal experiences or even autobiographical references, but they should not be read as autobiographies or as texts which offer psychological insight into the state of an author's mind. These texts are fictional texts and should be read accordingly unless the author advises his or her reader otherwise. For example, the observations of Camille Hernandez-Ramdwart get so close to her personal life that she consciously blurs the borderlines between traditional genres creating a new, semi-fictional and openly autobiographical texture in her works.

Again, the analyses of the works in this dissertation do not aim at giving a definite and unequivocal answer to the question of what it means to be mixed-race in Canada. Rather this dissertation aims at launching discussion, focusing attention and provoking thought on the issues at stake.

Traditionally, women created quilts, alone or in communal work, and various quilting techniques can be traced to the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. A patchwork quilt is a multi-layered bed coverlet whose various layers are filled with wool or cotton. It is made out of single, once discarded, pieces of fabric that are held together with a running stitch.¹⁹ Each quilt block thereby forms a discrete unit, independent of the others, yet when added to another piece, the boundaries between the units begin to dissolve, allow for interaction, and create unity and wholeness.²⁰ Quilts explain how boundaries are always only arbitrarily imposed. For example, they are capable of transcending temporal boundaries by simultaneously referring to the past, the present and the future. The quilt must thus be understood as a cultural artifact and can be read as a metaphor for various literary, historical, and aesthetic realities.

In academic criticism, patchwork quilts and the process of quilting have increasingly been used as a metaphor in literary writing, as a political and cultural manifesto or as an expression of philosophical thought. Especially in feminist approaches to literary analysis, the quilt appears as a motif, symbol or metaphor. Elaine Showalter contends that quilting has become "one of the most central images in the new feminist lexicon" for quite a lot of feminist writing abounds with images of "texts and textiles, thread and theme, weaver and web."²¹ Along this line, Margot Anne Kelley, who featured an article on the semiotics of quilting in contemporary African-American women's literature, concludes that quilting aesthetics may "suggest valuable ways to

¹⁹ Cf. Webster's 1996, p. 831; Roach, Susan. "Quilting." *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. ed. Elizabeth Kowaöeski-Wallace. New York and London: Garland Publ., 1997. p. 330-331. p. 331

²⁰ Cf. Elsley 1996, p. 3

²¹ Showalter, Elaine. "Piecing and Writing" *Poetics of Gender*. ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. pp. 222-247. p. 224-225.

reconceptualize our senses of self, community, lineage, and the connections between art and its social function."²²

In my view it is exactly this social function of art and its inherent potential to raise political awareness that might be helpful in illustrating the peculiarities of the mixed-race experience(s) without denying African-Canadian literature its beautiful and unique aesthetics. For that reason I chose a quotation from Suzette Mayr's second novel *The Widows* (1998) as the title of this project. "The Quiltings of Human Flesh" was created by a black Canadian with a racially mixed background and employed by the author herself to take hold of the intricacies revolving around the question of racial hybridity in African-Canadian literature. Therefore the quilting metaphor shall be engaged to elucidate the thematic scope and the conceptual framework of this Ph.D. project without the pressure of outlining a fixed theoretical construct to describe constructions of biraciality in African-Canadian literature. The chapters of this dissertation ought to be read as fragments. As in a quilt each fragment of this academic fabric will tell a different story. Each of the patches presented is to be respected on its own, but the different narratives will also inform each other and hopefully mingle with the materials of other stories. They will contradict at times, will speak from different places and refer to different points in time; some may even set out to explore the interstices between history and present. What this dissertation offers is a quilt of mixed-race subjectivities as expressed in contemporary Canadian literature. Newly patterned patches can and will be added in infinite numbers; divergent voices are invited to enrich the stories told.

Moreover, Mayr's words poignantly express and encapsulate the reality and imaginary of racially mixed individuals. The notion of being 'half this' and 'half that' obviously does not work for biracial or multiracial people because, in fact, they are most likely confronted with (or embody) a confluence of varying

²² Kelley, Margot Anne. "Sister's Choices: Quilting Aesthetics in Contemporary African American Women's Fiction." *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*. eds. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1994. pp. 49-67. p.67.

cultural, linguistic, regional specifics.²³ In employing the quilting metaphor as the conceptual framework, this dissertation favors and aims at promoting a multidimensional model of identity which opts for the possibility "that an individual can have simultaneous membership and multiple, fluid identities with different groups".²⁴

The trope of the quilt may not be perfect or flawless – as few or maybe none of the concepts within the language of 'race' are. The danger at hand lies in nourishing the idea of the racially mixed individual as a composition of colorful pieces and highly exoticized heritages. It might also render the identities of racially mixed people a highly exoticized curiosity on display. However, identities cannot be inherited. They are created in a continual process of shaping and re-shaping, they are subject to change in the course of time, and they might even be in flux depending on the momentary context or the given point of reference. In spite of its weaknesses, the quilt can serve as a useful metaphor for providing a conceptual framework of mixed-race studies for a number of reasons.

First, the genetic composition of a human body resembles a quilt, for it unites, combines, and consists of indefinite patches. None of these patches in the quilt is more important than others; all of them have their legitimate existence, fulfill a function, and are necessary to provide a whole. The quilt thus

²³ Some recent sociological studies on these issues can be insightful in this regard: Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar's M.A. thesis *All o' is me: Mixed-Race Identity in the Caribbean-Canadian Context.*, for instance, examines the particular experiences of racially mixed Canadians through the lens of racial discourses in the Caribbean. Similar to Hernandez-Ramdwar, the M.A. projects of Melanie Knight explore how Canadian mixed-race individuals (of African-Caribbean-Lebanese and French-Canadian origin) shape and negotiate their identities and where they situate themselves along the racial continuum. Both investigate the personal memories and life stories of interviewees. Knight additionally takes into consideration how contradiction and tension are caused by the straddling of not only different racial, but also linguistic interfaces. Cf. Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. *All o' is me: Mixed-Race Identity in the Caribbean-Canadian Context.* M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, Department of Education, 1996; Knight, Melanie Jane. *The Negotiation of Identities: Narratives of Mixed-Race Individuals in Canada.* M.A. Thesis, OISE, University of Toronto, 2001.

²⁴ Root, Maria P.P. "Within, Between, and Beyond Race." *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader.* ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: London and New York, 2004. pp. 143-148. p. 145.

represents the epitome of a de-central, non-hierarchical structure.²⁵ Yet, its patches are not only our genes, but likewise the (hi)stories of our ancestors: each one telling a different tale, each one touching upon the others. If we are lucky, we still remember or perhaps recognize these tales as our own, but certainly some might have been lost on the trail. Due to former census practices to identify within a monoracial system of categorization, due to public pressure or family-induced secrecy some stories might have been forgotten. To unearth them can be wholesome.

Sole to Whole ... from Gender Theory to 'Race'-Matters

In various publications on the theory of gender, the quilt has been considered as a metaphor for personal transformation and self-reclamation. It is furthermore appreciated as a device for self-empowerment. French Feminist critic Helene Cixous, for example, replies to the question "What is Woman?" by revealing the mélange of pieces that constitute a woman. "There is, at this time, no general woman, no typical woman" Cixous states, "what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions." By proposing this shift in attention Cixous challenges persistent patriarchal constructions of femininity and questions the idea of woman as the Other.²⁶

In her study on African-American traditions of quilt-making Margot Kelley also stresses the significance of acknowledging one's fragments. Along this line, she contends that one of the major and most resonant features of quilting is "the promise of creating unity among disparate elements, of establishing connections in the midst of fragmentation."²⁷ Quilting allows to

²⁵ Cf. Roach, Susan. "Quilting." *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. ed. Elizabeth Kowaöeski-Wallace. New York and London: Garland Publ., 1997. p. 330-331.

²⁶ Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1986. pp. 309-320; p. 309

²⁷ Kelley 1994, p. 55-56.

"provide an image of special integration that does not freeze one in one place," as Radka Donnell-Vogt underlined in her collection of interviews with women artists.²⁸ African-American feminist and activist Adrienne Rich finally stresses the necessity of recognizing and accepting one's fragments in order to become capable of moving towards autonomy.²⁹

In short, the trope of the quilt supports the idea of bonding, launches communication, and is able to unite the personal and the political.³⁰ Because of their potential of raising awareness, quilts must be respected as "an expressive means for voicing the concern of muted voices."³¹

One of the feminist scholars who most successfully integrate the metaphor of the quilt in a theory of gender is feminist critic Judy Elsley. In her literary analysis of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982) she proposes a poetics of fragmentation. Drawing up a feminist agenda, Elsley supports Cixous's view and argues that such a poetics of fragmentation answers the needs of women who "have spent their lives being marginalized by a culture that uses women for its own conveniences."³² Elsley claims that a

woman makes the world her own by taking apart the patriarchal ways of being to create a space for herself. That space allows her to accept her

²⁸ Donnell-Vogt, Radka. (Interview by authors). *Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists*. ed. Lynn F. Miller and Sally S. Swenson. Metuchee, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981. pp. 39-53. p. 49.

²⁹ Rich, Adrienne. "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. ed. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 1985. pp. 2044-2056; p. 2053.

³⁰ For more detailed theoretical approaches to the trope of the quilt cf., for example, Baker, Houston A. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker. "Patches: Quilts and Community in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'." *The Southern Review* 21 (Summer 1985): 706-720; Hedges, Elaine. "Quilts and Women's Culture" *Working in the Arts*. ed. Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt. New York: Feminist Press, 1985. pp. 13-20; Schapiro, Miriam and Faith Wilding. "Cunts/Quilts/Consciousness" *Heresie* (December 1989): 1-17; hooks, bell. "Aesthetic Inheritances: History Worked by Hands." *Yearning Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End, 1990; Showalter, Elaine. "Common Threads." *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. ed. Elaine Showalter. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991; Torsney, Cheryl B. and Judy Elsley. *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1994; Elsley, Judy. *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting*. New York et al: Peter Lang, 1996. p. 1-7.

³¹ Roach 1997, p. 331.

³² Elsley 1996, p. 3.

own fragmentation, embrace those fragments, and thus validate herself. Recognizing rather than denying her pieces is often a woman's way to becoming 'sole or whole' in a more feminocentric way.³³

By refusing the Western-European epistemology of oppositions, binarisms and Manichaeisms, marginalized people can move towards a cohesive fragmentation and engage upon a journey of self-empowerment and self-(re)discovery. For racially hyphenated people – who often feel sole rather than whole – this process of accepting one's fragments and striving towards wholeness may equal such a journey. It implies a personal development from an identity imposed by the outside, which has been shaped by white-supremacist and/or patriarchal constructs, racialized stereotypes and images, to an identity nurtured from the inside and determined by self-definition. It may become a means of "stitching together their fragments in a pattern to suit themselves."³⁴

In her theory Elsley underlines that the process of quilting begins with ripping the fabric apart, with tearing it into pieces. This act of deconstruction is simultaneously the quilter's most creative act; it must be valued as "an act of courage, necessity, and faith."³⁵ The experience of being torn apart is familiar to many people of mixed-race as well. It is the prevailing binarism of self/other which necessarily marginalizes the racially mixed person in manifold ways within her or his family and within society. They often do not know where they fit in or where they belong since they are constructed as the Other. No matter where they turn, their belonging will be questioned.

Being reduced to halves and feeling torn apart is painful since the space that opens in the process of making fragments is a liminal space, a disruptive and destabilizing space. Yet it also constitutes a space to start from: "Tearing fabric apart has the effect of creating space between pieces. This place of

³³ Elsley 1996, p. 4.

³⁴ Elsley 1996, p. 9.

³⁵ Elsley 1996, p. 4.

liminality, this undefined space becomes a place of creative freedom."³⁶ The undefined, the open and the liminal can turn into a space that facilitates self-creation, a space in which racially mixed people can find a way to speak, to voice their experiences and to re-create themselves according to their own patterns.³⁷ Quilting must then be perceived as an act of healing. It symbolizes the refusal of being torn apart and entails the negation of halves and other quantities. The process of quilting turns object into subject and replaces passive victimization with active self-reclamation.³⁸

Quilting the racially mixed subject ... from a Canadian perspective

Quilts have become political and aesthetic statements. The pieced quilt signifies one of the most vital metaphors for expressing notions of cultural diversity and political correctness.³⁹ Racialized subjectivities must be accepted as part of this diversity. After all, 'race' still matters. It is the category of 'race' that all the different subjectivities featured in this study share as a dominant and influential aspect of identity formation. Apart from living with the social implications of 'race' and racialization, the authors (and/or their literary characters) could not be more diverse: They have different histories, speak different languages and tell different stories. They come from several regions of Canada, have immigrated to Canada or were born on native Canadian soil; they personify an array of cultural influences, favor various forms of sexual orientation and have divergent definitions of family life. Some have close bonds to their families or parents; others have never met them or were separated from

³⁶ Baker, Houston A. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker. "Patches: Quilts and Community in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'." *The Southern Review* 21 (Summer 1985): 706-720; p. 706.

³⁷ Cf. Elsley 1996, p. 10; Cf. Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*. New Haven, Conn. Yale UP, 1985; Cf. Gilbert, Sandra. "Literary Paternity." *Critical Theory since 1965*. ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1986. pp. 486-496;

³⁸ Cf. Elsley 1996, p. 10

³⁹ Cf. Torsney 1994, p. 2. Notably, Torsney adds that the quilt holds this potential precisely because "it stands outside of social class" (p.4).

them due to political upheavals in their mother countries. Some feel at ease and rooted in Canada, others mourn for long lost homes.

The African-Canadian authors featured in this project are as different as the patches of a quilt, but they all share some experiences that have shaped their lives as Canadians: they have been constructed as different and marginalized as the Other. They identify as African-Canadians or black Canadians in general – however, exact definitions on what constitutes these forms of identity might vary. Importantly, the writers have encountered various forms of racism themselves – institutionalized and personal patterns of racism. Finally, they acknowledge some kind of 'racial' mixing in their families (although this should not be understood as a pre-requisite to be allowed to voice ideas about being 'mixed-race').

The African-Canadian community of writers is very vital and versatile. Naturally, the corpus of literary texts increases as well and many of these texts explore the question of racial hybridity and include characters that defy easy categorization and lead liminal existences within a quilt of black Canadian voices. In the following, I would like to provide a brief overview of the authors featured in chapter 4 of this study and the notions of racial hybridity expressed in their writings.

Suzette Mayr, for example, is of German and Caribbean descent and lives in Calgary, Alberta. She offers a borderlands poetics in which her fictional characters easily switch between different forms of identity, transform and constantly re-invent themselves. Spiced up with a touch of magic realism and a wry, infectious sense of humor, she offers a strong, self-determined feminist perspective on issues of racial hybridity and the process of balancing it with problems revolving around questions of sexual orientation or age. Vancouver-based poet Mercedes Baines, for her part, deconstructs 'race' as a category in her poetry. She reveals the cultural omission of literary expressions about racial hybridity and criticizes the historical denial of racial intermixture in Canada. In her poetry, Baines provides sharp-tongued references to archetypes in order to

expose the perpetuating existence of the black/white Manichaeism on the basis of white supremacist societal structures. Eventually, Baines insists on a holistic view on identity and the self. She refuses to be reduced to bits and pieces and claims her individual freedom of self-definition as an inalienable right. Silence is replaced by an angry outcry against discrimination and rejection is replaced by self-acceptance. The reality of being "brown" is transformed into a comforting normality.⁴⁰

Similar to Mayr and Baines, dramatists Maxine Bailey and Sharon Lewis offer a strong feminist perspective on the question of racial hybridity. Their literary characters forge a connection of African Canada to the experiences of First Nations people, celebrate the bond between women across time and space, and try to reconcile past, present and future. Their play *Sistahs* (1994) advocates a polyvalent blackness by raising awareness to the various racialized subjectivities of women in Canada. This poly-consciousness that Bailey and Lewis claim for the African-Canadian community is more than reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois's idea of the 'double consciousness' of the African-American at the time of the Harlem Renaissance.⁴¹ Adjusted to the black Canadian context, the poly-consciousness voiced in *Sistahs* embodies the different constructions of and views on blackness across several generations (of women), examines specific historical conditions and celebrates the cultural diversity of African Canadians. In a final confrontation, the female characters of the play attempt at defying death and the seemingly endless subjugation of women of color by stirring up an "everybody-bring-something-soup".⁴² Bailey and Lewis openly revive the American metaphor of the 'salad bowl'⁴³ and live out the idea of

⁴⁰ Cf. Baines, Mercedes. "Brown Child." Poem. *West Coast Line*. 28.1-2 (Fall/Spring 1994): 194-195.

⁴¹ Cf. DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folks. Writings* [1903]. Ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Library of America, 1986. Pp- 357-547; for its application to the African-Canadian context see Clarke, George Elliott. "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African Americanisms, or the Structures of African Canadianité." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 63 (Spring 1998): 1-55.

⁴² Cf. Bailey, Maxine and Sharon Lewis. *Sistahs*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1994.

⁴³ Cf. Henderson, Simon. *Aspects of American History*. New York et al: Routledge, 2009. pp. 132-141.

Canadian multiculturalism, making racial hybridity an accepted (yet problematic) facet of it.

Ontario-based writer Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar likewise struggles with the implications of Canadian identity politics and cannot help but feel discomfort with the designation 'Canadian'. To her, it is a metaphor of whiteness and an expression of superiority. Exposing the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes and institutionalized forms of racism and discrimination, Hernandez-Ramdwar feels estranged on Canada's uncomfortable territory. Her racial hybridity represents nothing but the embodiment of a historical curse. It is the legacy of centuries of colonialist oppression and black people's exploitation. Hernandez-Ramdwar repels the whiteness in her body, repudiates the Other, and thus cannot identify as Canadian as well. She mourns for her long-lost past in the Caribbean and feels "gravitated towards thinking black."⁴⁴

While the women authors presented so far mostly focused on explorations of 'race' and gender, some of the male writers who settled on issues of racial hybridity mostly examine the relationship between 'race' and class. Haitian Canadian writers Max Dorsinville and Gérard Étienne, for example, engage upon a painful exploration of Haitian history and its obsession with 'race', 'racial' intermixture and the questions of social superiority and political power. Étienne, in particular, gives voice to the undisguised hatred against light-skinned Haitians and outlines the consequences of internalized racialized prejudices and elitist social convictions.

In *La Pacotille* (1991), Étienne portrays characters that feel locked in the prevailing predicament of a rigid social hierarchy based on racial difference and an inability of defeating the past. Bearing the pain of the unspeakable, his main character must repeatedly confront shame, inferiority and fragmentation. Every day they feel forced to fight "la bête" and its notions of racial identity, historically and literally within themselves. Traumatized by a brutal past and immobilized by the challenges of present racialized notions of identity in

⁴⁴ Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "Ms. Edge Innate" *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision. 1994, p. 5.

Canada, he gives in to schizophrenia as a consequence of reliving his psychological and physical torture. Étienne also offers a vision of a liberating savior, a racially mixed woman named Guilène. As a reincarnation of Erzulie, the lost and much desired mother of the Haitian earth, she embodies hope, emancipation and freedom; she bears the burden of history and carries the responsibility of changing the future by overcoming the fixed notions of 'race' and identity.

Max Dorsinville also employs the mythological figure of Erzulie in his explorations of racial ambiguity in his novel *Erzulie loves Shango* (1998). By creating a novel that will blur reality and imagination, Dorsinville renders notions of 'racial' authenticity as fake while simultaneously celebrating the idea of the carnivalesque. It is in a dazzling game of racial ambiguities, transformations, mythical reincarnations and confrontations with memories that his protagonists Jacques and Denise take off their masks to encounter their true selves. Like Étienne, Dorsinville illustrates the deeply internalized anti-mulatto sentiment of the Haitian past, critiques the Haitians' craving for whiteness and examines their effect on the Haitian-Canadian present.

Kim Barry Brunhuber, an Ontario-based novelist, filmmaker and journalist, offers insight into the interrelatedness of 'race' and class from a different angle. Exploring notions of racial ambiguity in the model industry, his novel *Kameleon Man* (2003) turns out to be a postmodern re-examination of passing in the light of globalization. In *Kameleon Man* the mixed-race body is seen as a newly discovered marketing commodity and answers to the rules set by an international market and its demands. His protagonist Stacey Schmidt tries to become a chameleon by consciously disguising his true racial origin and by adjusting to the exoticized expectations of his audience. Affected by self-destructive inclinations, he is forced to slip in and out of various racialized identities and thereby evokes the myth of the tragic mulatto who eventually loses track of his own self and is crushed by the weight of racial discrimination. In the end, Stacey painfully realizes – close to death – that he is neither a

successful model, nor a very good chameleon. He realizes that he cannot and must not deny his racial hybridity. In consequence, Brunhuber has his protagonist see no solution but to turn away from Canada in order to escape simplified categorizations of identity and to carve out a space for a multilayered individuality.

*No author and no reader changes the meaning of words. The struggle of discourses changes their meanings, and so the combination in which we put words together matters, and the order of propositions matters: through these, whatever our intentions, words take on meaning.*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Macdonnell, I. A. *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. p. 51.

2. SIGNIFYING THE IN-BETWEEN: 'RACE', 'RACIAL HYBRIDITY' AND QUESTIONS OF BELONGING

Race is fundamental in modern politics. Race is situated at the crossroads of identity and social structure, where difference frames inequality, and where political processes operate with a comprehensiveness that ranges from the historical to the intrapsychic.

(Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race*)⁴⁶

2.1. The Language of 'Race' – Notes on Terminology

What's in a word? What's in a name? When these words and names belong to the language of 'race', when they set out to designate or explain 'racial' phenomena, the answers will be indefinite, inconvenient, even disturbing. What we encounter are history and repression, paradox and meaning, privilege and bias, insult and empowerment. The language of 'race' is complex and thorny. It tells of centuries of discrimination against those that have been marked with difference. It reflects the struggle for power and gives insight into those 18th- and 19th-century ideologies on whose grounds the struggle for power continues until today. These 'race-words' are fuelled by the black/white-dichotomy and bear with them the unmistakable taste of racist devaluation. Therefore the language of 'race' is destined to "limit individuals in their subjectivities"⁴⁷ – regardless of how thoughtful and politically correct an analysis strives to be.

Every scholar embarking on a study of 'race' and its various phenomena faces this dilemma of terminology. How can you describe and examine something that does not exist? Should scholarly interest not move beyond questions of 'race' or at least be "against Race" as Paul Gilroy proposed with the

⁴⁶ Winant, Howard. *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. p. xi.

⁴⁷ Zack, Naomi. "Black, White and Gray: Words, Words, Words." *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*. ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: London and New York, 2004. pp. 153-157. p. 153.

title of one of his latest publications?⁴⁸ What about a terminology that proves to be inherently racist? Am I to talk about 'mulattoes' or 'half-breeds'? How can people be 'mixed', 'hybrid' or hyphenated? Should such designations not best be abandoned? If the purpose of this dissertation is partly to raise consciousness about the ongoing existence of racism, how can any academic make use of a terminology that is derogatory, negates wholeness and promotes fragmentation? Solutions are not easy. However, as scholars we must not retreat from a racialized discourse. Racism will not disappear just because softly camouflaging terms are invented. For as long as racism has not ceased to exist, the concept of 'race' cannot and must not become obsolete within the academic discourse. Instead a discursive conceptualization of 'race' must be established. Such an understanding must be anti-essentialist in its core, acknowledge the constructedness of this category and accept that the discourse on 'race' is and will be "susceptible to change".⁴⁹ It must be critically employed as a way of understanding, interpreting and problematizing notions of difference in order to unsettle "the intellectual foundations on which it has for so long rested."⁵⁰

The Category of 'Race'

Although 'race' is most widely used as a term "for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups [...] and implies that the mental and moral behavior of human beings, as well as individual personality, ideas and capacities, can be related to racial origin"⁵¹, it is not a biological reality, as many academics and writers have pointed out

⁴⁸ Cf. Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2000.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hier, Sean P. and B. Singh Bolaria. "Introduction: Identities without Guarantees." *Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. eds. Sean Hier and Singh Bolaria. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006. pp. 1-10. p. 4.

⁵⁰ Cashmore, Ellis. "'Race' – as Signifier." *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. 4th ed. Ed. Ellis Cashmore. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 298-300. p. 300

⁵¹ Ashcroft, Bill and Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. "Race." *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London and New York, 1998. pp. 198-206. p. 198

before.⁵² 'Race' is not a biological reality but a social construct that has historically served to perpetuate claims to power, to establish or justify dominance over subject peoples and is still used in contemporary times to uphold a rigid social order based on the interpretation of difference. The ideology of 'race' believes in the principles of white supremacy and black inferiority.⁵³ These principles benefit white people by justifying the relegation of "the others" to subordinate, marginal existences and can be summarized in a single word: racism. In this respect, as Bill Ashcroft argued convincingly in his attempt to delineate the relation of 'race' and racism, "racism is not so much a product of the concept of race as the very reason for its existence."⁵⁴

For lack of a more cogent term, the term 'race' will be used with single quotation marks in the following study to remember its imperfection as an analytical category and in order to underscore its constructedness as a social category. Again, it is significant to remember that silence about the category of 'race' and about its manifold integration into social, political, economic life and aesthetic concepts will not make racism go away.

Racialization

Racialization can be defined as a political, ideological, representational and dialectical process of (racial) signification and categorization whose use and meaning derives from history. In this process particular groups are identified "by direct or indirect reference to their real or imagined phenotypical

⁵² Cf., for example, Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove, 1961; Banton, Michael. *Racial Theories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 1994; Bremen, J. *Imperial Monkey Business: Racial Supremacy in Social Darwinist Theory and Colonial Practice*. CASA Monographs 3, Amsterdam: VU Press, 1990; Husband, C. *'Race' and Nation: The British Experience*. Perth, WA: Paradigm, 1994; Malik, Kenan. *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society*. New York: New York University Press, 1996; McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York et al: Routledge, 1995; Gates, Henry Louis Jr. (ed.) *'Race', Writing and Difference*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

⁵³ Cf. Gordon, Lewis R. "Race, Biraciality, and Mixed Race". *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: London and New York, 2004. pp. 158-165.

⁵⁴ Ashcroft 1998, p. 199

characteristics in such a way as to suggest that the population can only be understood as a supposedly biological unity."⁵⁵ Its objective is to demarcate the Self from the Other; and it is deeply rooted in and draws from the idea of 'race'.

Historically the process of racialization was initially referred to by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967) in which he launched a discussion about the complications resulting from the decolonized African intellectuals' attempts to constitute a cultural future.⁵⁶ Later, in his analysis of how 'race' has entered the political discourse in Britain, Reeves (1983) moved on to make a distinction between 'practical' and 'ideological' racialization. Reeves interpreted the first term as the process of configuring groups, while he understands the latter term as the use of the idea of 'race' in discourse.⁵⁷ Omi and Winant, in *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986), apply the concept to "signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group."⁵⁸ Importantly, they point to the process of racialization as a historically defined one. Similarly, Robert Miles emphasizes that the use and meaning of the concept of racialization have a long history in precapitalist and capitalist societies.⁵⁹ They support and illustrate the fact that "the idea of 'race' is not a universal idea, but, rather, emerges at a particular point in Western European history [...]."⁶⁰ In consequence, any observation about the process of racialization must take the specific historical context of the particular group into consideration.

⁵⁵ Miles, Robert. "Racialization." *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. ed. Ellis Cashmore. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 306-308. p. 307

⁵⁶ Cf. Fanon 1967, pp. 170-171

⁵⁷ Cf. Reeves, F. *British Racial Discourse: A Study of British Political Discourse about Race and Race-Related Matters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. p.173-176; see also Miles 1989, p. 74

⁵⁸ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

⁵⁹ Cf. Miles 1989, p. 76

⁶⁰ Miles 1996, p. 307

The yearning for the hierarchical categorization of human beings represents the driving force in the dynamics of racism. Without this desire 'race' would not exist.⁶¹ Ashcroft defines racism as "a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, causal way to psychological or intellectual characteristics" and thereby points out that this causality inevitably leads to the distinction between 'superior' and 'inferior' racial groups.⁶²

Robert Miles, for his part, calls racism first of all a "term of political abuse".⁶³ Miles later specifies that the concept of racism is not only a theoretical concept but extends to practices and processes in real life. Nevertheless, Miles argues against this inflational use of racism in this sense and sets up a case for limiting the use of the term to its ideological component because he sees no logical connection between cognition and action⁶⁴. Importantly, Miles also explicates that it is misleading to restrict the parameters of racism by reference to blackness. He accurately professes that not only people of color but several 'white' groups of people have been confronted with racism as well. Similarly, Miles stresses that the articulation of racism or the performance of racist acts must not be mistaken as a prerogative of white people.⁶⁵ In fact, racism must be acknowledged as a problem "for all who live in a social context where it is articulated and where it sustains exclusionary practices."⁶⁶

Although I agree with both Miles and Ashcroft in their general definitions of racism, Miles's reduction of racism to an ideology (without its procedural aspect) must be seen very critically. There is little use of theory without its practical application. In my opinion, racism must be understood as

⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Miles, Robert. *Racism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. p.1

⁶⁴ Cf. Miles 1989, p. 77

⁶⁵ Cf. Miles 1989, p.6

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 10

an ideology in which people believe and upon which they act. Racism is an everyday reality and as soon as racist thought is able to engender exclusion, it represents an act of violence. In doing so, racism epitomizes the denial of humanity. For that reason it is the more general and thus more widely applicable conception of racism which Jörg Becker successfully developed from Johan Galtung's definition of 'violence' in his book *Strukturelle Gewalt: Beiträge zur Friedens- und Konfliktlösung* (1975) which has influenced my personal understanding and academic reading of racism most profoundly. Becker's transfer of Galtung's theory to the field of racism is groundbreaking and has provided a useful tool kit for describing racialized structures in society for and deconstructing the category of 'race'.

Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist and major founder of the research field of *Peace and Conflict Studies*, launched a discussion on the relationship between peace and violence in the late 1960s and 1970s, in which he argued that peace should be primarily understood as the absence of violence.⁶⁷ In his elaboration of terms and concepts, the theorist claims the existence of different (usually contrary but simultaneously interacting) forms of violence. Galtung extends the traditionally molded definitions of both peace and violence by claiming that it was essential to recognize the existence of a type of violence which goes beyond the idea of instantly recognizable, immediately felt, agent-based violence and its consequences. "Gewalt," Galtung explains, "liegt dann vor, wenn Menschen so beeinflusst werden, dass ihre aktuelle somatische und geistige Verwirklichung geringer ist als ihre potentielle Verwirklichung."⁶⁸ According to Galtung, violence is therefore the gap between a person's full potential and his or her

⁶⁷ Cf. Galtung, Johann. *Strukturelle Gewalt: Beiträge zur Friedens- und Konfliktforschung*. Reinbek: Rowohlt 1975. p. 8. (Galtung originally presented his ideas on violence and peace in: Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (1969): 167-91. Notably, some similar ideas were brought forward by Latin American liberation theologians that broadly employed the term to explain "sinful" social structures. They claimed that poverty and social injustice (including racism and gender inequality) were expressions of such social structures. For further details see Gilligan, James. *Violence*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997; Farmer, Paul. *Pathologies of power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003; Farmer, Paul. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence." *Current Anthropology*. 45.3 (June 2004): 305-325.)

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p. 9

current state of being; it is the "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs".⁶⁹

Johan Galtung framed the term *structural violence* to denote one of these hidden forms of violence whose effects are far from being less dangerous or brutal to the individuals or groups of people involved. In opposition to his concept of "*personale Gewalt*", a form of direct violence, in which a subject inflicts violence on someone else, structural violence is almost always invisible. At times the people affected might not even be aware of this type of violence or consider its effects as something naturally given because it has been carefully embedded in social structures, regulated by traditions and institutions as well as standardized by the experience of omnipresence. Structural violence is thus long lasting and appears quite common.⁷⁰ It is fueled by the belief that things are and always have been this way: "Strukturelle Gewalt ist geräuschlos, sie zeigt sich nicht – sie ist im Grunde statisch, sie *ist* das stille Wasser."⁷¹

Its main difference to *direct violence*, Galtung emphasizes, results from structural violence being carried out not by an individual agent. It is hidden in structures and it usually signifies the disadvantage of groups of the world population because of political, legal, economic and social injustices. *Structural violence* refers to the unequal distribution of and access to a society's resources (as, for example, expressed in level of wages, education opportunities, or the possibility to take advantage of health care). In short, *structural violence* exists in its physical and psychological form and it can be equated with social injustice. Peace then, if defined as the absence of violence, can only be achieved when social justice is attained. And social justice precludes the existence of racism.

Moving along with Galtung's definition of structural violence, it becomes clear that racism is one expression of structural violence. Racism is a form of institutionalized (i.e. structural) violence. It resides in consciousness and is

⁶⁹ Galtung, Johan. "Kulturelle Gewalt." *Der Bürger im Staat* 43. 2 (1993): p. 106

⁷⁰ Cf. Galtung 1975, pp. 7-36; Cf. also Du Nann Winter, Deborah and Dana C. Leighton. "Structural Violence." *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology in the 21st century*. eds. Daniel J. Christie, Richard V. Wagner and Deborah Du Nann Winter. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001. pp. 99-102.

⁷¹ Galtung 1975, p. 16

systematically exerted through social structures that may create oppression, exploitation, marginalization and expulsion. Often, these effects remain invisible – at least to those people who belong to the social elite of a country, but sometimes even to those who are primarily affected by racism and its outcome. People are so accustomed to seeing white men with power, privilege and prestige that both white and non-white groups of the population take this situation for granted. Global sexism, deeply rooted racism and homophobia are not always identified as the cause for such inequalities – certainly not in public discourse or media representations. Nevertheless, racism as an expression of structural violence does lead to social, political and monetary inequities and/or to psychological damage inflicted on both the inflictor and the people of color, who live with distorted representations of their selves and their cultures and suffer from the denial of their individual and communal histories.

As mentioned before, Jörg Becker employed Galtung's theory of violence and used it to explain forms of racism in his book *Alltäglicher Rassismus* (1977). He expounds:

Auf die Rassismusdebatte übertragen hieße das, dass dann von Rassismus zu reden ist, wenn als die Ursache für den Unterschied zwischen dem Potentiellen und dem Aktuellen die Andersartigkeit der Hautfarbe bei einem Individuum oder bei der von der herrschenden in-group diskriminierten out-group gilt.⁷²

Becker introduces the term *structural (or indirect) racism* and, following Galtung's conception, posits it as an opposite to *personal (or direct) racism*. He explains:

Im strukturellen Rassismus spiegeln sich ungleiche Machtverhältnisse wider, die sich an verschiedenartigen Strukturen in den Subsystemen

⁷² Becker, Jörg. *Alltäglicher Rassismus: Die afro-amerikanischen Rassenkonflikte im Kinder- und Jugendbuch der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1977. p. 125

eines politischen Systems festmachen lassen, so in der unterschiedlichen Verfügungsgewalt über Produktionsmittel, der Beteiligung an politischer Herrschaft, der Analphabetenquote, der Sterberate o.ä. bezogen auf unterschiedliche rassische Gruppen.⁷³

Structural racism thus points out the socio-political consequences of a violent structure within a society, however, it does not necessarily make clear the intentions behind such structures because it is not personalized by an active subject that can be identified as deliberately inflicting pain on someone else or something else.

In order to emphasize the motives for structural racism and – hence - to underscore question of moral guilt, Becker also transforms Galtung's ideas of *intended* and *unintended violence* to the realm of racism. Of course, such a question must always be examined in a specific historical context and cannot be generalized. Back in the 1970s, Becker argued, it was mainly economic reasons that could be held responsible for the existence of structural racism in the USA.⁷⁴ Canada's motives for perpetuating violent structures, however, are not much different as Métis scholar and social activist Howard Adams clearly stated:

In Canada, racism originated in the imperialist fur trading industry, and over the centuries it has become deeply entrenched in Canadian society [...]. The racism created during the centuries of the fur trade cannot be eradicated today. Although cheap Indian labour is unnecessary to the present Canadian economy, the early principles of racism remain as a dominant feature of the Canadian economic system.⁷⁵

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 126

⁷⁴ Cf. Becker 1977, pp. 126-128.

⁷⁵ Adams, Howard. *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View*. Toronto: General Publishing, 1975. p. 8

Adams is absolutely right in his suggestion of strong economic motives for the creation and perpetuation of racism in Canada. What followed from interrelatedness of racism and the state economy (which by extension refers to class) was the belief in white supremacy. This belief or myth, as Adams claims, was then able to entwine around a number of Canadian institutions like the church, schools and courts and remains rooted in them as a guiding ideology until this day. Taking Adams' argument further, it can therefore also be suggested that Canada's official policy of multiculturalism is affected by white supremacism – despite all of its good intentions. However, before a more detailed discussion of the relationship between multiculturalism and racism can take place, I would like to return to the conceptions proposed by Galtung and Becker and outline their usefulness as another conceptual element of this study.

In relation to this project, both Galtung's and Becker's concepts of violence offer a useful and inclusive – even if very generalized and somewhat vague – framework for the understanding of the racism that is inflicted upon African-Canadians in general and Canadian people of mixed racial origin in particular since both scholars clearly move beyond dominant (i.e. traditional) conceptions of conflict. In this, Galtung and Becker help us to understand the mechanisms of power, which exert a strong and lasting influence on the lives of people of color – including people of mixed-race descent. Their conceptions of violence and racism provide a scheme that allows recognizing racism in Canada as a reality and as a process inherent in and perpetuated by the nation-state. It "operat[es] regardless of intent."⁷⁶ Historically, structural violence in Canada is expressed in the denial of the long-term African presence in Canada and the erasure of a history of miscegenation on Canadian soil. Politically, it represents the repression of African-Canadians in terms of them having limited access to levels of political institutions which guarantee voice in decisions on the distribution of resources. Economically, structural violence comes down to reduced opportunities in the world of business, monetary disadvantage or even

⁷⁶ Galtung 1996, p. 93.

blatant exploitation; and socially it must be regarded as (intended or unintended) communal neglect and individual deprivation.

Violence, in the context of black Canada, occurs vertically, i.e. it increases from the top to the bottom of the social hierarchy. It is especially those vertical structures in society that Galtung is most critical of. Like other people of color, African-Canadians have been robbed of their voices and deprived of fundamental human needs like respect, recognition and tolerance. Galtung argues for transforming such vertical structures of inequality and injustice into more desirable horizontal structures that offer a chance for equality and social justice.⁷⁷ In the African-Canadian context this equals a call for recognition and a share in making decisions in various realms of society.

Along this line, Galtung's concept also provides insight into useful ways of overcoming conflict. He expounds that structural violence must be seen as the central (if not only) arena in which elements of human behavior can be and must be successfully transformed in order to alter conflict. In *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996) Galtung offers some steps he considers necessary in overcoming structural violence. The first step is confrontation, i.e. "selecting an issue that encapsulates the general conflict".⁷⁸ This process of confrontation goes along with accepting and acknowledging the existence of inequality and aims at diminishing the influence of the dominant group on the repressed group. Secondly, Galtung demands struggle as the next essential step towards liberation. This struggle may be carried out in various forms, preferably in a peaceful way (e.g. in conformity with Gandhian principles). Thirdly, it will be indispensable to enter a stage of what Galtung calls 'decoupling'. The process of decoupling refers to the separation of those at the bottom of the structure from those at the privileged top of the structure. It is a step towards independence – economically and politically, maybe even aesthetically. Finally, Galtung proposes 'recoupling' as the final step in the process of overcoming structural

⁷⁷ Cf. Galtung, Johan. *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict Development and Civilization*. London: Sage Publications, 1996.

⁷⁸ Galtung 1996, p. 93.

violence. It is defined as "therapy for pathological structures" and intends to operate in the long-run.⁷⁹ Its goal is the establishment of horizontal structures in a process in which "horizontal links are built to others in the same situation".⁸⁰ Clearly, Galtung is aware that (despite its implicit Marxist tendencies) recoupling is neither always realistic nor wholly achievable. Yet it should always remain a target.

Blackness and Whiteness

The terms 'black' and 'white' must likewise be problematized as racialized categories. Their meaning is unstable and, without doubt, contested. Therefore they are less to be understood as primary identity markers but rather as homogenizing designations for in reality highly differentiated members of particular groups. 'Black' and 'white' have been assigned negative and positive connotations, respectively. These connotations relate to the dichotomy of sin and virtue and refer back to 19th-century concepts of 'race' that associated nonphysical characteristics with racial designations.⁸¹

As Audrey Smedley showed in *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (1993), both whiteness and blackness only slowly insinuated their way as racialized categories into European thought.⁸² Although both terms developed in contradistinction to each other, it might be worth noticing that blackness did not acquire a negative connotation until the 17th century in the context of colonialism. Pieterse (1992) expounded that representations of blackness in European iconography from the 12th to the 15th century were generally positive in their evaluation.⁸³ Only with the rise of

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p. 94.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 95.

⁸¹ Cf. Zack, Naomi. "Black, White and Gray: Words, Words, Words." *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*. ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: London and New York, 2004. pp. 153-157. p. 155

⁸² Cf. Smedley, Audrey. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. Westview Press, 1993; see also Cashmore, Ellis. "Whiteness." *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. Ed. Ellis Cashmore. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 377-381.

⁸³ Cf. Pieterse, Jan. *White on Black: Images of Africa and blacks in western popular culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

European colonialism did blackness "become denigrated and yoked with savagery and inferiority," certainly not without support of the spreading Christian faith and its implications. The racialization of whiteness and blackness served as the argumentative foundation of colonialist reasoning. They gained momentum in defense of slavery and fortified the image of black peoples as "naturally suited to servitude and labor" and as "naturally, genotypically and so permanently inferior".⁸⁴ At the same time, whiteness came to be associated with the ideal of purity and perfection. Most importantly, however, white skin became "a means of control" and was provided with certain social and civil privileges.⁸⁵

In this context, Lerone Bennett (1993) underlined that the early colonists in North America did not consider themselves as belonging to the white race. It was only by transforming social classes, which had existed on the basis of occupational and cultural differences as well as on monetary wealth, into a homogenous new group. Bennett explains, "the first white colonists had no concept of themselves as *white* man [...]. The word *white*, with all its burden of guilt and arrogance, did not come into common usage until the latter part of the century."⁸⁶ The new racial status became a necessity not only to legitimate slavery as an institution but also because the high numbers of white *de facto* slaves in the early American colonies needed to be set apart from black slaves as the formation of a social control apparatus became more pressing in plantation states. Since white bondage was a precursor of the systematic exploitation of black people, the invention of homogenizing terms became a necessity to set those groups apart. Bennett thus underlines:

Before the invention of the Negro or the white man or the words and concepts to describe them, the colonial population consisted largely of a great mass of white and black bondsmen, who occupied roughly the

⁸⁴ Cf. Cashmore 1996, "Whiteness", p. 378-379

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 379

⁸⁶ Bennett, Lerone. *The Shaping of Black America: The Struggles and Triumphs of African-Americans, 1619 to the 1990s*. New York: Penguin, 1993. qtd. in Cashmore 1996, "Whiteness", p. 378

same economic category and were treated with equal contempt by the lords of the plantations and legislatures.⁸⁷

In short, the invention of the term 'whiteness' through the process of racialization operated to camouflage – and later to explain or even legitimate – class differences and led to certain civil and social privileges for white people and, in general, a racial worldview.⁸⁸ To a large extent, 'race' was irrelevant in the beginning and was then newly functionalized through the process of racialization in order to operate as a helpful construct in the establishment of slavery and in the perpetuation of its economic dynamics. Therefore 'race' must also be seen as a category in relation to and based upon social and economic changes.

While the superiority of white skin resulted in a depreciation of black skin, it also led to the internalization of inferiority and devaluation of blackness for blacks themselves.⁸⁹ Skin-bleaching and hair-straightening are only a few expressions of this function of whiteness and the ensuing low self-esteem of black people. However, the connotations of blackness have changed in the course of the political developments of the 1950s and 1960s. The African-American Civil Rights Movement posed a serious challenge to the concept of whiteness and recoded blackness as beautiful, powerful and valuable. Charles Hamilton's *Black Power* (1967) might be seen as a prime example of this change in attitude.⁹⁰ In consequence, the conceptualization of whiteness as a color category altered as well. As Cashmore, Hernandez-Ramdwar, Frankenberg and others contend, there has been a shift to ideas such as privilege, power and social prestige in the understanding of whiteness.⁹¹ Nevertheless, notions of

⁸⁷ Bennett 1993, qtd. in Cashmore 1996, "Whiteness", p. 379

⁸⁸ For an illuminating treatise on the formation of a 'white race' as a distinct group in response to the changing social and ideological conditions see Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*. London: Verso, 1994.

⁸⁹ Cf. Cashmore 1996, "Whiteness"; Cf. Also Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1969.

⁹⁰ Hamilton, Charles. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage, 1967.

⁹¹ Cf. Cashmore 1996, "Whiteness", Hernandez-Ramdwar 1996; Cf. also Frankenberg, Ruth. (ed.) *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC et al: Duke University

purity and superiority are still swaying underneath the surface, especially with regard to incidents of racial trespassing.

Although some scholars claim that whiteness has lost its significance as a category in the discourse of 'race', I argue that it is still valuable for the analysis of any race-related context because it functions as an opposition to blackness. Whiteness must be recognized as a racialized category – and as a signifier of power. A neglect of the term would compare to a retreat from the racialized discourse. Yet I am aware that a persistent use of the term is not only a way of homogenizing a group of people, but admittedly it is also a way of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak termed *strategic essentializing* – maybe in an unavoidable reaction to the state homogenization of people of color as Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar stresses in her M.A. thesis *All o' is me* (1996).⁹² She explains her decision to maintain the term white Canadian as follows:

In much the same way that the Canadian state utilizes 'visible minority' for reasons of control and domination, so too I refer to 'White Canadian' in this paper as a way of differentiating them from people of color and Aboriginal people. Also, the descriptor 'White' speaks to the privilege inherent in this group based on skin color, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender et cetera, based in the white supremacist system operating in Canada. [...] in particular, (but not exclusively), 'White Canadian' refers

Press, 1997; Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

⁹² In his glossary of key terms in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michael Kilburn explained that in Spivak's view essentialism was not negative in its essence but rather to be eyed critically in its application. He fittingly illustrates that "[e]ssentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive. [...] 'Strategic essentialism' is like role-playing, briefly inhabiting the criminal mind in order to understand what makes it tick." ("Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak", p.2). Strategic essentialism is thus a way of deconstructing truth by calling into question how such truths are produced and passed on. Online: Kilburn, Michael. "Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak". <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bhari/Glossary.html>> Accessed on August 30th, 2009.

to Anglo-Canadians of the upper and middle-classes who benefit the most from this system.⁹³

Certainly, some of her arguments are convincing. Yet I also disagree to some extent. I argue for a use of the terms 'black' and 'white' as non-proper nouns and thus they will be written without capitalization. I made this choice to underline the constructedness of both concepts and to mark them as arbitrary and unstable. The individual preferences of authors as regards the capitalization of either one or both terms will, of course, be respected. George Elliott Clarke, for instance, prefers a capitalization of 'black' in order to underline the cultural self-assurance or "immanence" of African-Canadians.⁹⁴

Furthermore, the insistence on 'whiteness' as an analytical category in opposition to blackness appears necessary to make the existing binaries upon which racialized concepts are based visible. 'Black' and 'white' are meant to refer to the racialization of socio-political categories rather than cultural or ethnic ones. 'Race' must not be mistaken for ethnicity, even though the two concepts do overlap at times.

Racial Hybridity: mixed-race, biracial, multiracial

If categories like black and white are nothing but unstable signifiers or even misnomers, how can we create conceptual space for describing the experiences of racialized individuals without reinstating or reinforcing essentialist ideas of identity? Although many scholars have exposed the construct of 'race', popular folk concepts of 'race' linger. How are we to show the contested nature of terms like 'black' or white, mixed-race, biracial or multiracial? How can the ways of ascribing meaning to these designations be accounted for without neglecting their variations across time, space and cultural specifics? How can we move

⁹³ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1996, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Cf. Chariandy, David. "Canada in Us Now: Locating the Criticism of Black Canadian Writing." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 75 (Winter 2002): 196-216. p. 199.

away from essentializing definitions of difference and progress towards a more inclusive understanding of identity? Again – no simple answers are available.

The expression and understanding of hybrid identities can, at least, offer one way of tackling these intricacies. Hybridity can be defined as a space in and through which complex subjectivities can be voiced. It can be described as "the fractal, opaque, fragmented structure of what originally appeared as a cohesive whole"⁹⁵ or as "the mixture produced when two or more elements are fused together. It's the process or the moment of homogenization when dissimilar entities are combined and exist in complement with each other".⁹⁶ Hybridity can be expressed in many different forms: linguistic, cultural, political ones and it appears in racialized contexts. It is born within contact zones, in borderlands - at times denied, often contested, undeniably highly ambiguous. Bridging linguistic analysis and cultural criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin, for instance, proposed that multivocal language situations possess the potential for powerful disruption. This moment of disruption (reminiscent of the tearing of fabric necessary to create a quilt) holds the possibility of creating something new. It's the in-between space that proves to be most effective in its power to render claims to purity (racial and cultural ones) untenable.⁹⁷

The origin of the idea of hybridity can be traced back to the 17th century. Its roots can be found in zoological theories and horticulture. The term derives from the Latin word *hybrida*, describing the "impure", "racially contaminated" and allegedly infertile animal offspring of mixed race crossings.⁹⁸ In the 19th century, the word was first applied to human beings and became a physiological phenomenon referring to human 'half-breeds' and 'mongrels'.

⁹⁵ Rosello, Mireille. "Introduction to 'Practices of Hybridity.'" Special Issue. *Paragraph*. 18.1 (1995): p. 4.

⁹⁶ Sanga, Jaina. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, and Globalization*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001. p. 76.

⁹⁷ Cf. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin et al: Texas University Press, 1981.

⁹⁸ Cf. Cancelini, Néstor Garcia. *Culturas Híbridas*, Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989; Cf. Ifekwunigwe, Jayne. *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of 'Race', Nation and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999; Cf. Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, New York, London: Routledge, 1995.

After Darwin's theory of evolution, visible differences between humans were eventually accepted as permanent and bound to nature: thus they were racialized in scientific context. In the late 20th century, however, the notion of hybridity shifted away from the concept of 'race.' It has been reappropriated within postcolonial discourses and turned into one of the prominent key terms in explorations of *cultural* overlapping and interaction. The focus on cultural hybridity has helped illuminate the Manichean relationship between colonizer and colonized and uncover the imperial ideology of power at its base.⁹⁹ Ever since its emergence in cultural criticism, the notion of *cultural* hybridity has continuously been extended, reduced, shifted and redefined in various descriptive and analytic approaches like multi- or transculturalism.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study it becomes necessary to return to the ambiguous and uncomfortable territory of racial hybridity. Historically and etymologically the term 'racial hybridity' remains problematic and highly disputed. For a long time I hesitated in my decision as to whether the term should be employed in this study or not. I am still not completely convinced of its legitimacy, yet – once again – there is no other cogent term at hand. Existing synonyms mostly intend to camouflage the racialized discourse inherent in the concept of hybridity. Jayne Ifekwunigwe (1999), for example, suggested an alternative with the French-derived terms *métis(se)* and *metissage* to designate the offspring of differently racialized parents and the process of their genetic intermixture, respectively.¹⁰⁰ However, the significance of 'race' cannot be deprived by the use of borrowed words. On the surface such terms seem more easily digestible to the reader but underneath they turn out to be just as problematic. Moreover, the use of foreign language-derived words like *metissage* might only push racially designated identities further to the margins

⁹⁹ Cf. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1969; Cf. JanMohammed, Abdul R. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983; JanMohammed, Abdul R. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 18-23; Ashcroft, Bill and Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin "Mulatto." *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London and New York, 1998. p. 147.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ifekwunigwe 1999, p. xix.

by helping to exoticize these subjectivities. The problem underlying such terminology is still racism and thus it must be named.

At the same time the concept of hybridity surprisingly allows for taking the focus off the category of 'race' whenever it appears necessary to transcend the black and white discourse and to clear space for the interplay of other hierarchically positioned signifiers like ethnicity, sexuality, generation, class or age.¹⁰¹ In short, hybridity will be employed as a term despite its apparent inadequacies. In making it effective for this analysis of racially hybrid identities in Canadian literature it must be understood as a flexible concept that will be subject to change if necessary, and as a concept that will be applied within a specific historical and social context.

Fortunately, some very problematic words, referring to the offspring of interracial relationships and marked with the unmistakable taste of devaluation, have (almost entirely) been abandoned from academic discourses, for example designations such as 'half-caste', 'bastard' or 'mulatto'. They had been used in attempts at categorizing miscegenation, often in slave discourse, and are inherently racist.¹⁰² In response to such degrading labels scholars and writers of color, some being racially mixed themselves, have invented possible – although not necessarily serious – alternatives for designating racialized individuals. Naomi Zack speaks about the 'racially designated', while Lawrence Hill mockingly proposes the marker 'people of pigment'. George Elliott Clarke even cynically refers to the term 'zebra'. Those labels underscore the ridiculous nature of the language of 'race' and the uncertainty of concepts like racial hybridity. Both 'race' and racial hybridity are constructs of an imaginary and do not exist in reality. Yet, they do exert a powerful – at times devastating and psychologically damaging – influence on people who embody double or multiple genealogical descents, because they are rooted in and designed to uphold a social hegemony of power.

Being faced with the fact that all definitions to describe the complex identities of racially hybrid individuals must fail and will remain dissatisfactory

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ifegwunigwe 1999, p. xx.

¹⁰² Cf. Ashcroft, "Mulatto," p. 147.

in their essence, I decided to apply the terms 'mixed-race', 'biracial' and 'multiracial' interchangeably – and for lack of better alternatives--strategically (or, to speak with Spivak again, as strategic essentialism. They are meant to refer to people who are the descendants of members of socially defined, racialized groups. I am aware that these terms, too, must be acknowledged as yet other socially constructed categories and are not easily delineated. In an attempt to provide a careful definition, Ifekwunigwe (1999) argues that people whom the public usually assigns to one of these categories according to the persistent folk concept of 'race' are marked by their heterogeneity, but they also share some distinct experiences: They often have physical characteristics that reflect their difference through an alleged 'intermediate status', they have to reconcile two or multiple cultural influences or worldviews and, most importantly, are confronted with public interpretations of their visible physical markings in terms of racialized categorization.¹⁰³

Another reason for deciding in favor of 'mixed-race' and related terms is that they constitute designations that are widely used among racially mixed authors themselves although they are certainly far removed from being self-ascribed descriptors of identity. To enhance the readability of this thesis will refrain from applying single quotation marks to these words, expressing my hope that their pure existence will be reminiscent of the existence of racist ideologies. Their use is to ensure a continuing debate on their legitimacy.

The language of 'race' is imperfect and more often than not appalling, but it is also capable of calling into question social inequalities, pointing to legal injustices and defying popular folk concepts of 'race' and miscegenation. While it is also significant to underline that in the attempt to not shift away from a racialized context other signifiers of social stratification must not be neglected or pushed to the margins of analysis, I do maintain that the focus on 'race' will remain relevant for as long as racism continues to impact the lives of racialized individuals.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ifekwunigwe 1999, p. xxi.

2.2. Identities in Flux: Discourses on 'Race' and Subjectivity

"Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to the bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order."

(Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*)¹⁰⁴

The provocative and complex writings of Michel Foucault have been exerting a powerful and irrevocable influence on contemporary understandings of notions such as identity, power and truth for the past decades. His primary objective was to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects."¹⁰⁵ He had an interest in exploring the processes in which human subjectivity is constituted socially and historically and reflected on how individuals define their existence through historical subject positions (such as heterosexual, feminine, or Canadian), which are capable of giving insight into historical power relations.¹⁰⁶

Foucault's theories discard universally valid and supposedly objective truth claims. Instead, he promotes an understanding of identity as a process of *becoming*, and less as a state of *being*. In his view identities are always transient, fractional and fluid. In his view identities must always be read within specific spatial and temporal contexts, i.e. they never exist outside of social circumstances, times and places. Sean Hier explained that identity, for Foucault, is informed by "complex sets of social relations that configure to naturalize and normalize what are always temporary historical forms of knowledge about who we think we really are."¹⁰⁷ In consequence, an essential identity does not exist; and neither is there an authentic "I". Identities must hence not be seen as

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon, 1972. p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, Michel. "Afterward: The Subject and Power." *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Ed. H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982. pp. 208-264. p. 208.

¹⁰⁶ The concept of subjectivity is to be understood as the multi-faceted ways in which individuals define and present themselves. Cf. Hier, Sean and B. Singh Bolaria. "Introduction: Identities without Guarantees." *Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. Eds. Sean P. Hier and B. Singh Bolaria. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006. pp. 1-10.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hier 2006, p. 2.

manifestations of an innate, nature-bound core but are rather "illusive socio-historical constructions that never remain the same."¹⁰⁸

Foucault promotes a discursive reading of identity, making discourse - in its ability to transmit cultural and historical knowledge through language - a primary means through which identities are formed.¹⁰⁹ Such discourses are flexible, not dominant and fixed, systems of meaning and remain open to subversion, redefinition or challenge. Identity is neither absolute nor natural. A conceptual framework for analyzing identities in the Foucaultian sense must be anti-essentialist, question regimes of truth (like racial inferiority and superiority) and reject transhistorical approaches - just like the concept of the quilt. It is capable of responding to and reflecting the changing subject positions through which identities are voiced. As a result, Foucault's re-conceptualization of identity also had a considerable impact on the perception of 'race' as a social construction situated in time and space.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Hier 2006, p. 3

¹⁰⁹ Stuart Hall defined 'discourse' in "Racism and Reaction" as "sets of ready-made and pre-constituted 'experiencings' displayed and arranged through language." Similarly, Sean Hier added that 'discourse' involves "the predominant linguistic and semiotic systems that people use to transmit cultural and historical meanings." Cf. Hall, Stuart. "Racism and Reaction." *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain*. London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1977. p.322; Cf. Hier 2006, p. 3

¹¹⁰ Cf. Hier 2006, p. 4

2.2.1 'Race Theory' – a Brief Historical Review

William Dunbar first used the term 'race' in English in a poem in 1508 and it then lingered in the language as a word referring to classes of people or things.¹¹¹ However, it was not until the late 18th or beginning 19th century that the concept of 'race' came to denote human beings distinguishable by inherited physical characteristics. Only then it gained significance as a concept for classification and implied a hierarchical order of people(s).

Before that, in the 16th and 17th century, concepts such as pagan vs. civilized, Christian vs. non-Christian, heathen or barbarian had been more frequently employed as categories of classification. Then peoples were described along geographical lines. As well, physical features – skin color, for example – were consulted for explaining differences in human beings who occupied geographically discrete regions. François Bernier was among the first scholars who introduced a number of such categories.¹¹² In general, the concept of 'race' was infused with Western European interpretations of the Bible and thus religion formed the major framework for discourses on 'race'.¹¹³ Predominant was the theory of monogenesis, which claimed that mankind exclusively descended from Adam and Eve. Disparities between humans were explained by both divine intentions and varying climate conditions (=environmentalism).¹¹⁴

In the 18th century, the discourse of 'race' surfaced more frequently and the theory of polygenesis came to pose a serious challenge to its predecessor. Environmentalist claims were called into question and, in opposition to the idea of monogenesis, the theory of polygenesis contended that in spite of its common descent from Adam and Eve mankind split into separate types, which were not yet designated as 'races' and which expressed themselves in divergent

¹¹¹ Cf. Banton, Michael. *Racial Theories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Cf. also Ashcroft 1996, p. 199.

¹¹² Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 199.

¹¹³ Cf. Hier 2006, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *ibid*

physical characteristics.¹¹⁵ It was Immanuel Kant, whose *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) made first use of the phrase "races of mankind". Kant used the concept of 'race' explicitly to denote biologically and physically distinctive categories of human beings.¹¹⁶

Debates searching for the explanation of human variation continued throughout the 18th century and eventually found 'scientific' support in the discoveries of transitional fossils at the beginning of the 19th century. These discoveries led natural scientists to the development of still elementary theories of transmutation, i.e. the gradual evolution from one species to another one. Along this line, the writings of Swedish zoologist and botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) and German physiologist Johan Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) offered first systems of racial classification.

Linnaeus, although he was not an evolutionist but a natural theologian by conviction, offered with his famous *Systema Naturae* (1758/59) a taxonomy that structured nature in a hierarchy and provided the basis for what is still used as a normative system of classification in biological sciences today.¹¹⁷ His arguments were founded on the observation of physical characteristics. Linnaeus also presented a concept of 'race' for human beings, in which he included mythological creatures. He divided mankind into Africanus, Americanus, Asiaticus, Europeanus und Monstrosus on account of place of origin and, significantly, on skin color. He assigns specific behavioral characteristics and physiological features to each 'race'. Notably, the European 'race', for example, is deemed pale-skinned, brawny, keen-witted and inventive while the African 'race' is described as dark-skinned, phlegmatic and weak.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Cf. *ibid*

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 200.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Quammen, David. "Linné: Er ordnete die Natur." *National Geographic Deutschland*. (Juni 2007): 155-168; for a general overview of Linnaeus and his achievement see "Carl Linnaeus" Available Online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Linnaeus>, Accessed August 2nd, 2009

¹¹⁸ Cf. Linnaeus, Carl. "Systema naturae per regna tria naturae." 1767. p. 29 Available Online: Google Books, <<http://books.google.com/books?id=Ix0AAAAAQAAJ&pg=PP6&hl=de#v=onepage&q=&f=false>>, Accessed August 2nd, 2009.

Blumenbach was situated at the University of Göttingen where he held medical lectures. His (however questionable) accomplishments lie in having developed a system of racial classification based on craniometrical research. By analyzing the data of human skulls and interpreting physiological difference Blumenbach draw conclusions on how the human species had split into different 'races'. He claimed the existence of five groups: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian (=Negroid) and American.¹¹⁹ He, too, attempted to link physiological characteristics to mental abilities and pattern of group behavior. Blumenbach characterized the Caucasian race as "the Europeans, with the exception of the Lapps, and the rest of the true Finns, and the western Asiatics this side the Obi, the Caspian Sea, and the Ganges along with the people of North Africa" whom he described as "white in colour, with red cheeks, and, according to the European conception of beauty in the countenance and shape of the skull, the most handsome of men."¹²⁰ The Ethiopians were, in turn, portrayed as having "curly hair, jaw-bones projecting forwards, puffy lips and snub noses".¹²¹

However, it must be emphasized that Blumenbach did not believe in the physical or mental inferiority of black people. In order to prove his point, he dedicated an entire chapter of his *The Anthropological Treatises* to contradict the belief that "the negroes are specifically different in their bodily structure from other men, and must also be placed considerably in the rear, from the condition of their obtuse mental capacities."¹²² Concluding his elaborations to bring about evidence for the equality of the Ethiopian race, Blumenbach declared:

¹¹⁹ Cf. Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich. *Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte*. ed. Robert Bemasconi. Nachdr. der Ausgabe Leipzig 1798]. Bristol et al: Thoemmes, 2001; Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich. *The Anthropological Treatises*. London: Longman, 1865.

¹²⁰ Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich. *The Anthropological Treatises*. London: Longman, 1865. p. 303-304.

¹²¹ *ibid.* p. 304.

¹²² *ibid.* p. 305.

I am of the opinion that after all these numerous instances I have brought together of negroes of capacity, it would not be difficult to mention entire well-known provinces of Europe, from out of which you would not easily expect to obtain off-hand such good authors, poets, philosophers, and correspondents of the Paris Academy; and on the other hand, there is no so-called savage nation known under the sun which has so much distinguished itself by such examples of perfectibility and original capacity for scientific culture, and thereby attached itself so closely to the most civilized nations of the earth, *as the Negro*.¹²³

Until today Blumenbach's typology of human 'races' remains one of the most significant works that had a share in conceptualizing theories of 'races'. Blumenbach's ideas (however distorted and abused) had a lasting impact on later theories of scientific racism and, moreover, as Werner Sollors pointed out, on early ideas about racial hybridization.¹²⁴

The systems proposed by Linnaeus and Blumenbach exposed many beliefs of the theory of monogenesis as flawed and discussions about the underlying mechanisms of human evolution ensued.¹²⁵ Gradually, as Bill Ashcroft emphasized, the concept of 'race' was transformed from "signifying, in its literary sense, a line of descent that a group defined by historical continuity, to its scientific sense of 'race' as a zoologically and biologically defined group."¹²⁶ Most influential, at that time, was the work of Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), a French anatomist and early paleontologist, who with his theory of functionalism and his belief in the fixity of species presented a 'race' theory in 1805 that assumed the existence of three distinct 'races': the white, the yellow and the black 'race' (later known as Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid). Though his theoretical framework was hardly scientifically convincing and

¹²³ *ibid.* p. 312 [emphasis by Blumenbach]

¹²⁴ Cf. Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge et al: Harvard University Press, 1997. pp 61-69.

¹²⁵ Cf. Hier 2006, p. 6.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 200.

heavily contested, his ideas remained prominent because of ideological reasons. Cuvier's theory allowed for a hierarchical typology of superior and inferior groups of people and influenced Charles Hamilton Smith's *The Natural History of Human Species* (1848), *The Races of Man* (1850) by Robert Knox or Count de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des Races humaines* (1853).¹²⁷

These elaborations on the nature of 'race' eventually culminated in the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). Darwin introduced the idea of natural selection and proposed that some members of the same species were fitter for survival in specific environmental contexts than others because they had developed slightly deviating physical features. His theory exerted a lasting influence on Western Europe, especially on scientific debates in Victorian England. Darwin opposed the belief in an invariable, permanent world, raised doubt about the belief in divine creation and settled the controversy over mono- and polygenesis. Most importantly, however, the simplification and re-contextualization of Darwin's theory in colonialist and imperialist thought resulted in the conceptual opposition of racial 'purity' and racial 'contamination' in Social Darwinism and gave rise to eugenic endeavors, as for example propagated by Francis Galton.¹²⁸ By the end of the 19th century, 'race' had been established as an ideology that took for granted that the white 'race' was innately superior to others.

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid*; Cf. Marshall, Keith and Magubane, Zine. "This Missing Ideological Link in the Genealogy of Race" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, GA, Aug 16, 2003* <Not available>. 2009-05-26 <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p107072_index.html> Accessed on August 2nd, 2009; Cf. also Gobineau, Arthur de. "The Inequality of Races [1854]." *Nations and Identities*. ed. Vincent Pecora. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001. pp. 131-141; Knox, Robert. *The Races of Men: a philosophical enquiry into the influence of Race over the destinies of nations*. 2nd. ed. London, 1862; Smith, Charles Hamilton. *The Natural History of the Human Species: its typical forms, primeval distribution, filiations and migrations*. Edinburgh: Lizars, 1848.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 201; Cf. Galton, Francis. *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*. New York and London: Friedmann, 1978; Obermann-Jeschke, Dorothee. *Eugenik im Wandel: Kontinuitäten, Brüche, Transformationen: Eine diskursgeschichtliche Analyse*. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2008. (especially chapter V. 2 "Francis Galton: Die Begründung von Eugenik", pp. 71-84)

In the early 20th century the legitimacy of 'race' was strengthened by various scientific inquiries about the origin of racial variation. World War II put a temporary hold on such theories when the UNESCO published the *Statement of the Nature of Race and Racial Difference* (1951) in the aftermath of the holocaust. This report contended that mental characteristics or intellectual abilities cannot be explained by genetic differences and should thus not be referred to when it comes to racial classification. Instead, the significance of the social environment was emphasized as a driving force in the creation of individual (and national) identity.¹²⁹

The 1960s then returned to a conservative neo- or socio-biologism which aimed at explaining human behavior through ancient instincts (which – at best – could only be altered in superior cultures) and considered the emergence of different cultures as the result of biological selection processes. Richardson and Spear's *Race, Culture and Intelligence* (1972) and Baxter and Samson's *Race and Social Difference* (1972) are only two examples of works which continue to put a claim on the centrality of 'race' with regard to human variation.¹³⁰ Simultaneously, the 1970s gave birth to opposing views on 'race' that (at least on the surface) decentralized 'race' as an identity marker and put emphasis on ethnicity instead. Along this line, the concept of 'race' shifted from a genetic and biological approach to an understanding of 'race' as a social and cultural phenomenon.¹³¹ Frantz Fanon, for instance, argued that categories like 'blackness', which were informed by racist and imperialist ideologies, could establish a psychological force shown in the (negative) self-construction of the colonized subject and thus keep their discursive power.¹³²

¹²⁹ Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 204.

¹³⁰ Cf. *ibid*; Cf. also Baxter, P. and B. Sansom. *Race and Social Difference: Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; Cf. Richardson, Ken and David Spears. *Race, Culture and Intelligence*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

¹³¹ Cf. Ashcroft 1996, p. 205.

¹³² Cf. Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness" [1952]. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 323-326.

2.2.2. "Identities Without Guarantees" and the Critique of Sameness: Contemporary Race Theory

One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is, This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize – someone who is, for example, racially 'mixed' or of an ethnic/racial group with which we are not familiar. Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning. Without a racial identity, one is in danger of having no identity.

(Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*)¹³³

In their highly significant publication *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994) Michael Omi and Howard Winant claim "race will *always* be at the center of the American experience." Looking at the history of 'race' as a concept for human classification this thesis does not sound illogical or unreasonable.¹³⁴ Yet, from a contemporary point of view that considers movements and developments in the context of globalization, one must also admit that "societies, cultures, civilizations and so forth are constantly changing."¹³⁵ These changes will also be reflected in the re-situation of 'race' and the re-articulation of 'race' theories. In contemporary theoretical approaches, scholars (mostly) agree on the social construction of 'race' and its significance as an ideology that holds an impact on people's lives. However, that's usually where agreement ends. As Hier's comprehensive overview on studies of 'race' and ethnicity outlines, academics either reject 'race' as an analytical category altogether because they regard it as a scientific myth – and as such it should be devoid of analytical value – or they aim at addressing the social reality of 'race' and set out to elucidate the ways in

¹³³ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York et al: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986. p. 62.

¹³⁴ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 5 (original emphasis); Cf. also Hier 2006, p. 11

¹³⁵ Cf. Hier 2006, p. 11.

which "racial identities are experienced by different, and often, disadvantaged groups."¹³⁶

The above stated citation from Omi and Winant's influential publication at the chapter's opening illustrates a few significant truths: First, 'race' remains (unfortunately, at least in practice) the central axis of social relations, since everyday classifications of racial identity do exercise influence over our perception of people. Second, the mixed-race individual appears to disturb the peace by standing outside of those categories by which people structure their experiences. Third, the mixed-race experience is often neglected in contemporary 'race' theory which – apparently – fails to offer convincing (or rather flexible) models in which bi- or multiracial people find themselves reflected and on account of which they can explain their state of being to themselves and to others.¹³⁷

Obviously, their process of "racial formation" is very different from that of people who easily fit into monoracial categories. Omi and Winant describe this process as one "by which social, economic and political forces determine the consent and importance of social categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning."¹³⁸ They argue that it is influenced by the interplay of micro level relations (i.e. our individual decisions) and macro level relations (i.e. social structures). Eventually, Omi and Winant settle on the agreement that "race is an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle."¹³⁹ In their understanding of 'race' as a concept, Omi and Winant open up some space for a conceptualization of non-fixed and fluid identities that might prove useful – or at least a basis – for the analysis of newly emerging, unfixed subjectivities as those of racially mixed people appear to be.

¹³⁶ Hier 2006, p. 13.

¹³⁷ Cf. Hernandez-Ramdwar 1996, p. 16.

¹³⁸ Omi and Winant 1986, p. 23.

¹³⁹ Omi and Winant (1994), p. 68.

In his effort to rethink the concepts of 'race' and ethnicity within black cultural criticism in Britain, Stuart Hall offers a pertinent concept that helps in the analysis of human experiences in the context of racial hybridity. He argues for a politics of difference that accepts and recognizes the heterogeneity of black subject positions, identities and interests. Part of this process of recognition is to take into consideration that black subjectivities cannot be represented "without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity".¹⁴⁰ Hall stresses that those identities mainly spring from a subjective positioning of the human being rather than from essentialized notions of 'race' or inherited cultural assets. He promotes a "new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses *difference*" and deliberately leaves room for identities positioned at the margins, which are nevertheless grounded in history.¹⁴¹ "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past," Hall concludes.¹⁴²

In his theory of identity, Hall mostly criticizes that academics often postulate a relationship between culture and biology in contemporary cultural criticism while simultaneously declaring the death of 'race' as a biological reality. In the 20th century culture and biology have become metonymical, Hall explains. The problem lies in that scholars consider 'race' to be a false, deterministic idea, yet then retreat from this conviction to establish the cultural and social characteristics of a particular 'race' of people. Hall does not deny the existence of physical (and cultural) differences. What is significant in Hall's view is the process of assigning meaning to those differences. The differences themselves, Hall claims, are no predicament but what is problematic is people's faith in scientific knowledge. Heavily drawing on Jacques Derrida's idea of

¹⁴⁰ Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 223-227. p. 226.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 227 (emphasis by Hall)

¹⁴² Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London et al: Arnold, 1996. pp. 110-121. p. 112.

différance "as a marker which sets up disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the world", Hall explains that his notion of difference is able to "challenge fixed binaries which stabilize meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings."¹⁴³

Hall calls attention to the cultural function of science which, in his view, works to "fix human group difference and to establish a system of meaning whereby one group of people is understood to be different from another group of people based on a range of cultural characteristics." ¹⁴⁴ Instead of relying on a false "guarantee of race" in social studies, Hall demands the abandonment of this idea. Neither cultural identity nor cultural diversity should be naturalized: Identities cannot and must not be fixed. In extension of Hall's theory of identity, Sean Hier suggests to give conceptual space to the development of "identities without guarantees".¹⁴⁵ Hier explains that such a notion of identity would refrain from relying on a biological framework and permits a politics of inclusion that allows for ethic responsibility, tolerance and acceptance. In consequence, Hall and Hier's concepts stress the significance of *self-constructed* (as opposed to heteronomous) identities (not 'races'!) and leave room for a great heterogeneity of subjectivities. Hall concludes that new approaches to cultural criticism must strive for

the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category of 'black'; that is the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed

¹⁴³ Hall 1996, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 115; for further explanations on Derrida's idea of *différance* Cf. Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. London et al: Routledge, 2003. p. 32.

¹⁴⁴ Hier 2006, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. also Hier 2006, p. 9.

transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature.¹⁴⁶

Since such "identities without guarantees" - as Hall and Hier propose - are capable of escaping the bond established between biology and culture, they may be inclusive of hybrid identities as well. Most significantly, such a concept of identity consents to the self-constitution of the racialized subject and can thus be very valuable in both black and mixed-race studies.

Paul Gilroy: Diaspora and the Critique of Sameness

In "Identity, Belonging and the Critique of Sameness" Paul Gilroy gives credit to the enduring and yet increasing importance of the concept of identity in both cultural criticism and real life. Gilroy views identity as "a means to understand the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical setting in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed."¹⁴⁷ However, he makes clear that identity must be problematized as a concept, in particular when it comes to endeavors of group formation. As soon as collectivities consider and reflect upon what they have in common - even if such binding links are only imaginary ones - tensions are set free around the constitution and eventual enforcement of possible boundaries and around the thus evolving question of belonging. In realizing the formation of cultural or political units, human beings extract sameness out of difference. In such moments of constituting collectivities, Gilroy ensures, "identity becomes a question of power and authority."¹⁴⁸

For Gilroy, identities born out of such endeavors are dangerous in their capacity to reinforce essentialism and in re-establishing the questionable link

¹⁴⁶ Hall 1995, p. 225.

¹⁴⁷ Gilroy, Paul. "Identity, Belonging and the Critique of Sameness". Hier, Sean and B. Singh Bolaria. "Introduction: Identities without Guarantees." *Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. eds. Sean P. Hier and B. Singh Bolaria. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006. pp. 117-126. p. 117.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 118.

between nature and culture. They reduce identity to an absolute, uncomplicated expression of 'pure sameness' which denies the persistent process of self-making. Identity then becomes something to be possessed and displayed.¹⁴⁹ Gilroy concludes:

When identity refers to an indelible mark or code somehow written into the bodies of its carriers, 'otherness' can only be a threat. Identity is latent destiny. Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation. [...] The scope for individual agency dwindles and then disappears. People become bearers of differences that the rhetoric of absolute identity invents and then invites them to celebrate.¹⁵⁰

It is exactly this open and profound critique of sameness that makes Gilroy's concept of identity so very useful for the analysis of mixed-race subjectivities. In various cross-cultural examples he illustrates how cultural or political groups of people are afraid of difference. "Difference," Gilroy explains, "corrupts and compromises identity."¹⁵¹ It is the recognition of difference that people often experience as pivotal moments which are filled with the air of anxiety and potential threat and which irrevocably triggers a reaction in defense of sameness. The hazard of dilution and contamination – "crossing as mixture and movement" – must be shielded against.¹⁵²

The threat inherent in all kinds of mixtures and crossings, Gilroy argues, is even worse than the acknowledgement of difference, the confrontation with *Otherness*, itself:

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 119-120.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

Different people are certainly hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared with the hatred turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and the partially familiar. To have mixed is to have been party to a great betrayal.¹⁵³

In expansion of Gilroy's realization, one can state that racial and cultural hybridity unsettle seemingly stable (and yet tremendously fragile) territories of imagined sameness. The expression of racially mixed subjectivities thus calls for a defensive response. It constitutes a potential threat to unity. The available options for those who feel the compulsion to protect and secure their sameness are few: "separation and slaughter" (in Gilroy's terminology), exclusion and destruction (in mine).¹⁵⁴

To overcome the intricacies revolving around such a defensive and absolute notion of identity Gilroy proposes the idea of the diaspora as a helpful alternative in describing and explaining the emergence of 'global' 21st-century identities. Diaspora may serve as an alternative concept to understandings of 'race', nation or culture which are rooted in the absolute, deterministic and inflexible framework established in relationships between nature, body and environment. Diaspora, Gilroy claims instead, "identifies a relational network" and

posits important tensions between here and there, between then and now, between seed in the bag, the packet, the pocket and seed in the ground, the fruit, or the body. By focusing attention equally on sameness within differentiation and the differentiation within sameness, diaspora disturbs the suggestion that political and cultural identity might be understood via the analogy of indistinguishable pleas lodged in the protective pods of closed kinship and subspecies being.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *ibid*, p. 122.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 124.

Diasporic identities must hence be comprehended as being always creolized, and hybridized, especially when they emerge from racialized tension.¹⁵⁶

Paul Gilroy's understanding of diasporic identities offers a constructive idea in terms of describing and analyzing the experiences of racially mixed individuals. Their identities, too, are neither absolute nor fixed. Their visible difference is threatening because it avoids simple classification on the basis of categories of sameness. Their belonging is thus continuously questioned; they face (polylateral) communal exclusion and (multiple) discrimination; they are familiar with the experiences of dispersal and insulation (in both its literal and figural meaning). Mixed-race subjects often speak from different points of reference, in time and space, and are incompatible with essentialized notions of nation, culture, ethnic community, or body. In a nutshell, Gilroy's idea allows for a conceptualization of mixed-race subjectivities as expressions of flexible, fluid, multiple and yet webbed identities.

George Elliott Clarke: The Dialectics of Black Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy bewails "the tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures" and maintains that the focus on the national assets of any culture is inappropriate in both literary analysis and cultural criticism.¹⁵⁷ He criticizes that "groups have fallen back on the idea of cultural nationalism, on the overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of 'black' and 'white' people."¹⁵⁸ If there is one black Canadian critic who has repeatedly been criticized for

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. p. 7; qtd. in Chariandy, David. "'Canada in Us Now': Locating the Criticism of Black Canadian Writing." *Essays on Canadian Writing. Special Issue "Race"*. 75 (Winter 2002): 196-216. p. 199.

¹⁵⁸ Gilroy 1993, p. 2; qtd. in Chariandy 2002, p.199

generating and perpetuating the idea of black cultural nationalism, it will be George Elliott Clarke. For many decades, Clarke has been committed to unearthing, chronicling, and analyzing examples of African-Canadian literature and orature that date back to periods before the publicly noticed arrival of Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s. Two of his primary academic achievements – and there are far too many to adequately list them here – have been the publication of *African Canadiana: A Primary Bibliography of Literature by African-Canadian Authors 1785-1996*, in which Clarke gathered a corpus of texts written and published by black Canadians in both English and French, and the compilation of the first anthology of Africadian writers, *Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing* (1991/92). One of his objectives in these projects was the construction of a "genesis" of African-Canadian literature, including its preferred themes and techniques. Especially *Fire on the Water* was a collection "born of necessity: to witness words that once existed in invisibility."¹⁵⁹ Another objective was to create a "vision of community" which – in Clarke's view – is simultaneously "spiritual *and* political".¹⁶⁰ It is the idea of the "nation" that Clarke evokes in the introduction to *Fire on the Water* and in numerous other publications, for example in "Honouring African-Canadian Geography: Mapping Black Presence in Atlantic Canada" (1997). In this article, Clarke proudly voices his claim to Canada (while alluding to a famous poem by Langston Hughes):

I claim this landscape for my own. It was watered by the slave blood of all those Black people who preceded me and I now water it with my tears. [...] I, too, sing, Canada. This land is my land.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Clarke, George Elliott. "Declaration". *Fire on the Water: an Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol 1. ed. George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1991. p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Clarke, George Elliott. "Introduction: Fire on the Water: A First Portrait of Africadian Literature." *Fire on the Water: an Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol 1. ed. George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1991. pp. 11-29.

¹⁶¹ Clarke, George Elliott. "Honouring African-Canadian Geography: Mapping Black presence in Atlantic Canada." *Border/Lines* 45 (Dec 1997): 35-39. p. 39

Clarke has been eager to carve out an (or perhaps even the?) image of black Canada – in particular the image of Africadia – as a "nation". For this purpose he suggests the existence of a relationships between land and blood, people and spirit to delineate Africadia with the help of its "distinct historical and cultural features such as its Loyalist heritage, religious and cultural conservatism, and antimodern attitudes".¹⁶² Without doubt, Clarke demonstrates a strong leaning to the concept of cultural nationalism, a fact that is mirrored not only in his own pieces of creative writing but likewise in his countless academic essays and critical reviews.

Being a prolific and alert scholar, Clarke has been very conscious of the criticism directed at his celebration of cultural nationalism in black Canadian writing and he has publicly acted in response to it several times. For instance, he counters Gilroy's position of anti-nationalism in "Must all Blackness Be American?: Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tightrope Time', or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*" (1996). In this essay, Clarke discusses Walter Borden's one-person play from 1986 and addresses his deliberate Canadian recontextualization of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1958). He points out that it was Gilroy's intention to dissent from "Ameriocentricity"¹⁶³ and reveal the important contributions of the African communities in the Caribbean, Great Britain and Africa, in short, the "transcultural, international formation [called] the black Atlantic".¹⁶⁴ Admittedly, Gilroy omits Canada on his map of the black Atlantic. Clarke reacts to this *faux pas* and accuses Gilroy of succumbing to the only too familiar "Ameriocentric blindness".¹⁶⁵

Gilroy speaks up against the pitfalls of ethnic absolutism, yet Clarke lays blame on him for resurrecting the idea of pan-Africanism (under the cover of a pan-Atlanticism) while simultaneously endorsing an old-fashioned nationalism

¹⁶² Chariandy 2002, p. 199.

¹⁶³ Gilroy 1993, p. 191.

¹⁶⁴ Gilroy 1993, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Clarke, George Elliott. "Must all Blackness be American?: Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tightrope Time', or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. 28.3 (1996): 56-71. p. 65.

that implies the dependence of the different cultures of the black Atlantic on the black culture created in the 'new world', i.e. U.S. America. In Clarke's opinion, Gilroy "denies the truth that, as Borden's work demonstrates, utterances of 'unamerican' blackness often represent deliberate 'deformations' or reformulations of African-American cultural productions."¹⁶⁶ Despite his initial point, as Clarke argues, Gilroy sets out to Americanize blackness once more. Clinging to the validity of the concept of cultural nationalism, Clarke concludes his discussion by enforcing his claim that "the canon of African-Canadian literature emerges when a writer or a critic declares his or her membership in that tradition. [...] All narrative pursues an original identity, and poetry declares it."¹⁶⁷

However, what George Elliott Clarke neglects to do in his critique of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (because he only marginally admits this fact) is to pay attention to Gilroy's proposal of an alternative choice, which opposes notions of cultural nationalism and ethnic absolutism. Gilroy refers to this as a formidable task: "the theorization of creolization, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity."¹⁶⁸ He argues that most texts produced by black writers – independent of their places of origin and their places of reference – tend to have an "unashamedly hybrid character"¹⁶⁹ and thus render simplistic (i.e. essentialist) readings of such works impossible. Yet Clarke's argument that cultural nationalism never fully evaporate even in hybrid literatures lingers. He posits that it is through the techniques of hybridization that "new understandings of the native (or post-colonial) culture [are] articulated" and the black writer's expression of what Clarke calls *Africadianité* is even reinforced.¹⁷⁰

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that Gilroy as well as Clarke acknowledge the existence of hybridity in black literatures, yet they strive for incompatible goals: For Gilroy, the mere existence of hybridity in various forms

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁸ Gilroy 1993, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁰ Clarke 1996, p. 65.

of cultural expressions is *per se* an indication of the unstable nature of identities and renders notions of essentialism and nationalism inadequate. Clarke, however, regards hybridization as a technique that African-Canadian writers employ to express their rootedness in the land, to reformulate the meaning of Canadianness (with its implicit racial and cultural heterogeneity). Furthermore, Clarke's insistence on the existence of "a hybrid people" answers to the historical particularities (of racial and cultural cross-breeding) of black Canada.¹⁷¹ In consequence, he also considers African-Canadian identities and literatures "a species of hybridity".¹⁷² Importantly, as David Chariandy was the first to emphasize, Clarke's notion of cultural nationalism avoids one of the pitfalls of essentialism, namely the claim to purity.¹⁷³ He favors establishing a bond between the essentialist, tradition-based idea of cultural nationalism and the undeniable reality of cultural hybridity. Those seemingly contradictory concepts are not irreconcilable to him.

Rinaldo Walcott: Theorizing the Diaspora, or the Disruption of Blackness

Another moment in which Clarke's adherence to black cultural nationalism came to light was his harsh (and at times nonprofessionally personal) critique of Rinaldo Walcott's concept of diasporic blackness in *Black Like Who?* (1997). Walcott defines 'blackness' neither as a biological category nor as a more or less reliable cultural one. Rather he acknowledges that black Canadian expressions are "not merely national products, but [...] occupy the space of the in-between, vacillating between national borders and diasporic desires, ambitions and disappointments."¹⁷⁴ Walcott explains that

¹⁷¹ Clarke 1991, p. 24.

¹⁷² Clarke, George Elliott. "Introduction" *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature*. ed. George Elliott Clarke. Toronto: McClelland, 1997. pp. xi-xxviii. p. xii

¹⁷³ Cf. Chariandy, David. "Canada in Us Now": Locating the Criticism of Black Canadian Writing." *Essays on Canadian Writing. Special Issue "Race"*. 75 (Winter 2002): 196-216.

¹⁷⁴ Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing, Black, Canada*. p. xii; Cf. also Chariandy 2002, p. 204

African-Canadians have produced for themselves a diasporic consciousness and sensibility from which they derive a series of transnational identifications with various forms of global 'blackness'. [...] It is a diaspora consciousness and sensibility that is fully aware of other forms of 'blackness' as existing beyond the borders of the nation-state, but importantly as somehow tied into how 'blackness' is lived and experienced within the boundaries of the nation of Canada.¹⁷⁵

Apparently, Walcott is aware of both Canada's distinct black culture and the processes of relocation, displacement and transnational migration that all groups within the black diaspora seem to have experienced. He gives preferentiality to an instable, flexible blackness that may have Canada as a place to speak from or some other place within the worldwide black diaspora. This blackness is always historicized, too. Yet Walcott explicitly retreats from nationalist discourses in his analyses of black Canadian culture(s) and in defining black identities.¹⁷⁶ Instead he teaches to respect and appreciate the in-between subjectivities of black Canadians. In his first introduction to *Black Like Who?* Walcott expounds this idea and writes: "The sliding signifier of blackness intends to continue to slide and remain out of bounds. And that is a good thing. Yet to read blackness as merely 'playful' is to fall into willful denial of what it means to live black."¹⁷⁷ In consequence, he even refrains from employing the term African-Canadian, for he considers it an inadequate loan from the African-American context and feels that it carries the burden of ethnicity. To Walcott, the act of naming based on ethnicity must be eyed critically because it is often "deployed in an attempt to deny the complexity of what might and might not

¹⁷⁵ Walcott, Rinaldo. "Emerging Diaspora Consciousness among African-Canadians in Toronto." *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*. Vol. 1: Overview and Topics. eds. Melvin Ember et al. New York: Springer, 2004, pp. 438-445. pp. 439-440.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Charinady 2002, p. 204

¹⁷⁷ Walcott 2003, p. 25

constitute blackness."¹⁷⁸ Later in his introduction, Walcott illustrates this choice further:

when I use the term blackness, I mean to signal blackness as a sign, one that carries with it particular histories of resistance and domination. But blackness is also a sign which is never closed and always under contestation. Blackness for me, like black Canadian, allows for a certain kind of malleability and open-endedness which means that questions of blackness far exceed the categories of the biological and the ethnic. I deploy blackness as a discourse, but that discourse is embedded in a history or a set of histories which are messy and contested. [These] various kinds of blackness are always in progress, always in the process of becoming.¹⁷⁹

Walcott regards blackness as a discursive outcome and, considering this, his line of arguments is quite opposed to that of George Elliott Clarke, even if we take into account Clarke's notion of the cultural hybridity inherent in black Canadian identities. Eventually, Walcott moves even further from the nationalist discourse in his definition of blackness and offers an innovative, political understanding of it in "Black Subjectivities: Ethnicity, Race and the Politics of Film in Canada":

If definitions of black Canadian are centered around political practices/act(ion)s that signal a transgression of instituted forms of domination, then black Canadian might be anyone who resists in concerted ways, with a vision of emancipation, all forms of domination. Black Canadian is a counter-narrative or utterance that calls into question the very conditions of nation-bound identity at the same time as national discourses attempt to render blackness outside the nation. My

¹⁷⁸ Walcott 2003, p. 27

¹⁷⁹ Walcott 2003, pp. 27-28

articulation of black Canadian will undoubtedly leave some feeling that the borders are open, an invitation to all. What I am after is the attempt to articulate, and struggle to create, a space that acknowledges transgressing the usual and assumed as an important practice of the political.¹⁸⁰

All in all, Walcott considers blackness an act of transgression that cannot exist within fixed (national) borders and values it as an expression of resistance against domination. As Chariandy rightly observes, Walcott hereby reacts and opposes to the "mainstream colonization of race".¹⁸¹

With regard to racially hyphenated identities, Walcott's approach to blackness offers some potential for grasping the nature of mixed-race identities, too. Since his notion of blackness is meant to be disruptive, troublesome and inevitably politically contested, biracial or multiracial identities fit neatly into his concept, for they *per se* represent expressions of resistance and evoke moments/acts of transgression. Furthermore, his concept does not rely on ethnicity as a defining aspect but merely on a transnational political consciousness. Most significantly, however, Walcott's definition of (Canadian) blackness refrains from establishing border(line)s. Black identities can be molded and re-molded; they are flexible and always in the process of making. Yet they are also connected to (and influenced by) a specific historical experience. Simultaneously, they are imbued with a global, political sensibility that provides them with unique insight and strength in the struggle against domination.

¹⁸⁰ Walcott 2003, p. 103; Notably, Afro-German writers and activists have put forward a similar definition of blackness within the German historical and cultural context. To them, blackness also represents a category of political resistance, a category that remains open to all those who wish to identify as black since they do not match mainstream expectations (i.e. white skin) and continue to suffer from racism. Cf. Oguntoye, Katharina. *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992.

¹⁸¹ Chariadny 2002, p. 207

2.3. Uncertain Crossings: Racial Hybridity and Post-Colonial Belonging

"I may know what I am not (i.e. White, Inuit, or Japanese), but does that mean I know what I am [...]?"

(Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar,

All o' we is me: Mixed-Race Identity in the Caribbean-Canadian Context)

"How does it feel to be a problem?" African-American scholar and philosopher W.E.B. DuBois asked back in 1903. In his landmark publication *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois intended to explore "the strange meaning of being black [...] in the dawning of the Twentieth Century"¹⁸² and he correctly predicted that one of the major problems of the 20th century would be the color line.¹⁸³ Now, more than 100 years after DuBois, the impact of the color line is almost as persistent as ever; and I daresay that in the dawning of the 21st century the intricacies revolving around the color line will pose one of the major challenges of this century: In the age of globalization, networking, international migration, electronic communication and economic interconnectedness the question of *hybridity* will become manifest.

In history, the social categorizations of racially hybrid people differed regionally and in regard to specific cultural contexts. As Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar pointed out so poignantly in the epigraph above, it has been easier to explain what racially mixed individuals were not than to find categories in which they could be adequately described or, importantly, adequately describe themselves.¹⁸⁴ Being racially mixed has meant and still means to be constructed as different. This difference is reflected in the various social positions (linked to certain economic, civil and political rights) which racially mixed people were offered in specific times and places, and in particular within colonial contexts.

¹⁸² DuBois, William E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. Chicago: McClurg, 1903, p. 3

¹⁸³ Cf. DuBois 1903

¹⁸⁴ In *Who is Black?* (1991) Davis lists seven status positions that racially mixed people were relegated to. Cf. Davis, James F. *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1991.

In the Caribbean, for example, an intermediate class of managers, tradesmen and small proprietors was established due to the small number of whites.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, racially mixed people formed a third, intermediate, social group of the bourgeoisie in Charleston or New Orleans.¹⁸⁶ The 'mulattoes' of Haiti and the mestizos of Mexico were also elevated socially and achieved a higher social status than their indigenous parents. This shows that on the one hand a non-white ancestry was regarded the ultimate in genealogical degeneration; on the other hand, a mixed descent puzzled and intrigued people and led to some social and economic privileges.¹⁸⁷

Despite the different status which racially mixed people inhabit in diverse historical and cultural contexts, they usually share the experience of having been defined in terms of both their ambiguity and their marginality. Because of their uncertain position(s) between center and periphery, attitudes towards racial intermixture have been reflections of this uncertainty. Generally, objection against racial intermixture predominates at the core of racial anxiety.¹⁸⁸ Miscegenation was seen as a threat to purity – and by extension as a threat to whiteness. Although interethnic and interracial mating and marriages have always been commonplace, intermarriages between whites and blacks were usually considered "essentially anti-social tendencies"¹⁸⁹ or acts of social transgression.¹⁹⁰ In Germany, for instance, eugenics theories and the rigid notion of 'racial hygiene' under the Nazi era led to forced abortions or

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Genovese, Eugene. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974. p. 431

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Berzon, Judith R. *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1978. p. 9-10.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Davis 1991

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Ifekwunigwe, Jayne O.. *Scattered Belongings. Cultural Paradoxes of 'Race', Nation and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.; Cf. Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London: Routledge, 1997. p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ Rogers, J.A. *Sex and Race*. Vol. 3. St. Petersburg, FL: Helga Rogers, 1944. p. 32

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995; Cf. Ifekwunigwe 1999, p. 9; Cf. Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999; Cf. Sollors, Werner. *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*. New York: OUP, 2000.

sterilizations of the offspring of interracial relationships.¹⁹¹ In Britain, so-called "half-cast children" were presumed a "moral problem", especially in port cities like Cardiff or Liverpool.¹⁹² In South Africa the apartheid system propagated the moral superiority of "pure White Volk" and prohibited interracial relationships with the 1927 Immorality Act to protect "public health and safety".¹⁹³ In the United States, the institution and perpetuation of the one-drop-rule provided that the mixed-race children derived from the violent sexual abuse of black slave women by white slave owners ultimately remained under control and subject to economic exploitation.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, racialized prejudice developed among the black population. The colorism promoted under Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) might serve as a representative example. Social activist Garvey, an influential figure of the Harlem Renaissance and founder of the *United Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA), clearly defined the purpose of his organization along racial lines, since it underlined the significance of racial pride and consciousness. Moreover, Garvey was in favor of a strict racialized nationalism whose goal was "to fight for the emancipation of the race and [the] redemption of the country of our fathers".¹⁹⁵ He advanced the idea of segregation, for he refused any form of racial integration or cooperation with whites and instead supported the black diaspora's return to Africa.¹⁹⁶ Much of Garvey's thought was profoundly racist: He not only propagated unabridged racial pride and loyalty, but – according to his philosophy – a transgression of the color line would have to lead to self-

¹⁹¹ Cf. Oguntoye, Katharina. *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992; Oguntoye, Katharina. *Eine Afro-Deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von 1884-1950*. Berlin: Hoho-Verlag, 1997.

¹⁹² Rich, Paul. *Race and Empire in British Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. p. 130-135.

¹⁹³ Cf. Banton, Michael. *Race Relations*. New York: Basic Books 1967; Cf. Ifekwunigwe 1999

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Davis 1991, Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York et al: routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986; Williamson, Joel. *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, London: Louisiana State University, 1995.

¹⁹⁵ Garvey, Marcus. "The Principles of the Universal Negro Improvement Association" [1922]. *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: or Africa for the Africans*. ed. Amy Jacques Garvey. Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1986. pp. 93-100. p. 93.

¹⁹⁶ Cashmore, Ellis. "Marcus Garvey." *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. ed. Ellis Cashmore. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 140-143.

hatred and an undesirable racial ambivalence.¹⁹⁷ Racially hybrid individuals were therefore relegated to symbols of racial pollution and they had to be treated with suspicion. In need of a scapegoat for his failure, Garvey eventually claimed that 'mulattoes' and middle class blacks could be held responsible for his unsuccessful attempt at generating a pan-African movement.¹⁹⁸

Many of Garvey's racist attitudes discredit bi- and multiracial individuals as well as interracial relationships, but they can be explained by his experience with the 'mulatto elite' of his birthplace Jamaica. Garvey was deeply influenced by his background in Jamaica, "where minute distinctions of color and ancestry could be quite important."¹⁹⁹ Most tellingly, when Garvey gave a brief account of his family background in an article he published in *Current History* in 1923, he simply stated: "My parents were black negroes."²⁰⁰ By extension, he pointed out that "there was so much color prejudice in Jamaica [that] nobody wanted to be Negro." He explained that there were many "black-whites" in Jamaica. Those racially mixed people were the "colored men of the island who did not want to be classified as Negroes, but as white."²⁰¹ Having met much prejudice and rejection, Garvey often remembered the "wicked and vicious opposition," which he had experienced "from among [his] own people, especially among the very lightly colored."²⁰²

Similarly, civil rights leader Malcolm X (1925-1965) displayed a suspicious attitude towards mixed-race blacks that might be accounted for with the help of a glance at his personal experience and his family background.²⁰³

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Grant, Colin. *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and his Dream of Mother Africa*. London: Oxford University Press 2008; Cf. Hahn, Stephen. *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Clarke 2002, p. 216

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Carrión, Jaun M. "Two Variants of Caribbean Nationalism: Marcus Garvey and Pedro Albizu Campos." *Centro Journal* Vol XVII. No. 001 (Spring 2005): 26-45. p. 37.

²⁰⁰ Garvey, Marcus. "The Negro's Greatest Enemy. [1923]" *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: or Africa for the Africans*. ed. Amy Jacques Garvey. Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1986. pp. 124-134. p. 124.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² *ibid.* p. 133.

²⁰³ Malcom X's father, Earl Little, was a follower of Marcus Garvey. He died at a comparably young age, leaving his family to live in abject poverty. His mother Louise, the offspring of a white man and a black slave woman, was unable to cope with the responsibility of caring for 8 children and had to spend her life in a mental institution. Malcom Little replaced his family name with the X to draw attention to the true name of his African ancestors. Cf. Miller, Keith.

The speech he delivered in 1953 after his appointment as Assistant Minister of Nation of Islam's temple in Detroit demonstrates the vehemence of his dislike of whites and racially mixed people:

Yes! Yes, that raping, red-headed devil was my *grandfather*! That close, yes! My *mother's* father! She did not speak of it, can you blame her? She said she never laid eyes on him! She was *glad* for that! I'm *glad* for her! If I could drain away *his* blood that pollutes *my* body, and pollutes my complexion, I'd do it! Because I hate every drop of the rapist's blood that's in me.²⁰⁴

Dwelling on the rape of his grandmother by a white man on Antigua, Malcolm X propagates an anti-white sentiment. To him it is this rape that symbolizes the violence and oppression directed against black Americans.

Later in his life, Malcolm X should also experience some of the privileges that were granted to blacks with light skin: In his *Autobiography* (1965) he remembers that he was able to integrate more easily into the white school he attended. He was also convinced that that the treatment he received by his father was partly influenced by the lightness of his skin. However, these experiences only showed him more fiercely how deeply racism and the racialized prejudice against blacks were ingrained in American society.²⁰⁵ Like Garvey, this realization and the accompanying frustration caused him to propagate arguments for black separatism and to condemn white America and its racist grounds. Intriguingly, though, the arguments put forward by Malcolm X placed him on the very same racist grounds that white racists preached from – even if they were brought forward in response to the oppression of blacks. His

"Malcom X, 1925-1965". *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. 2nd ed. Vol 2. ed. Paul Lauter et al. Lexington, MA: Heath and Company, 1994.

²⁰⁴ Malcom X [with the assistance of Alex Hailey]. *The Autobiography of Malcom X*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1964. p. 206 [original emphasis]

²⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid*

rhetoric sought unity among blacks, and this also required the separation from whites. Accordingly, Malcolm X criticized interracial relationships as acts that weakened the much desired power and loyalty among blacks.

In an interview with the Barbadian-Canadian author Austin Clarke, which was conducted in Harlem in 1963, Malcolm X evinced that people of racially mixed origins were "in trouble" because white American society would always categorize them according to Manichean oppositions.²⁰⁶ However, Malcolm X also emphasized that to a certain extent the rigid mode of racial classification in the U.S. fostered loyalty and solidarity between dark-skinned and light-skinned African-American intellectuals and enabled them to unite in their struggle against racial discrimination.²⁰⁷

Prejudice against miscegenation can also be perceived in the works of Martiniquean psychiatrist and postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). In his influential book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1965), he insists that "blue eyes [...] frighten the Negro".²⁰⁸ On the whole, Fanon's book attempts to create a humanist vision of the world by expressing a general opposition to racialisms and colonial subjugation. In his psychoanalytic approach, Fanon tries to get insight into how racism and oppression influence the lives of colonized subjects and, specifically, he wants to explain how the experience of colonization impinges upon the self-perception of the colonized subject. He concludes that black people have had to put on white masks in order to be received in and by the white world. In response to this, *Black Skins, White Masks* seeks a way to overcome the alienating and destructive mechanisms of colonialism.

One of these mechanisms he identifies is the desire for what Fanon refers to as "lactification", i.e. the yearning to live up to and even embody the assumed superiority of white culture.²⁰⁹ He argues that the wish to cross the colour line is driven by black people's intrinsic motivation to whiten the race. Thus people

²⁰⁶ Cf. X, Malcom. "Austin Clarke / Malcom X." Interview. 1963. *The Austin Clarke Reader*. ed. Barry Callaghan. Toronto: Exile Editions, 1996. pp. 264-76.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Clarke 2002

²⁰⁸ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1967. p. 43

²⁰⁹ Cf. Fanon 1967, p. 47

involved in interracial relationships (and their mixed-race offspring) are ultimately allaying their thirst for racial improvement. Fanon regards interracial relationships inherently pathological.²¹⁰ He postulates the existence of "frantic women of color in quest of white men"²¹¹ and black males seeking "admittance to White sanctuary".²¹² He condemns this "quest for white flesh", which he believes to be perpetuated by "alienated psyches".²¹³ Without doubt, the 'mulatto' is marked with the taint of suspicion and treason when Fanon asserts: "Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*".²¹⁴

However critical his attitude towards racial hybridity and miscegenation might have been, Fanon's approach is still valuable for an analysis of mixed-race identities since his theoretical thoughts not only spark criticism of collective identities (like 'nation') in general but can be read as a critique of Manichean oppositions (like colonizer and colonized or civilization and savageness). Therefore many postcolonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak appreciate and interpret the Fanonian approach to deconstruct existing notions of ethnic and national identity in order to promote an understanding of identity as a construction of fluid and flexible subjectivities.

Before returning to Bhabha and his Fanon-based ideas on hybridity, I would like to briefly draw attention to another scholar who holds a strong influence on the development of contemporary theories of hybridity: the Russian philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). He was among the first to introduce the concept of hybridity to the study of literature and employed the concept in a linguistic sense. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), a collection of four essays on the nature of the novel, Bakhtin distinguishes between two forms of hybridization: 'organic hybridity' and

²¹⁰ Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." George Elliott Clarke. *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 211-237. p. 213.

²¹¹ Fanon 1967, p. 49

²¹² Fanon 1967, p. 51

²¹³ Fanon 1967, p. 81

²¹⁴ Fanon 1967, p. 63

'intentional' hybridity.²¹⁵ In the first case, the process of hybridization is an unconscious and unintentional one, but – according to Bakhtin – it must be recognized as one of the driving forces in the evolution of languages. "The mixture", Bakhtin explains, "remains mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions [...]. [Yet] such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world."²¹⁶ As such the process of hybridity is an act of creation, and, significantly, a natural process that releases power. It's neither marginal nor unusual; it is "a strength rather than a weakness"²¹⁷ and, importantly, it emphasizes that 'purity' (whether linguistic, cultural or 'racial' purity) does not exist. Hybrid forms are the results of historically transformed elements; they are new and ambivalent cultural or social configurations of the known.²¹⁸

Bakhtin describes the second form of hybridity as an 'intentional' or conscious hybridization.²¹⁹ He defines the process or moment of hybridization as the "mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter [...] between two linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor".²²⁰ Similar to the theoretical approaches of Jacques Derrida or deconstructionist literary critic Paul de Man, Bakhtin develops here the idea that a language is able to be the same and different simultaneously, that it embraces a sense of duality, that it is basically "double-voiced".²²¹ A single voice can thus be split

²¹⁵ Bakhtin, Michail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin et al: Texas University Press, 1981. p. 358

²¹⁶ Bakhtin 1981, p. 360

²¹⁷ Ashcroft, Bill. "Hybridity." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 183-184.

²¹⁸ Cf. also Werbner, Pnina. "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested Postcolonial Purifications." School of Social Relations, Keele University. Online: <<http://p.werbner.googlepages.com/HybridityJRAI.pdf>> Accessed on: Oct. 7th, 2009.

²¹⁹ Bakhtin 1981, p. 358

²²⁰ Bakhtin 1981, p. 358

²²¹ Bakhtin 1981, p. 361; Cf. also Sanga, Jaina, 2001, *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, and Globalization*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. p. 84; Cf. Kawash, Samira, 1997, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity and Singularity in African-American Narrative*, Stanford UP.

into two and at that very moment, boundaries are dissolved, interstices emerge and contradictory meanings clash. Intentional hybrids are thus "inevitably dialogical".²²²

Bakhtin's linguistic theory of hybridization and his notion of the "double-voice" – incorporating both fusion and dialectic articulation at once – serve as a promising key model for debating cultural relations in postcolonial discourse. Bakhtin's notion of the "double voice" can be seen as a significant contribution to the realm of this literary analysis because it claims language to be incapable of neutrality, for each word is inextricably bound to the context in which it exists. By extension, (racialized and hybrid) identities are likewise decidedly rooted in the context in which they are constructed. It is the single voice of the racially hybrid individual that may speak in different contexts and – to adhere to Bakhtinian terminology – from different consciousnesses. It is the mixed-race body and voice in which arbitrarily imposed boundaries dissolve and supposedly contradictory elements unite or co-exist. Moreover, such identities are – like language – subject to change and capable of (r)evolution.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha not only re-works Fanonian thought but he also picks up Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of hybridity in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity reflects the (post-)colonial situation. To him hybridity is a "'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom."²²³ He contends "hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications".²²⁴ Culture, Bhabha insists, is never static. Cultural meaning is then not only constructed through difference to other cultures, but initially cultures are involved in a process of translation,

²²² Cf. Bakhtin 1981, p. 360

²²³ Bhabha, Homi. "Interview with Homi Bhabha." *Identity, Community, Difference*. ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London et al: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. pp. 207-221. p. 211

²²⁴ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. p. 219

i.e. "a process of alienation and of secondariness *in relation to itself*."²²⁵ Cultures change, they are never complete in themselves. In fact, they are decentered structures. Hybridity is hence "an ambivalent space that is not necessarily the resolution of a conflict between two cultures, but an area of tension that is created by the splitting of different aspects within cultures".²²⁶ It's "between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other", an interstitial cultural space, a moment of uncertainty, and a moment of resistance against colonial domination.²²⁷

Without doubt, one must not conflate the notions of cultural and racial hybridity, yet Bhabha's conception proves very useful for the theoretical framework of this analysis because he clearly denies essentialism and because he claims identities to be holistic and organic, i.e. complex, dynamic and productive. His suggested strategy of exploring the interstitial configurations of cultural uncertainty and transferring them into instruments of colonial resistance constitutes a means of critically interrogating modes of representation, exposing socially constructed hierarchies and providing an anti-essentialist stance in identity politics: "The process of hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."²²⁸

Hybridity turns out to be a space in which writers can disturb commonly sanctioned constructions of reality and engage in dialogues "that relocate the responsibility for their own subjectivity within themselves."²²⁹ The hyphen then becomes a tool that "creates a volatile space that is inhabited by a wide range of voices," as Fred Wah concludes in "Half-Bred Poetics" (1994), an essay from his collection of writings on poetics and hybridity *Faking It* (2000).²³⁰

²²⁵ Bhabha 1990, p. 210

²²⁶ Bhabha 1994, p. 107

²²⁷ Bhabha 1994, p. 127

²²⁸ Bhabha 1990, p. 211

²²⁹ Wah, Fred. "Half-Bred Poetics". *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity. Critical Writing 1981-1999*. Fred Wah. Edmonton, Alberta: Newest, 2000. pp. 71-96. p. 76

²³⁰ Wah 2000, p.74

Fred Wah presented the essay "Half-Bred Poetics" at a conference of the Association for the Study of New Literatures in English in Germany 1994 - while the controversial 'Writing Thru Race Conference' was taking place in Vancouver. As an address to hybridity, Wah's paper was groundbreaking in discussing "the particular dynamic in the conflagrations around racialized writing" and intended "to claim a space for the particular poetics of racialized writing with

In "A Poetics of Ethnicity", a paper given at the Canadian Studies conference at the University of Manitoba a few years prior to the publication of "Half-Bred Poetics", Wah tried to locate his mixed-race and multiethnic self within the predominant discourses of multicultural and ethnic writing. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the Canadian identity politics of the 1980s and lodged a strong claim on hybrid identities in his refusal to succumb to attempts at homogenizing definitions of Canadian identity and literature. "Immigrant, ethnic, and native writers in Canada have utilized most of the available public aesthetics in order to create a more satisfying space within which to investigate their particular realities," Wah declares.²³¹ He describes the marginalized writer as an "alienethnic" writer, who symbolizes nothing but an embodiment of hybridity.²³² Bringing into play the opposition between belonging and displacement in this term, Wah posits the marginalized hybrid writer as being simultaneously 'ethnic' (i.e. recognizable and identifiable) and 'alien'. Being 'alien', the writer turns into "an absolute stranger who by definition brings into question and displaces the taxonomies of the public sphere," Scott T. McFarlane explicates accurately in his analysis of Wah's *Faking It* (2000).²³³

How is it that this 'alien' writer can have an identity, can be recognized, McFarlane continues to explore Wah's terminology. How can he/she have a "common language of the other".²³⁴ The alienethnic writer is the one "who attempts to account for oneself" and who does not "anticipate a response from already existing hegemonic social and cultural forms – including socially and

which [he] felt aligned, in a 'new' literature still being constructed within the 'old' world" (ibid, p. 4).

²³¹ Wah, Fred. "A Poetics of Ethnicity". *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity. Critical Writing 1981-1999*. Fred Wah. Edmonton, Alberta: Newest, 2000. pp. 51-66. p. 51

²³² ibid, p. 55

²³³ McFarlane, Scott Toguri. "Faking It: A Brief History of Hybridity and Human Biology." *West Coast Line*. 34.3 (Winter 2001): 124-149. p. 137.

²³⁴ Wah 2000, p. 66

culturally sanctioned forms of community."²³⁵ The hybrid writer, Wah persists, challenges such forms and opens the realm for others. He questions the established boundaries of communities in Canada's cultural and literary landscape and resists monolithic models of personal and communal identity. By being located within a particular community, Wah concludes, the hybrid writer will "reterritorialize", i.e. he/she will bring the community into question by telling their stories.²³⁶ The mixed-race writer claims the right to define him- or herself, not only individually, but also in terms of community belonging. On the whole, it means to "tell your story in pieces, as it is."²³⁷ These hybrid "pieces" (which Edward Said evokes here in *After the Last Sky*) have liberating powers: They will unsettle binaries, question power relations and resist imposed hierarchies.

As demonstrated by Wah, the concept's focus on culture and ethnicity remains not undisputed. The key insufficiencies of the notion of cultural hybridity must be seen in its problematic origin in 19th-century 'race' science and the difficulties in reconciling the biological discourse of 'race' with the cultural discourse of difference.²³⁸ Since cultural hybridity is frequently celebrated detached from its epistemological origins in scientific racism, it may deny the specificities of racialization and visibility. Among the scholars to stress the interrelatedness of cultural hybridity, the ideology of 'race' and the process of racialization is Robert Young. In his study of English culture, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995), Young examines the interconnection of the concepts of 'race', culture and sexuality and argues that cultural hybridity has always been part of a colonialist discourse of racism.²³⁹ He suggests that 'race' and culture developed interdependently, "the racial was always cultural,

²³⁵ McFarlane 2001, p. 138

²³⁶ Wah 2000, p. 55

²³⁷ Said, Edward. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheon, 1986. p. 151 [qtd. in Wah 2000, p. 62]

²³⁸ Cf. Fisher, Jean. "Some Thoughts on 'Contaminations'." *Third Text*. 38 (1995): 3-7; Cf. Ifekwunigwe 1999, Papastergiadis, Nikos. *Art and Difference: Hybrids and Clusters*. Art and Design 43, 1995.

²³⁹ Cf. also Ashcroft, Bill and Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths (eds.). *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London, NY: Routledge, 1998. p. 120

the essential never unequivocal ... culture and race developed together, imbricated within each other".²⁴⁰ He contends that

hybridity in particular shows the connection between racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure. There is no single or correct concept of hybridity: It changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes.²⁴¹

The racist legacy inherent in the discourse on hybridity must thus be acknowledged. Similar to Bhabha and Wah, Young postulates that hybridity must be understood as remaining ambivalent or "double-voiced". He employs Bakhtin's linguist model of the double-voice as a dialectical model for cultural and racial interaction:

Hybridity [...] involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against the divisive, the generative against the undermining. Hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation.²⁴²

While the 'organic' leads to hegemonizing structures, the 'intentional' longs for diasporizing, for "intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation".²⁴³ Young concludes that this "doubleness is important both politically and theoretically: without the emphasis on the active, disjunctive

²⁴⁰ Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 27-28

²⁴¹ Young 1995, p. 27

²⁴² Young 1995, p. 22

²⁴³ Young 1995, p. 22

moments or movements of homogenization and diasporization, it can easily be objected that hybridization assumes [...] the prior existence of pure, fixed and separate antecedents".²⁴⁴

Accordingly, Young points to two different kinds of hybridity. On the one hand, there is hybridity as the combination of two distinct things that come together, thereby "making difference into sameness"; on the other hand, hybridity can be viewed as a process of disruption, of turning "sameness into difference":

At its simplest, hybridity, however, implies a disruption and forcing together of any unlike things, [...], making difference into sameness. Hybridity is the making of one of two distinct things, [...]. Hybridization can also consist of the forcing of a single entity into two or more parts, a severing of a single object into two, turning sameness into difference, as in today's hybrid shares on the stock market, although they, in the last analysis, are merely parts of a whole that will have to be re-invoked at the wind-up date. Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different.²⁴⁵

What Young illustrates so poignantly above is that purity is a myth and that hybridity is a space of uncertainty, liminality and ambiguity, a space where difference melts into sameness and sameness is disrupted into difference. Hybridity is an on-going process re-inscription, recovery and (r)evolution. Now, returning to W.e. B. duBois's statement about the persistence of the color line, the question arises as to how blackness can be defined along this line in the Canadian context and how people of mixed origin fit in? What are the options

²⁴⁴ Young 1995, p. 25

²⁴⁵ Young 1995, p. 26

given to those living with the silenced racialized hyphen? Are they black? Hyphenated? Mixed? Half? Oreo or "reverse doublestuff"²⁴⁶? Or, simply Canadian?

²⁴⁶ Mercedes Baines. "Half-Baked Zebra Cake". Poem. *West Coast Line* 31.1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 132.

3. APPROACHING AFRICAN-CANADIAN BORDERLANDS

3.1. The African-Canadian Experience: Unearthing the History of Miscegenation in Canada

References to interracial sexual contacts and the existence of bi- and multiracial people are rare in Canadian history books. Since there has been little room "for imagining Blackness as constitutive of Canadianness"²⁴⁷, the history of miscegenation and interethnic mingling has been even willingly omitted from the official founding narratives of the Canadian nation. Interracial relationships constitute a part of Canada's "forbidden history." Therefore the histories of bi- and multiracial people were consciously "left in the shadows" – as Vancouver feminist scholar Veronica Strong-Boag phrased it – quite similar to those of First Nations people, non-charter ethnic groups, women or homosexuals.²⁴⁸

In spite of its erasure in public, historical and literary discourses, 'racial' mixing has been an integral part of the Canadian experience. In all provinces, from the Maritimes to the West Coast and in both rural and urban areas, people of different ethnic groups have intermingled. Africadian scholar and multi-genre writer George Elliott Clarke acknowledges in *Fire On The Water* (1991/92), a two-volume anthology of black literature and orature in the Maritimes, that a "high degree of racial and cultural cross-breeding [...] has occurred in Africadia,"²⁴⁹ primarily between black and First Nations people, but

²⁴⁷ Walcott, Rinaldo. "Insubordination: A Demand for a Different Canada". *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Rinaldo Walcott. Toronto: Insomniac Press: 2000. p. 7.

²⁴⁸ Strong-Boag, Veronica. *Rethinking Canada. The Promise of Women's History*. Don Mills: OUP, 1997. pp. 2-3.

²⁴⁹ Clarke, George Elliott. "Introduction: Fire on the Water: A First Portrait of African-Canadian Literature." *Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol I. ed. by George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1991. p. 23.

George Elliott Clarke himself coined the neologism "Africadian". It represents a fusion of the words "Africa" and *cadie* – the Mi'kmaq expression for "abounding in" and the possible cognate of the French toponym *Acadie*. Africadian therefore denotes the black Nova Scotian population, although it can be extended in its meaning to denote all black people in the Maritimes. Since Clarke's definition refers to place rather than to language, the term is inclusive of both Anglophone and Francophone people. Moreover, Africadian serves as a political signifier. It lays emphasis on the long presence of black people in Maritime Canada and displays the postcolonial longing of a marginalized voice for self-naming and self-reclamation. Clarke's term epitomizes black Nova Scotia's search for its own history and ethnic identity and represents an insistence on black nativity and displays a sense of nationalism. Notably, Africadian also

also, as U.S. historian Robin Winks confirms in *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1997), between blacks and French- and British-descended settlers. Their relationships began in 1605 with Mathieu da Costa – a black interpreter who accompanied Samuel de Champlain on his explorative voyages to Maritime Canada and settled with him at Port Royal.²⁵⁰ People of African ancestry have lived in *l'Acadie* ever since, as both slaves and free blacks.

Slavery was a historical fact in Canada, in both Anglo- and Francophone areas. In Quebec, it was most likely established through a Royal mandate issued by Louis XIV. In Nova Scotia, slaves were imported from various places as early as 1686.²⁵¹ As an institution, slavery was thus well entrenched in the Maritimes even before the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists in 1783. Slaves were owned by Church ministers, for instance, who found no fault with adjusting their Christian beliefs in order to find biblical approval of their deeds, by governors and by some of the most prominent and influential families in Nova Scotia.²⁵² Although slavery was never legally instituted in the Maritimes, it was widely tolerated "under the tacit permission of law and sanction of society."²⁵³ The establishment of a color line, prevailing attitudes of white superiority, prejudice and race-hatred were sufficient for the systemic oppression of the

accentuates the close interaction between the culturally distinct settlements of *l'Acadie* and the history of black people in the Maritimes. Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "The Birth and Rebirth of African-Canadian Literature." *Down East: Critical Essays on Contemporary Maritime Canadian Literature*. ed. by Wolfgang Hochbruck and James O. Taylor. Trier: WVT, 1996.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Hamilton, Sylvia., "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia." *'We're rooted here and they can't pull us up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. eds. Peggy Bristow and Dionne Brand et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. pp. 13-40, p. 14; Pachai, Bridglal. *Peoples of the Maritimes: Blacks*. 2nd. ed. Tantallon, NS: Four East Publications, 1993. p. 7

²⁵¹ Cf. Pachai 1993

²⁵² Cf. Clairmont, Donald H. and Dennis William Magill. *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999; Cf. Hamilton 1994; Pachai 1993

²⁵³ Smith, T. Watson. "The Slave in Canada." *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*.10 (1989): 20.

Africadian population; legal justification was not necessary to exercise slavery.²⁵⁴

A considerable voluntary intermixture among Acadian communities, black inhabitants and the indigenous Mi'kmaq population took place as well.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the number of *officially recorded* intermarriages remains relatively low. In his exploration of the reality of slaves in New France from 1628-1760, Winks records that out of the entire black population 7% had intermarried, and 54.2 % of those intermarried had chosen "British stock".²⁵⁶ Since interracial sexual unions were anything but uncommon, they could be motivated by various reasons. Master – servant (or slave) relationships were usually characterized by the sexual exploitation of black females, but they could also spring from black women's hopes of liberation from servitude by marriage to a white man.²⁵⁷ Interracial relationships offered an option for enslaved blacks to free themselves through the act of marriage. Along this line, Winks records 11 marriages with blacks in New France. Notably, most of these marriages took place between white women and black men.²⁵⁸

While Canada prefers to propagate its moral superiority to the United States, historians James Walker and Robin Winks have contended that the black Canadian historical experience differed only in terms of numbers and extension from the United States' procedures of violence, rape and systematic slave breeding.²⁵⁹ There was also forced interbreeding through rape during the times of slavery. Winks records that almost 60 percent of the children of slaves born in New France were born outside of marriage, "*pere inconnu*".²⁶⁰ He points out that black females in New France had cost more than males since "women were

²⁵⁴ Cf. Bast, Heike. "The Ghosts of Africville, Acadia and the African Continuum: (Re)claiming Ethnic Identity in Africadian Literature." *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*. 43 (2003): 129-142.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Mannette, 2000, 63

²⁵⁶ Cf. Winks, Robin. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. Montreal et al.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. p. 495.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 7, p. 496

²⁵⁸ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 11

²⁵⁹ Cf. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2nd ed. (Montreal et al.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); James Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

²⁶⁰ Winks 1997, p. 11

more suited to the tasks demanded of them in the home,"²⁶¹ whereas Clarke suggests that black females were possibly also purchased for sexual reasons and maintains that "opportunities for white sexual predation – and concomitant expansion of one's slave 'holdings' – did not go unnoticed."²⁶² James Walker , for instance, chronicles the case of Lydia Jackson, a back Loyalist slave woman violated by her white slave owner while being eight months pregnant.²⁶³ Hence, as Clarke concludes in "Canadian Biraciality and its 'Zebra Poetics'" (2002) and "Honouring African-Canadian Geography" (1997), interracial contacts in Canada were often infused with sexual violence, rape and even racial lynching.²⁶⁴

However, in New France, no legal steps were undertaken to prevent the intermarriage of white settlers and black women. In fact, the Minister of the Marine, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, even encouraged the intermarriage (between French and First Nations) people after 1663, "so that a new people of one blood might emerge, with their future pinned to the revitalized country."²⁶⁵ If a white man married a black slave woman, she was freed from slave bondage. Winks explains the fact that no legal measures was taken to prevent such marriages with the small number of black slaves in New France at that time.²⁶⁶ Maybe it was also due to the rural structures of the province and its scattered communities that the number of black and white mixed-race marriages did not suffice to initiate extensive legal debates on the issue.

The act of crossing the color line was nevertheless considered as much a threat to white Canadian "purity" and the racially mixed offspring of such "social transgressions" were feared to cause a deterioration of "Anglo-Saxon

²⁶¹ Winks 1997, p. 48

²⁶² Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. George Elliott Clarke. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. p. 212.

²⁶³ Walker 1992, p. 50

²⁶⁴ Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Honouring African-Canadian Geography: Mapping Black Presence in Atlantic Canada." *Border/lines* 45 (Dec. 1997): 35-39; Clarke 2002, pp. 215-216

²⁶⁵ Winks 1997, p. 3

²⁶⁶ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 7

stock".²⁶⁷ Historian James Walker concludes that from the moment of visible interracial mixing, "Blacks were no longer simply a disadvantaged minority, but a danger to be guarded against for the sake of Canada's future generations."²⁶⁸ Consequently, racial trespassers had to bear public scrutiny and their relationships, whether voluntary or enforced, excited "public feelings and controversy"²⁶⁹ as New Glasgow-born newspaper editor and activist Dr. Carrie Best states in her outstanding autobiography and history of African-Canadians in Nova Scotia, *That Lonesome Road* (1977).

Along this line, Acadian author and cultural critic Joy Mannette exemplifies how her experience of having been raised in the secluded Acadian fishing village of Chezzetcook north of Halifax has been clearly shaped around the color line. When she tries to trace back her family genealogy, she is harshly criticized that it was "too complicated" and not "laine pure."²⁷⁰ Mannette narrates how, on the one hand, she was taught to feel ashamed of her Acadian origin and describes how, on the other hand, she has been surrounded by forthright racism in her community. As a child, she learned to play counting "nigger toes" and was told not to buy blueberries from colored people, because "they pee on them first."²⁷¹ The racially biased attitude in her Acadian community instructed her to associate 'black' with 'dirty'. Eventually, when Mannette – as a "pinkish Acadian mother" – gives birth to a "brown child," she is considered to have "lowered herself" and feels outcast from her Acadian home.²⁷² The community does not regard her child as Acadian because it is not "white enough."²⁷³ Mannette becomes painfully aware that Acadia "was no

²⁶⁷ Walker, James. *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*. Historical Booklet No. 41, Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985. p. 8

²⁶⁸ Walker 1985, p. 14.

²⁶⁹ Best, Carrie. "That Lonesome Road." *Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol. I. ed. by George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1991. p. 121

²⁷⁰ Mannette, Joy. "My Dearest Child." *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. ed. Rinaldo Walcott. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2000. pp. 51-68. p. 53

²⁷¹ Mannette 2000, pp. 52-54

²⁷² Mannette 2000, pp. 51-52

²⁷³ Mannette 2000, p. 54

place to bring up a 'black' child."²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, she emphasizes that she and her "brown child" will continue to identify as Acadian in spite of communal opposition. Mannette engages in the powerful political act of opposing outside categorizations and re-writing the history of the Maritimes in order to move towards self-identification and self-reclamation instead.

In view of the apparent inequality and discrimination of racially mixed blacks Debra Thompson from the University of Toronto set out to compare the state regulations of interracial relationships in Canada and the U.S. in "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies" (2009). Thompson points out that despite the absence of openly discriminatory anti-miscegenation laws (like those implemented in the legal history of the United States) Canada has found ways to regulate and control the transgression of racialized social boundaries.²⁷⁵ An "informal and extra-legal regime ensured that the social taboo of racial intermixing was kept to a minimum."²⁷⁶

The social strategy of 'passing', possibly instigated by the American influence of the one-drop-rule, was therefore a promising option for light-skinned Canadian blacks. Winks states that "at least 103 children were born

²⁷⁴ Mannette 2000, p. 62

²⁷⁵ In the U.S. 41 out of 50 states enacted anti-miscegenation legislation against blacks and other visible minorities. Mostly, these laws prohibited the sexual intercourse of non-Whites with the white population and forbade intermarriages. Thompson notes that such anti-miscegenation laws can be traced back to almost a hundred years prior to the Declaration of Independence. Only in 1967, these laws were declared unconstitutional in consequence of the landmark civil rights case of *Loving v. Virginia*.

²⁷⁶ Thompson, Debra. "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America." *Social and Legal Studies*. 18.3 (2009): 353-371. p. 353; Cf. also Walker, James. *'Race', Rights, and the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997 and Backhouse, Constance. *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada: 1900-1950*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Arguably, the *Indian Act* (amended in 1985) might be seen as a legal document promoting anti-miscegenation and might serve as an example for the state practice of regulating the intimate sphere: First Nations' women would be denied their legal Indian status if they married a non-Aboriginal person. It "restricted and provided penalties for interracial sex and/or marriages" (Cf. Thompson 2009, p. 363). Bonita Lawrence further points to the imbalance the Indian Act provided in terms of gender: "Clearly, if the mixed-race offspring of white men who married Native women were to inherit property, they had to be legally classified as white. [...] Because of the patriarchal framework governing white identities, European women who married Native men were considered to have stepped outside the social boundaries of whiteness." (Cf. Lawrence, Bonita. "Gender, Race, and Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview." *Hypatia* 18 (2003): 3-31. pp. 8-9.

from [interracial] unions [between 1628-1760]: 84 half-breeds and 19 mulattoes. These children married and in turn had their descendants, and through the generations must have 'passed' over to white."²⁷⁷ As in the United States, the practice of hypodescent was a social reality in Canada and would downgrade racially mixed offspring of interracial couplings. To give evidence for the application of this practice in Canada, Robin Winks observes that the national census of 1931 classed marriages between white and colored settlers as "Negro" – "following the North American norm that 'Negro blood' darkens rather than the Latin norm that 'white blood' whitens."²⁷⁸ Winks concludes that "many of those who could pass as white probably did so."²⁷⁹

Thus some racially mixed African-Canadians chose to identify as white. Comparing census dates, birthrate figures and immigration reports for the period of 1911 - 1951, Robin Winks admits that either census data had to be partly erroneous or "a considerable number of Negroes 'passed over' each decade into 'white' classifications – not primarily through intermarriage [...], but presumably through electing to consider themselves white."²⁸⁰ Winks further suggests that the applied practice of 'passing' might help to explain the frequent migrations of African-Canadians to different provinces, especially from the historically grown and relatively community-oriented centers in Nova Scotia to Quebec and Ontario. A movement into a new province might have helped to accomplish in taking on a new 'racial' identity.²⁸¹

From the 1930s to the 1960s a new cultural pride and self-awareness led to a noticeable increase in Canada's black population – not exclusively on account of the immigrant influx from the Caribbean. As a result of the new cultural awakening from the 1930s and the 1960s some of those who might formerly have opted for 'passing' as white would now choose to assert their African-Canadian heritage proudly. On account of the social and political

²⁷⁷ Winks 1997, p. 11

²⁷⁸ Winks 1997, p. 488

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Winks 1997, p. 496

²⁸¹ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 496

changes which occurred in Canada between the Great Depression and World War II, black Canadians "found allies with power and persuasive abilities in the press, in politics and in the broken privacy of once inward-looking Negro organizations – groups now hesitantly moving towards restrained forms of activism."²⁸²

One of these partly influential movements was the Garveyite movement in Canada, which became active in Montreal in 1919. After his deportation from the US and several stopovers in Jamaica and Great Britain, Garvey had decided to go to Canada in 1928 in hope of re-newing his influence on North America. Garvey's West Indian Association initiated social protests against the discrimination of blacks in Nova Scotia and Quebec, while propagating his philosophy of racial purity and pan-Africanism.²⁸³ However, his racialized bias against mixed blacks did mostly fall on deaf ears among Canada's black population (especially among those blacks who were born in Canada) because the intermingling of the white, black and Native population had been going on for a long time.²⁸⁴ Garvey was quickly criticized for propagating "Uncle Tomism".²⁸⁵ Yet Winks points out that some Canadians of West Indian origin did indeed feel attracted to Garvey's ideas, without doubt, their prejudice against light-colored African-Canadians being deeply rooted in the highly color-conscious colonial structures of the Caribbean societies.

The militant struggles of the black labor unions (as e.g. the porters' union), the organized Brotherhoods, the protests of black university graduates or the black Canadian soldiers fighting the World War II were also successful in fighting for more equal opportunities for black Canadians or in raising awareness of the injustices faced by Canadian blacks.²⁸⁶ Those moments of

²⁸² Winks 1997, p. 414

²⁸³ Cf. Hill, Daniel. "Negroes in Toronto: A Sociological Study of a Minority Group." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1960. pp. 42-43.; Cf. Cronon, Edmund David. *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Madison, Wisc., 1955. pp. 44-46; Cf. Winks 1997, p. 414

²⁸⁴ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 414-415

²⁸⁵ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 416

²⁸⁶ Cf. for example Greening, W.E. *It Was Never Easy, 1908-1958: A History of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers*. Ottawa: Mutual Press, 1961.

success were, however, restricted in their scope as equal treatment was nowhere close. Especially the immigration policy was still discriminatory, as Canada seems to "prefer 'tubercular Europeans' to healthy blacks and made them feel as if they "were dodging through a plantation without touching a tree."²⁸⁷

In consequence, the phenomenon of passing continued to occur until the 1960s. As Winks shows, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration suggested a number of approximately 12,000 blacks living in Montreal and Toronto at that time, although only 1,908 had recorded as 'Negroes' in the previous census. He admits that many Canadians with an African ancestry had "good reasons" for passing as white even in the 1960s. Due to the emergence of ethnically diverse and hybrid urban areas in Canada 'passing' also became easier.²⁸⁸

On the whole, one might conclude that racially mixed people have long been part of the Canadian experience and they might have been more numerous (and more important) than most census data or historical accounts of the past disclose: "The interaction between the black, the white Canadian, and their shared environment has revealed much of general interest and importance about Canadian ethnic and racial attitudes."²⁸⁹ Once again, the social signifiers of 'race', gender and sexuality prove to be interlocking sets of power relations and become essential for comprehending the African-Canadian experience and the experiences of racially mixed Canadians.

²⁸⁷ Winks 1997, p. 427

²⁸⁸ Cf. Winks 1997, p. 489

²⁸⁹ Winks 1997, p. 496

3.2. Canadian Multiculturalism and Cultural Violence: Mixed-Race Identities and the Intricacies of Belonging

[A]lthough there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always also a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid. [...] In societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests.

(Homi Bhabha, *Interview*)²⁹⁰

The National Imaginary: Canadian Multiculturalism

Frantz Fanon explained the meaning of national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* as follows: "A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence."²⁹¹ Now, what is it that Canada has been creating to keep itself in existence? Differences in language, ethnicity, and region as well as the lack of historical occurrences comparable to those participating in the creation of an American national identity (or at least a lack of appreciation of them) and the struggle to free itself of both British and American influences has caused disunity and rendered all efforts to fortify a pan-Canadian consciousness strenuous.²⁹²

Back in the early 1970s, writers expressed this lack of a national Canadian identity. Germaine Warkins, for example, referred to this predicament as Canada's lack of an "image in the mirror" and wrote:

²⁹⁰ Bhabha, Homi. "Interview with Homi Bhabha." *Identity, Community, Difference*. ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London et al: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. pp. 207-221. p. 208

²⁹¹ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1967. qtd. in Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*. Stratford, Ont.: Mercury P, 1992. p. 181

²⁹² Cf. Groß, Konrad. "Identity – Identities: Infamous Canadian Pastime, Venerable Quest, or Trivial Pursuit?" *O Canada: Essays on Canadian Literature and Culture*. ed. Jørn Carlsen. Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 1995. pp. 26-37.

Searchers for a Canadian identity have failed to realize that you can only have identification with something you can see or recognize. You need, if nothing else, an image in a mirror. No other country cares about us to give us back an image of ourselves that we can even resent. And apparently we can't do it for ourselves, because so far our attempts to do so have resembled those of the three blind men trying to describe the elephant. Some of the descriptions have been worth something, but what they add up to is fragmented, indecipherable. With what are we to identify ourselves?²⁹³

Canada was longing for an image of its own. Nowadays, almost 40 years later, Canada as a nation has gained more self-confidence with regard to its identity and proudly identifies itself as a nation based on its multicultural diversity and the belief in human values like tolerance, justice and equality. The multitudes of cultural and ethnic identities have become major cornerstones in the definition of Canadian society since Prime Minister Trudeau officially proclaimed the country bilingual and multicultural in 1971. The following excerpt from his official statement in the House of Commons demonstrates the nation's goal to achieve unity and expresses the sincere hope for respect and solidarity associated with this new national strength:

For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly. National unity, if it is to mean anything in a deep and personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity. Out of this can grow respect for [...] others, and a willingness to share ideas,

²⁹³ Warkentin, Germaine. "An Image in a Mirror." *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Margaret Atwood. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996. p. 9

attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence.²⁹⁴

What seemed an ideal for Trudeau was confirmed as a reality by his successor Jean Chrétien (1993-2003) in June 2000:

Canada has become a post-national, multicultural society. It contains the globe within its borders, and Canadians have learned that their two international languages and their diversity are a comparative advantage and a source of continuing creativity and innovation. Canadians are, by virtue of history and necessity, open to the world.²⁹⁵

Canada's approach to diversity was based on the confidence that the common good is best served when everyone is accepted and respected for who they are. The faith in the value of diversity that Trudeau expressed was to recognize that respect for social and cultural differences is necessary for the promotion of self-worth and identity. Chrétien then declared Canada a society that is open to everyone equally in order to encourage achievement, participation, harmony and, most importantly, a sense of belonging that is not restricted to national borders.

However, many Canadian scholars, writers and intellectuals, among them many African-Canadians, do neither share Trudeau's confidence that "Canadian multiculturalism ... [will] save the nation"²⁹⁶ nor do they join Chrétien in celebrating his abiding faith in Canada as a post-national multicultural society. Many are suspicious of and skeptical towards the policy,

²⁹⁴ "Statement by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, October 8, 1971." *Multiculturalism in Canada: The Challenge of Diversity*. eds. Jean Leonard Elliott and Augie Fleras. Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 1992. p. 281

²⁹⁵ "Canadian Diversity: Respecting our Differences."

<http://pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/respect_e.cfm?nav=2> Accessed on August 4th, 2008.

²⁹⁶ Huggan, Graham and Winfried Siemerling (eds.) "U.S./Canadian Writers' Perspectives on the Multiculturalism Debate: A Round Table Discussion at Harvard University. Panel Contributions by Clark Blaise, Nicole Brossard, George Elliott Clarke, Paul Yee; Responses by Geeta Patel." *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review*. Spring (2000): 82-111, p. 84

for they have experienced Canadian multiculturalism as nothing more but a fragile eggshell. To them the apple-pie order of Canada's multiculturalism is incapable of making up for the existent inequalities in their lives.²⁹⁷ For people of African ancestry, Canada has often turned out to be a hostile and racially biased environment, a nation that continues to congratulate itself for fostering the "Myth of the North Star".²⁹⁸ Canada has been neither the benevolent, safe haven of liberty for fugitive slaves nor the Promised Land or Lost Eden of the Canadian national imagination. In fact, Canada's public policy has contributed to the erasure of the African-Canadian presence, for example by supporting a historical amnesia concerning Canada's legacy of slavery and its exercising of racial discrimination under the guise of multicultural policies and human rights legislature.

Apparently, multiculturalism remains an ideological construct that indeed embraces diversity but fails to acknowledge the impact of 'race', racism and class on the creation of a sense of belonging. Though it cannot be denied that Canada has made some noticeable progress in its discourse on 'race relations' since the declaration of its multicultural policy in 1971, the question arises as to how 'race' and Canada's multicultural policy impact the construction of a sense of belonging for African-Canadians and racially mixed people.

Cultural Violence and Canadian Multiculturalism

Johan Galtung's aforementioned theory of violence and peace proves useful in helping to understand the question above as it enables some insight into the relationship between Canadian – i.e. state-implemented – multiculturalism and the perpetual existence of racism in Canadian society. 20 years after the introduction to his theory of violence, Galtung makes a useful addition to his

²⁹⁷ Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "Multikulturalität als Stärke der zeitgenössischen Literatur." *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*. Eds. Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Kloos und Reingard M. Nischik. Weimar: Metzler Verlag, 2005. p. 311

²⁹⁸ Walker, James. *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*. Historical Booklet No. 41. Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985.

concept. He introduces the idea of *cultural violence* and enables the forging of a causal link between culture and racism. Since culture is shaped and practiced by society and cultural values are usually molded within a political, social and economic context, culture is always subject to change. It is never fixed and stable. Clearly, in the course of history, cultural practices have never been void of violence (e.g. if we think of Hindu practices like *sattee*, a widow immolating herself or being immolated on her husband's funeral pyre).

In spite of such openly recognizable forms of cultural violence, Galtung argues that *cultural violence* also operates on a submerged level. It should first and foremost refer to those aspects of culture which are (ab)used to justify or legitimate the use of both direct and structural violence in a society.²⁹⁹ Hammer and Sickle or the Stars and Stripes can be taken as representative examples of this process, just like the symbol of the Canadian mosaic. According to Galtung, this form of violence is rather symbolic; it is built into a culture. It does not destroy, wound or mutilate as quickly as direct violence does and it is just as invisible and subtle as structural violence. In the Canadian context, multiculturalism can be read as a means of exerting cultural violence: it leaves its traces in ideology, religion, art and literature, even in language and sciences. In relation, Canadian culture must then be read as a construct created to legitimize societal structures which (openly or covertly) propagate the existence of a dominant social group. Cultural violence is then the (ideological) basis upon which the goal of superiority is achieved, while structural racism is one tool to do so.

In the Canadian context, it is significant to understand the dynamics of cultural violence, multiculturalism and their impact on both African-Canadian communities and identities. Cultural critic Rinaldo Walcott, for instance, has repeatedly emphasized that the constitution and history of the African-Canadian diaspora cannot be understood outside of the politics of

²⁹⁹ Cf. Galtung, Johan. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*. 27.3 (1990): 291-305.

multiculturalism.³⁰⁰ Walcott argues that official multiculturalism mainly "relies on and supports a persistent relationship to a heritage situated outside of Canada's national boundaries" and while insisting on the maintenance of cultural differences and the celebration of distinct cultural heritages.³⁰¹ Simultaneously, Canadian multiculturalism promotes "the historic and continual denial of a long and unbroken history of an African-descended presence in Canada".³⁰² In consequence, "official multiculturalism can only imagine the African-Canadian presence as a recent and immigrant one."³⁰³ Walcott is right when he accentuates that African-Canadians constitute a visible minority that is, in fact, rendered invisible. They have virtually found no or little reflection of themselves and their contributions to Canadian society in history books, the media, in schools and in public affairs.³⁰⁴ Walcott points out that this twofold influence of multiculturalism inevitably leads to an oversimplification of the complexity of African-Canadian cultures and denies black Canadians' heterogeneity (and hybridity), while implicitly forging French- and British-Canadian claims to power. This process of oversimplification prepares the ground on which stereotypes or even prejudice may flourish and then might provide new fuel for racism.

This problem mainly results from the fact that in its state-implemented form the policy not only gives political and social permission to sustain distinct cultural expressions; it strongly accentuates and enforces the claims of various groups for ethnic recognition. Severe pressure is thus put on ethnic groups to preserve their identities.³⁰⁵ Without doubt, such a policy "produces an ethnicity

³⁰⁰ Cf. for example, Walcott, Rinaldo. "Emerging Diaspora Consciousness among African-Canadians in Toronto." pp. 438-445; Cf. Walcott, Rinaldo. "Voyage through the Multiverse: Contested Canadian Identities." *Border/Lines* 36 (1995): 49-52;

³⁰¹ Walcott, Rinaldo. "Emerging Diaspora Consciousness among African-Canadians in Toronto." *encycloedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*. Vol. 1: Overview and Topics. eds. Melvin Ember et al. New York: Springer, 2004, pp. 438-445. p. 438

³⁰² *ibid.*

³⁰³ Walcott 1995, p. 438

³⁰⁴ Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "'Is the Canon Colorblind?' On the Status of Authors of Color in Canadian Literatures in English." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*. 44.1 (1996): 51-81.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Froeschle, Hartmut. *The German-Canadians: A Concise History*. Toronto: Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada, 1992. p. 3

that does not develop, an ethnicity trapped in a repetitive loop."³⁰⁶ Matthias Zimmer cautions against a multiculturalism that focuses on the preservation of folksy traditions and the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes because such multiculturalism would ossify "a historical or idealized status quo and trapping ethnic groups in ascribed stereotypes."³⁰⁷ After all, "cultural roots and ethnicity are not written in stone but subject to modification and alteration, and there is no guarantee for their perpetuity."³⁰⁸

Canadian multiculturalism does not pay attention to the fact that (ethnic) identities undergo constant changes and, in doing so, it implicitly fosters essentialist notions of identity and serves as a strategy of assimilation. Therefore multiculturalism camouflages the political, economic, and aesthetic dominance of a white (European-derived) majority in Canada and its Western-materialist values as Huggan Graham and Winfried Siemerling emphasize when they describe multiculturalism as a "form of commodified eclecticism, or [...] a smokescreen that hides and protects the values of the dominant culture".³⁰⁹ While, without doubt, Canada's pluralist approach was initiated with good intentions and has certainly also done good in helping various cultural groups gain a voice and public recognition (mainly through monetary support), it is also true that the dominance of Anglo- and Franco-derived cultures is unbroken to the day. This dominance is neither thoroughly examined in public discourses nor is it challenged how and why it came into being.

In conclusion, one must admit that the egalitarianism postulated (or at least suggested) by the multicultural policy is mostly imaginary and does not

³⁰⁶ Onufrijchuk, Roman. "Post-modern or Perednovok: Deconstructing 'Ethnicity'." *Ethnicity in a Technological Age*. ed. Ian H. Angus. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and University of Alberta, 1988. p. 5

³⁰⁷ Zimmer, Matthias. "Deconstructing German-Canadian Identity." *A Chorus of Different Voices: German-Canadian Identities*. eds. Angelika E. Sauer and Matthias Zimmer. New York et al: Peter Lang, 1998. p. 32

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Huggan, Graham and Winfried Siemerling (eds.) "U.S./Canadian Writers' Perspectives on the Multiculturalism Debate: A Round-Table Discussion at Harvard University. Panel Contributions by Clark Blaise, Nicole Brossard, George Elliott Clarke, Paul Yee." *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of criticism and Review*. Spring (2000): 82-111; p. 83

correspond to the experiences of African-Canadians and people of mixed descent. As a result of the aforementioned pressure on ethnic groups for maintaining their identities and the repression of the natural cultural evolution and the hybridity among and within ethnic groups, it is significant to acknowledge that Canadian multiculturalism implicitly aims at keeping the prevailing hegemonic structures working.³¹⁰

Critical Debates since the 1990s: The Interrelatedness of 'Race', Ethnicity and Class

Critical debates since the 1990s have challenged the national imaginary and brought the issue of 'race' in the focus of attention. These debates initiated a shift beyond concepts like ethnicity and language in order to take account of aspects such as 'race', gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability and age and in consequence the voices criticizing the concept of multiculturalism increased in numbers.³¹¹ Along with other postcolonial critics, Sneja Gunew surmises that the multicultural discourse obfuscates and disguises the traditional white male heterosexual Anglo- and Francophone power configurations.³¹² Feminist scholar Smaro Kamboureli disapproves of the state-approved celebration of difference because it fortifies essentialized identities and thereby rather upholds torpid divisions than encourages mutual support and creative harmony. With an ironic allusion to the Ten Commandments of the Bible she states:

³¹⁰ Cf. Bannerji, Himani. "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'." *Literary Pluralities*. ed. Christl Verduyn. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998. pp. 125-151

³¹¹ Cf., for example, Huggan, Graham and Winfried Siemerling (eds.) "U.S./Canadian Writers' Perspectives on the Multiculturalism Debate: A Round Table Discussion at Harvard University. Panel Contributions by Clark Blaise, Nicole Brossard, George Elliott Clarke, Paul Yee; Responses by Geeta Patel." *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review*. Spring (2000): 82-111, p. 95

³¹² Cf. Gunew, Sneja. *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1994.

Thou shalt be ethnic, our legislators say; thou shalt honour thy mother tongue; thou shalt celebrate thy difference in folk festivals; and thou shalt receive monies to write about thy difference (providing thou art a member of an ethnic organization that sponsors thy application). And we have responded to that call, ethnics and non-ethnics alike; we have responded by discovering that difference is sexy.³¹³

Aware of the economic motivations of anti-racism and multiculturalism, Smaro Kamboureli and Fred Wah explicate the problems aligned with Canadian national imaginary in "Race Poetry, Eh?". They indicate that the nation's turn to 'race' relations is also strongly motivated by economic matters and a desire to benefit from the global market:

Raced culture, we believe, would not feature as part of the national and global economies had race not become a sign that reflects the state's own vested interests today. We don't think it is a mere coincidence that at the same time the state's agency is curtailed by globalization, the state itself, as is the case with Canada, undertakes to redesign its national imaginary by rewriting its history of racial relations and racism. If, in the past, the body politic was troubled by racial frictions, today this body politic is reconfigured to gain access to global bargaining positions in culture and representation. It translates its own management of racialized cultural production into its political and cultural capital both internally and internationally. This translation, in effect a process of conversion from one kind of restricted economy into another, takes place within, and in the hope of sharing a bigger part of, the global market -- market here to be understood not only in terms of the seemingly free circulation of capital, but also in relation to the discursive space in which anti-racism has

³¹³ Kamboureli, Smaro. "Of Black Angels and Melancholy Lovers: Ethnicity and Writing in Canada." *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*. eds. Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman. Boulder: Westview, 1993. pp. 143-156; p. 146

emerged as – to put it crudely – a hot commodity. In Canada this process takes place under the rubric, indeed, under the guise, of multiculturalism.³¹⁴

As Wah and Kamboureli illustrate so poignantly above, anti-racism has become a commodity, camouflaged by the multicultural state policy. Despite its anti-racist agenda, Canadian multiculturalism holds its share in the perpetuation of racism and other forms of personal and institutionalized discrimination because discourses on ethnicity and national identity do not pay adequate attention to the intertwining of 'race' and class. It must be acknowledged that that cultural pluralism often serves as a red herring to divert attention from a capitalist social order.³¹⁵

Canadian Multicultural Policy and Mixed-Race Identities

Canada, unhyphenated, held possible in imagination [...].
(John G. Moss, *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*)³¹⁶

The short quote from John Moss's *Enduring Dreams* (1997) encapsulates the dilemma many mixed-race Canadians face when it comes to the question of national affiliation. Is it possible for racially hyphenated Canadians to live without the hyphen? Does the racialization of their identities impede the creation of a sense of national belonging? In the past decade several sociological studies provided empirical evidence for the fact that most racially hybrid Canadians do not look positively on Canadian multiculturalism as a basis for national identification.³¹⁷ In fact, these studies indicate that the existing concept

³¹⁴ Kamboureli, Smaro and Fred Wah. "Shrink Wrapped: The National Packaging of Race Writing." *The Atlantic Literary Review*, 2. 4 (October -December 2001): 132-40.

³¹⁵ Cf. Becker 1977, p. 49

³¹⁶ Moss, John George. *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*. Concord: Anansi, 1997. p. 136

³¹⁷ Cf. Mahtani, Minelle. "Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and 'Mixed Race' Identities." *Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. Eds. Sean P. Hier and B. Singh Bolaria. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006. pp. 163-190;

of multiculturalism is unable to correspond to the varied racial and ethnic self-representations of mixed-race individuals. They confirm what has been pointed out beforehand: Canadian multiculturalism tends to permit diversity while implicitly veiling Eurocentric values. Apparently, it has failed as a strategy to successfully combat racism or the racialization of identities. According to these studies, a glaring deficiency lies in the policy's steady refusal to acknowledge and discuss 'race' as a socially constructed and economically motivated divide among people.³¹⁸

In a recent study Minelle Mahtani interviewed women of mixed 'race' and examined how these women negotiate their identities in terms of their national affiliations with Canada and how they read Canada's multicultural policy. Most of the women she interviewed express exasperation with, if not severe difficulties in, identifying as Canadian and admitted that multiculturalism often impedes their senses of belonging to Canada.³¹⁹ The first problem the interviewees accentuate is that "multiculturalism tends to privilege ethnicity and descent over and above other social identities (like gender and class among other factors)."³²⁰ Mahtani rightly points out that racially hybrid women may have several ethnic allegiances and, importantly, such allegiances are rarely ever static but change and develop according to time and geographical location.

The hyphen multiculturalism promotes may turn into a burden for racially mixed people. Since multiculturalism tends to treat categories of identification as discrete and fixed entities, the hyphen becomes a "troubling symbol that refuses to admit the possibility of the co-mingling of ethnicities and

Further studies in this field are Ray, Kay Pamela. *Mixed / Realities and Experiences: Growing up Mixed-Race in Canada*. M.A. Thesis, Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1996; Nakada, Mark Tadao. *Dreaming Okinawa: A Poetic and Critical Investigation of Mixed-Race Subjectivity*. M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1997; Knight, Mélanie Jane. *The Negotiation of Identities: Narratives of Mixed-Race Individuals in Canada*. M.A. Thesis, OISE, University of Toronto, 2001.

³¹⁸ Cf. Kobayashi, Audrey. "Multiculturalism: Representing a Canadian Institution." *Place/Culture/Representation*. eds. James Duncan and David Ley. London et al: Routledge, 1993.

³¹⁹ Cf. Mahtani 2006

³²⁰ Mahtani 2006, p. 167

national citizenship."³²¹ Gillian Rose argues that the hyphen produces *spaces of distance*, i.e. for individuals it is usually not enough to express their national belonging but the ethnicization of the hyphen is demanded in order to make a valuable contribution to the multicultural mosaic.³²² Since two or more ethnicities might mingle in mixed-race identities, the process of self-definition will become exhausting, lengthy and – unfortunately – satisfy the curiosity of those who desire to decipher a person's phenotype in order to categorize him or her racially and/or ethnically, while reinforcing essentialized categories of identification. "I'm not just one simple thing," one of the interviewees in the study declares.³²³ Burdened by the ethnic hyphen and restricted by dichotomous categories available within the framework of Canadian nationhood, mixed-race Canadians remain what Zillah Eisenstein calls "the double foreigner, the double stranger [...] held up to the phantasmic and found doubly wanting."³²⁴

Within the Eurocentric framework of Canadian multiculturalism women of mixed-race are positioned at the margins and usually feel as outsiders. However, in spite of all the criticism mixed-race women directed at the policy of multiculturalism, Mahtani also suggests that (especially younger women who were born in Canada) tend to re-appropriate the term 'Canadian' in order to "[imagine] new senses of nationalism as places for creating personal meanings of ethnicity, identity and their relationship to nation among conflicting racial and gendered discourses."³²⁵ She argues that some women chose to identify as Canadian (without the ethnic hyphen) to develop a novel concept of Canadian identity in which neither ethnicity nor nationhood are defined as static and inflexible categories. They assert that "being different by no means equates with being un-Canadian" and "displace and shift the terms of

³²¹ Mahtani 2006, p. 169

³²² Rose, Gillian. "Distance, Surface, Elsewhere: A Feminist Critique of the Space of Phallogentric Self/Knowledge." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 13 (1995): 761-781.

³²³ Faith in Mahtani 2006, p. 169

³²⁴ Eisenstein, Zillah R. *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st century*. New York et al: Routledge, 1996. p. 41

³²⁵ Mahtani 2006, pp. 163-164.

British-French linked nationalism."³²⁶ They claim the label 'Canadian' as a tool of empowerment and in an attempt to defy the dichotomous classifications of the multicultural policy. For these women, Mahtani emphasizes, their mixed-race identity functions as a vision for a new understanding of national belonging in Canada: "I should be the new symbol for Canada!", Kiirti – one of the interviewees – announces proudly, "I am one big melting pot of stuff! (laughter) I'm a stew! (laughter) A big Canadian stew! (laughter)."³²⁷

Like Kiirti, some of the women express that their racial mixture embodies their sense of Canadianness. By refusing the hyphen, they defy the existing ethnic stereotypes and force people to re-think their racist assumptions about what it means to be Canadian. Instead they claim their own definition of Canadian identity and choose to exercise their right to mingle their ethnic and national affiliations as Darius, a 32-year-old actress explains:

I think Canada is really on this frontier of racial miscegenation, so I don't really separate my ethnic and national identity. I see myself as being Canadian and being mixed race. Maybe even more than someone who is monoracial [...]. To me, for me, being Canadian and being mixed race, and the issues around identity there, are not at odds with each other. They are related.³²⁸

While Mahtani's empirical results add a new facet to the discussion of mixed-race identities and the question of nationalism, it is a moot point as to whether racial hybridity should serve as the new vision of a truly multicultural Canadian identity. Certainly, such innovative reformulations of Canadian identity are capable of challenging existing notions of ethnicity and citizenship by moving beyond the rigid, often dichotomous categories of difference and proposing new, flexible models of identity. However, a celebration of racial

³²⁶ Mahtani 2006, p. 170

³²⁷ Kiirti in Mahtani 2006, p. 173

³²⁸ Darius in Mahtani 2006, p. 171

hybridity as the inevitable result of the age of globalization and as the much desired antidote to problems of identity formation will neither be sufficient to deconstruct 'race' nor make racism disappear. It might even produce a universalism in which new forms of essentialism are camouflaged by reifying the notion of 'race'. Furthermore, it may divert attention from the interconnectedness of 'race', gender and, importantly, class. As a result there might be little room for effectively contesting and revising existing power structures.

As long as the social construction of 'race' and its impact on social and economic inequalities is not fully acknowledged within the discourse of multiculturalism and as long as the racist history of the country is not publicly debunked, mixed-race Canadians will have to continue "writing themselves into existence."³²⁹ It will be necessary to "snatch from the hidden histories another place to stand in, another place to speak from," as Stuart Hall concludes so aptly.³³⁰

³²⁹ Mahtani 2006, p. 174

³³⁰ Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. pp. 222-237. p. 236

3.3. Living and Writing the In-Between: Tracing a Black Literary Tradition in Canada

African-Canadian artists (not unlike other marginalized groups) had to come up with strategies to re-shape the national imaginary: They have engaged in generating what Calgary poet Fred Wah calls the poetic tools of "disturbance, dislocation, and displacement" to make themselves audible and visible. From their multifaceted subject positions, African-Canadians have redefined, revisioned, and reconstructed as well as translated, transferred, and transpositioned prevailing ideas to expose the existing Manichaeisms along distinguishing criteria like religion, 'race', sexual orientation, class, age (and others) stay abreast of the constant changes and complexities of culture.³³¹ By questioning dichotomist structures, black writers attach importance to the *places in-between* instead.³³²

For black Canadians, living the in-between is conditioned by their inside/outside status in the nation-state: whether as 'indigenous black' or otherwise, one's in-betweenness in Canada is conditioned by a plethora of national narratives from the 'two founding peoples', to multicultural and immigration policies, to provincial and municipal policing practices and so on. The impossibility of imagining blackness as Canadian is continually evident even as nation-state policies like multiculturalism seek to signal otherwise. The simultaneity of being here and not being here is, in effect, an in-between position.³³³

³³¹ Wah, Fred. "Half-Bred Poetics." *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000. pp. 71-96.

³³² Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "Multikulturalität als Stärke der zeitgenössischen Literatur." *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*. Eds. Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Klooss und Reingard M. Nischik. Weimar: Metzler Verlag, 2005. p. 312

³³³ Walcott, Rinaldo. "'A Tough Geography': Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada." *West Coast Line. New Directions in African-Canadian Writing*. ed. Roy Miki. 22 (Spring/Summer 1997): 38-51. p. 43

From this liminal, in-between position, African-Canadian writers feel the necessity of acting as historians in order to write a counter-discourse to Canada's founding narratives. "The power of words, images, and concepts cannot be underestimated in the construction of Canada," writes Veronica Strong-Boag in her introduction to *Painting the Maple* (1998).³³⁴ Robert Kroetsch likewise insists that "We haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real."³³⁵ Like other marginalized artists black Canadian writers are very much aware of this power of literature as Kroetsch and Strong-Boag have expressed it. Hence, African-Canadian authors often create powerful counter-narratives to the dominant discourse, "so literature can, and perhaps must give the lie to official facts."³³⁶ James Baldwin once maintained that "artists are here to disturb the peace."³³⁷ For African-Canadians writing most often equals activism. Writing means to resist the status quo, to fight against historical and social amnesia, to defy erasure and to blow wide open fostered myths and concealed assumptions – in short to expose "the knowledge that continues to foster the practice of forgetting."³³⁸ African-Canadian writers brought to light what Homi Bhabha once referred to as "denied knowledges"³³⁹ in *The Location of Culture*.

Black Canadians have been very successful as chroniclers of the past and filled crucial blank spots in Canadian historiography.³⁴⁰ Until recently the mainstream historical and socio-political discourse has remained silent about facts like the genocide of First Nations people, the ruthless exploitation of the

³³⁴ Grace, Sherrill and Veronica Strong-Boag et al. "Constructing Canada: An Introduction." *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender and the Construction of Canada*. ed. Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: UBC, 1998. pp. 3-15. p.14

³³⁵ Kroetsch, Robert. "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence." *Creation*. ed. Robert Kroetsch. Toronto: New Press, 1970. pp. 53-63. p.63

³³⁶ Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." *Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991. pp. 9-21. p. 14.

³³⁷ Baldwin, James qtd. in Philip 1992, p. 135.

³³⁸ Philip 1992, p. 100.

³³⁹ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. p. 175

³⁴⁰ George Elliott Clarke unearthes the black Canadian history of the Maritimes, Karina Vernon claims the archive as a space for recovering black prairie history, Wayne Compton records Black British Columbian history and Lawrence Hill gives fictionalized accounts of black history in Ontario.

land, measurements like the Chinese head tax, the internment of Japanese Canadians or discriminatory immigration policies in the aftermath of the Second World War. Mostly, it is exclusively thanks to efforts of the marginalized groups themselves that history is being rewritten and corrected. Most importantly, African-Canadian historians have underlined one fact: Slavery and racial discrimination must be acknowledged as sad and momentous chapters in Canada's past. Contrary to the public myth, slavery was not only institutionalized south of the 49th parallel, but also an integral part of the Canadian historical experience.³⁴¹ Especially those blacks that fled or migrated to Canada in hope of being embraced by liberty and justice were bitterly disappointed. What they found was blatant racism, *de facto* segregation and, in some cases, even deportation.³⁴²

Stanley R. Barret explains in his study *Is God a Racist?* that "racism in Canada has been institutionalized [...] as deeply rooted as that in the United States,"³⁴³ the difference being only that Canada puts on a more subtle and less visible face of racism. Accordingly, the dominant discourse on 'Canadian identity' continues to be associated with 'whiteness' and its transparent norms even if public discussions about 'race relations' and racism have increased. In spite of Canada's anti-racist agenda, the racial discrimination against black Canadians continues and the public imaginary still fosters the thought of Canada as a nation founded by Europeans and surrounded by various micro-cultures. Thus the confident addition of the 'post' to the national is little more than perfumed dreaminess.

³⁴¹ The first recorded purchase of a black person was that of Oliver Le Jeune, who arrived in Quebec in 1628 and spent most of his life as a slave in Canada. In the 18th-century then, about 5000 Black Loyalists – who had fought with the British in the War of Independence – migrated/fled to the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario for settlement, hoping to receive the promised land grants and to find a liberal legislation free of racist prejudice.

³⁴² Cf. Hill, Daniel. *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*. Toronto: Stoddart Publ. Co. Limited, 1981; Winks, Robin W. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. Montreal: U of McGill P, 1997.

³⁴³ Barret, Stanley R. *Is God a Racist?* qtd. in Philip 1992, p. 182.

Exigency: The 'Race' for Publication

The norm of the white, heterosexual, Christian, English-speaking, middle and upper class male reflects the colonialist and imperialist ideology at the root of Canadian national and cultural identity. Since the 19th-century this legacy of white supremacist thinking has created a hegemonic nationalism that is also strongly reflected in Canada's literature, art and culture, academic structures, scholarly texts, school and university curricula as well as in publishing politics and market strategies.³⁴⁴ African Canadian critic and writer M. NourbeSe Philip argues that there has been a development towards an "ideological superstructure of publishing, reviewing and criticism"³⁴⁵ in Canada. For a long time marginalized writers have lacked publishing opportunities and attention by reviewers, critics, and academic scholars. Canadian culture – as represented by art councils and funding committees – habitually neglected or even outrightly disrespected black, Asian, First Nations or Queer cultural contributions. "The currents of racism in Canadian society run deep," Philip writes,

they run smooth, lulling white Canadians into a complacency that will see racism anywhere else but in Canada. Racism is as much the determining factor in the brutal and deadly confrontation between the police and African-Canadians as it is in the traditional approach of art councils and related institutions to African-based aesthetics and African Canadian artists.³⁴⁶

In response to such reproaches, major presses repeatedly call upon the ostensibly small audience available for such marginalized writers. However, Canadian publishing business has less to do with the number of potential

³⁴⁴ Cf. Strong-Boag, Veronica. *Rethinking Canada. The Promise of Women's History*. 3rd ed. Don Mills: OUP, 1997. p. 9; Cf. Lee, Jo-Anne and Linda Cardinal. "Hegemonic Nationalism and the Politics of Feminism and Multiculturalism in Canada." in Strong-Boag 1998, p. 218.

³⁴⁵ Philip 1992, p. 159.

³⁴⁶ Philip 1992, p. 12.

readers, but much more with power relations, institutionalized racist structures and the prevalent smugness of white supremacist thinking.³⁴⁷

In his recently published collection of interviews, *Why We Write: Conversations with African-Canadian Poets and Novelists* (2006), editor H. Nigel Thomas expounds his view on this dilemma and underlines that black writing in Canada has been mostly a small-press and community-based phenomenon, especially in the remarkable Renaissance of African-Canadian literature during the 1970s and 80s. The writers featured in Thomas's book widely agree on this subject and even express feelings of unease about the future of black Canadian writing in the face of consolidated structures within the publishing industry and plenty of marketing hurdles.³⁴⁸ In the 1960s, acclaimed writer Austin Clarke was the only black Canadian writer to be published by a major press. Unfortunately, Clarke's (hard-earned) acceptance by major publishers has unwillingly helped to spur the idea of the Caribbean nature and immigrant origin of African-Canadian literature. Many of the other artists – especially women writers, native black writers or those rooted in the experience of a specific region of Canada – had no publishing outlets available whatsoever.

As one strategy of resistance against the persistent disregard of African-Canadian contributions to literature self-publication has long been the only venue accessible to those African-Canadian writers who were deliberately excluded from Canada's literary landscape. In his anthology of black British Columbian literature and orature, *Bluesprint* (2001), Wayde Compton cites the author of the first black B.C. novel, Truman Green, as a prime example for the intricacies revolving around the publishing business of black Canadian literature. Publishers had turned down Green's novel *A Credit to Your Race* (1973) until the author decided to print his work on his own. Only 300 copies of the book were issued – only a few of those have survived until today. Green's fate was exemplary for the problems black writers in the 1970s and 1980s faced.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Philip 1992, pp. 160-167.

³⁴⁸ Thomas, Nigel H. "Introduction: Facing the Challenge" *Why we Write: Conversations with African Canadian Poets and Novelists*. Ed. H. Nigel Thomas. Toronto: TSAR, 2006. p. vii.

Those that did not have the means of self-publication, have often remained unpublished, were overlooked or ended up stored away in historical archives without being noticed.³⁴⁹

Another, very successful (but strenuous) approach to create space for black Canadian writing has been the foundation of smaller presses, often in a combined effort of some of the demonstratively neglected writers themselves. As one of the first efforts to be observed Harold Head's Khoisan Artists Books must be named. His press, founded in the 1970s, provided initial publishing opportunities for writers like Dionne Brand, for example.³⁵⁰ In the 1980s Ann Wallace and Makeda Silvera followed with the establishments of Williams-Wallace and Sister Vision Press, respectively. Both women had personal experience in being refused by mainstream publishers, but in spite of enormous obstacles like the lack of funds and societal awareness they took on the project of publishing defiant, challenging and rebellious works by Canadian women of color. While Wallace gave for instance voice to unique poets like Claire Harris, M. NourbeSe Philip and Dionne Brand, Silvera enlarged the publishing opportunities for gay and lesbian artists together with poet and visual artist Stephanie Martin. Moreover, they published works by Althea Prince and Pamela Mordecai as well as those of dramatist Djanet Sears and dub poet Ahndri Mandiela.³⁵¹

Both presses largely impacted the rise of black Canadian literature and had a stake in the increased visibility of African-Canadian authors by inducing the publication of some groundbreaking anthologies. Wallace published one of the primary anthologies of black Canadian literature, namely Lorris Elliott's *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* (1985). Lorris's anthology should stay the largest compilation of black Canadian poems and prose pieces for more

³⁴⁹ Cf. Wilkinson, Myler and David Stouck. "The Epic Moment: An Interview with Wayde Compton. *West Coast Line*. No. 38. 36/2 Fall 2002. pp. 131-145; Cf. Compton, Wayde. *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Thomas 2006.

³⁵¹ For further information on the history of publishing houses see Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "A Primer of African-Canadian Literature". *Odyseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto et al: University of Toronto Press, 2002. pp. 325-338.

than a decade until George Elliott Clarke's release of *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African Canadian Literature* in 1997.³⁵² Sister Vision Press, in turn, must be given credit for publishing the first and hitherto unmatched anthology *Miscegenation Blues* (1994), which allows insight into the experiences of women with a 'racially mixed' ancestry.

Additionally, small presses that were concerned with matters of representation, 'race' and culture emerged from the buzzing cultural climate of the 1970s and 80s. In 1971 Pulp Press (since 1982 Arsenal Pulp Press), for example, was established in a collective effort of university students who felt "disenchanted by what they perceived to be the academic literary pretensions of Canadian literature" at the time.³⁵³ Arsenal titles counter mainstream cultural and narrative expectations and draw attention to the reality of Canadian racism, featuring black writers like Wayde Compton, David Chariandy or David N. Odhiambo. Around the same time George Melnyk, a freelance writer and former instructor at the University of Alberta, formed NeWest Press. As a Western regional press NeWest also issued works by African-Canadians voicing the black Canadian prairie experience like that of the exceptional Calgarian Suzette Mayr. Helpful in distributing the writings of African-Canadians has also been TSAR Publications whose focus lies on poetry, fiction and non-fiction that can loosely be called 'multicultural' and on those that relate to Asian and Africa. Among the authors featured by TSAR are Nigel Thomas and Cyril Dabydeen.³⁵⁴

Only recently, since the mid-1990s, the number of African-Canadian writers who are accepted by major publishers like McClelland&Stewart or HarperCollins Canada has slightly increased. In the 1970s and 80s those given the chance of publication were exclusively of Caribbean descent, had

³⁵² Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "Canadian Multicultural Literatures: Ethnic Minorities and 'AlterNatives'." *The Canadian Alternative*. Ed. Klaus Mertens. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2003. pp. 37-51.

³⁵³ "Arsenal Pulp Press: A Brief History" < <http://www.arsenalpulp.com> >, Accessed on Aug 8th, 2008.

³⁵⁴ Certainly, the number of presses mentioned in this essay does not lay claim to completeness. Many other small presses have participated in the publication of marginalized authors.

immigrated to Canada before and were university-educated. As Ontario-based writer Lawrence Hill suggested in an interview with Nigel Thomas, larger publishers have begun to realize that "books exploring the minority experience can sell" and that it has thus become a bit easier for *authors of color* to be published at large.³⁵⁵ However, the "uneasy relationship of Black Canadian writing to the broader print-culture market" continues as David Chariandy quotes Nigel Thomas in his review of *Why we Talk* while Suzette Mayr insinuates that only particular types of the 'minority experience' are considered worth selling.³⁵⁶ To imagine blackness as something constitutively Canadian appears still troublesome to parts of the book-consuming audience. The idea that 'black-equals-immigrant' persists in the public imagination although numerous publications by African-Canadian and international scholars have proven the long-lasting history of indigenous black Canadians and highlighted their enduring creativity and production.³⁵⁷ In order to emphasize a native black presence, African-Canadian writers will continue to dedicate their energies to the publication of black writing on their own account. One of these attempts can be seen in the creation of Commodore Books, a small press under the umbrella of West Coast Line Publishing. Founded by B.C.-affiliated writers like Wayde Compton, Karina Vernon and David Chariandy the press focuses on the publication of (indigenous) black Canadian writers like Fred Booker or Addena Sumter-Freitag, whose works have stayed unnoticed in the past. Commodore Books constitutes the one and only active black press in Western Canada so far.

³⁵⁵ Hill, Lawrence in Nigel Thomas. *Why we Write: Conversations with African Canadian Poets and Novelists*. ed. H. Nigel Thomas. Toronto: TSAR, 2006. Two of Hill's novels, *Any Known Blood* (1997) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007) as well as his non-fictional, partly autobiographical work *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada* (2001) were successfully put on the market by HarperCollins.

³⁵⁶ Chariandy, David. "Why We Write: Conversations with African-Canadian Poets and Novelists." [Review].

< <http://www.tsarbooks.com/WhyWeWriteReviews.htm> > Accessed on August 8th, 2008.

³⁵⁷ Cf. Compton 2001; Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "A Primer of African-Canadian Literature". *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto et al: University of Toronto Press, 2002. pp. 325-338;

Cf. Vernon, Karina. *The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing*. (Ph.D. thesis, University of Victoria, 2008).

"Writing blackness is still difficult work," Rinaldo Walcott wrote in his introduction to *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada* (2003).³⁵⁸ Beyond doubt Walcott has got a very good point here – and, if one might follow Walcott's line, something else is undeniable: If writing blackness is still difficult work, publishing blackness remains a Gordian knot – an intractable problem to be solved by a bold stroke only.

African-Canadian Sites of Memory and the Intricacies of Belonging

"The black community is varied and multifaceted", Cecil Foster states in his profound elaborations on the meaning of being black in Canada in *A Place Called Heaven* (1996). "This diversity", Foster continues, "presents its own challenges and obstacles. The question that arises is whether we can create a community."³⁵⁹ In his personal examination of black cultural space in Canada, Foster asks whether African-Canadians share a sense of belonging or whether the heterogeneity of black Canadian subjectivities precludes considerations of a real bond or a common denominator among his people. He wonders "whether a people can have a community without their own heroes and myths, when they must borrow from other societies, rather than venerate and elevate their own"?³⁶⁰

Black Canada does have its own heroes and its own myths, even if Foster believes otherwise. Allowedly, the indigeneity of Canadian blackness easily vanishes in the light of the hyper-visible cultural indicators of Caribbean immigrants. While explorations of the immigrant experience(s) are of invaluable help in mapping Canadian 'blackness' in a more global, diasporic sense and in positioning it within a broader context of the postcolonial discourse, they also divert attention from old-line black Canadian communities

³⁵⁸ Walcott, Rinaldo. "Introduction to the Second Edition: Still Writing Blackness" *Black Like Who? Writing – Black – Canada*. Walcott Rinaldo. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003. pp. 11-23. p. 11.

³⁵⁹ Foster, Cecil. *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996. p. 18-19.

³⁶⁰ Foster 1996, p. 19.

and their cultural and literary contributions. Without dispute, African-Canadians – no matter whether they rely on an 'indigenous' (settler-descended) or 'naturalized' (immigrant-descended) background – are a heterogeneous group whose culture(s) is/are informed by various ethnic backgrounds, different languages, geographical origins and historical memories. Their various experiences are connected in what African-Canadian scholar, critic and writer George Elliott Clarke calls the "African microcosm of Canada"³⁶¹ or in what the Afro-German scholar Marion Kraft termed as the "African Continuum" – a unifying consciousness which gains its strength from a shared political struggle against erasure and which does not necessarily draw exclusively upon African cultural roots.³⁶²

However, most African-Canadians appear indeed to lack a sense of belonging and in that respect Foster's question is by all means justified. It seems anything but easy to be black in Canada: "To be black and 'at home' in Canada is to both belong and not belong," sociologist Rinaldo Walcott explains.³⁶³ George Elliott Clarke expresses the feeling of being only "semi-Canadian"³⁶⁴, author Clifton Ruggles calls it living in "shadowlands"³⁶⁵, cultural critic Adrienne Shadd speaks of "being a nonentity in our own country"³⁶⁶ and NourbeSe Philip muses on the implications of the black Canadian "Unhomely". "It is only in belonging that we will eventually become Canadian," Philip explains. To her the idea of being "home" in Canada is disturbed by a feeling of "permanent exile":³⁶⁷

³⁶¹ Clarke, George Elliott. "The Complex Face of Black Canada." *McGill News. Alumni Quarterly*. (Winter 1997b). p. 2.

³⁶² Cf. Kraft, Marion. *The African Continuum and Contemporary African American Women Writers: Their Literary Presence and Ancestral Past*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1995; Cf. Lutz 2003.

³⁶³ Walcott, Rinaldo. "A Tough Geography": Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada." *West Coast Line. New Directions in African-Canadian Writing*. ed. Roy Miki. 22 (Spring/Summer 1997): 38-51. p. 45

³⁶⁴ Clarke 1997a, p. 11.

³⁶⁵ Ruggles, Clifton and Olivia Rovinciscu. *Outsider Blues: A Voice from the Shadows*. Halifax: Fernwood Publ. 1996, p. 4.

³⁶⁶ Shadd, Adrienne. "Where are you really from? Notes on an Immigrant from North Buxton, Ontario." *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity*. ed. Adrienne Shadd. Toronto: Between the Lines. 1994, p. 9.

³⁶⁷ Cf. Philip 1992, p. 9; Cf. Vernon 2008, pp. 150-152.

For Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas, who in the words of the spiritual, have been trying to sing their songs in a strange land, be/longing *is* problematic. Be/longing *anywhere* – the Caribbean, Canada, the United States, even Africa. The land, the place that was the New World was nothing but a source of anguish – how could they – we – begin to love the land, which is the first step in be/longing, when even the land was unfree? How could they – we – be/long to a land that was not theirs – ours [...]?³⁶⁸

In spite of the apparent complexities of black Canadian 'be/longing' and the persistent cleavage between "native" and "immigrant", African-Canadians have created *sites of memory* across Canada which function as powerful counter-histories and articulate a black Canadian space in which individual and collective identities are fleshed out and interact.³⁶⁹ It is these *sites of memory*, a term employed by Karina Vernon in her pioneering study of black prairie culture and literature, from which African-Canadian writers draw or reclaim a sense of belonging – even if this sense of belonging remains difficult to grasp or to describe for now. Reworking the notion of the *lieu de mémoire* as it was outlined in Pierre Nora's *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (1996) and appropriated by Fabré and O'Meally in their introduction to *History, Memory and African-American Culture* (1994), Vernon understands these *sites of memory* as a phenomenon capable of inspiring a counter-hegemonic discourse in order to "examine the elisions and aporias of dominant cultural and historical inscriptions"³⁷⁰ and brings to light a hitherto repressed, neglected or erased knowledge of the past. These sites are "invested with the collective personal and

³⁶⁸ Philip 1992, p. 22. Philip makes transparent that it might prove not only difficult to acknowledge Canadian blackness, but that it might even be inappropriate given the fact that the only inhabitants entitled to the claim of indigeneity are the members of First Nations communities.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Nora, Pierre. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: U of Columbia P, 1996.

³⁷⁰ Vernon 2008, p. 19.

historical memories of generations of black writers."³⁷¹ What is significant in Vernon's argumentation is that the process of remembering certain "landmarks of the past"³⁷² (i.e. places, artworks, public or private people) holds the potential of creating a collective black Canadian memory, and with that possibly also a sense of belonging.

Unearthing a Black Literary Tradition in Canada

The task of identifying local black histories and heroes in order to answer Foster's call for a black community in Canada begins by unearthing what has been forgotten or denied. Already more than a decade ago, African-Canadian literary critic and writer George Elliott Clarke has pointed to the necessity that African-Canadian writers "are forced to act as historians".³⁷³ It is this project upon which black Canadian writers (especially of the 1990s) have embarked ever since. "African-Canadian literature has been, from its origins, the world of political exiles and native dissidents. It began in crisis, matured in crisis, and exists in crisis", Clarke wrote in the mid-1990s when authors and critics across Canada and Europe launched the project of re-covering a black literary tradition in Canada.³⁷⁴ Back in the 1980s Lorris Elliott, a founding author, influential literary critic and pioneering bibliographer of African-Canadian literature, had still confessed in his collection *Literary Writings by Blacks in Canada: A Preliminary Survey* (1988), that "there is no real evidence of extensive literary writing by blacks in Canada before the 1970s".³⁷⁵ Two decades later M. NourbeSe Philip still mourned the absence of a Canadian tradition of black writing as it exists in Great Britain or the United States and even speaks of a "Great Canadian Void":

³⁷¹ Vernon 2008, p. 19.

³⁷² Fabre, Genevieve and Robert O'Meally, eds. *History and Memory in African-American Culture*. New York: U of Oxford P, 1994. p. 7.

³⁷³ Clarke 1997, p. xx.

³⁷⁴ Clarke, George Elliott. "A Primer of African-Canadian Literature". *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto et al: University of Toronto Press, 2002. pp. 325-338. p.7.

³⁷⁵ Elliott, Lorris. *Literary Writing by Blacks in Canada: A Preliminary Survey*. Ottawa: Department of the Secretary of State, 1988. p. 4.

The great Canadian void either swallows you whole, or you come out the other side the stronger for it. Black writers here are, in fact, creating a tradition which will be different from both the English and American traditions of writing and literature by Black writers. Being the trailblazer for other writers to follow has been overwhelmingly difficult and daunting, for it has often appeared that there is nothing out there.³⁷⁶

Clarke himself has proven otherwise and pointed to the 18th-century roots of African-Canadian literature by excavating the early writings of the Black Loyalists in the Africadian – an area of long-time black settlement in the Maritimes.³⁷⁷ He names John Marrant, a black Calvinist missionary who made himself at home in Nova Scotia from 1785 to 1789, as the first black Canadian writer, marking Marrant's magic realist report of his captivity among the Cherokee *Narrative of the Lord's wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black (Now Going to Preach the Gospel of Nova Scotia)* as the starting point of the black literary tradition in Canada in 1785.³⁷⁸ As Clarke stresses, Africadian literature was born in "urgency" and originated as "a rebuke to the American Revolution and its pure, internal contradiction, namely, chattel slavery."³⁷⁹ The first phase of African-Canadian writing therefore comprises the writings of the Black Loyalists who migrated to Canada in the aftermath of the American Revolution in 1783. They came as slaves with British Loyalists or as free blacks, who had won their freedom by pledging allegiance to the British and decided to leave the United States for Canada in search of land, liberty and justice. Namable are

³⁷⁶ Philip, M. Nourbese. "Who's Listening? Artists, audiences, and Language." *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture 1984-1992*. ed. M. Nourbese Philip. Stratford, ON: The Mercury Press, 1992. pp. 26-46. p.45.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "A Primer of African-Canadian Literature". *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto et al: University of Toronto Press, 2002a. pp. 325-338; Clarke, George Elliott. "The Birth and Rebirth of Africadian Literature." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto et al: University of Toronto Press, 2002b. pp. 107-125.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Clarke 2002b; Cf. Clarke 2002a

³⁷⁹ Clarke 2002a, p. 328.

next to the successful writing of Marrant the memoirs of David George, a Baptist minister, and Boston Kind, a Methodist, published in 1793 and 1798, respectively. Both men left Canada only a few years later in a mass exodus to Sierra Leone.³⁸⁰

The 19th century was then marked by the influx of about 2000 fugitive African-American slaves, referred to as the Black Refugees, into Nova Scotia after the War of 1812. The largest group of black people, however, had come independently to Canada via the Underground Railroad seeking to escape the bondage of slavery. Thus the literature of this period was mostly characterized by its abolitionist content or religious outpourings. Josiah Henson's autobiography *Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada* (1849) was next to Henry Bibb's *Narrative* (1849) and Samuel Ward's *Autobiography of a Fugitive Hero* (1855) among the most successful publications. At the same time the first African-Canadian women writer, Mary Ann Shadd, started her career as a writer and newspaper editor. Noteworthy appear her works *Condition of Colored People* (1849) and *A Plea for Emigration* (1852), which were likewise observant of the living conditions in Upper and Western Canada, as they were socio-critical and anti-racist in purpose.

Not unlike their forebears, contemporary black writers affiliated with the Maritimes – some umpteenth generation Africadian by background, some African-American natives or immigrants, some of mixed origins – like George Elliott Clarke, Maxine Tynes, George A. Borden or Charles R. Saunders, for example, continue to craft community histories, memoirs and, most decidedly, lyrical accounts of their experiences of being black in Eastern Canada. Their lyrical personae often try to wrest identities from the rural landscape, but not without positioning their experiences within the broader context of the black diaspora. One of the black protagonists in George Elliott Clarke's first novel *George and Rue* (2005), in which Clarke traces a chapter in Nova Scotia's history of anti-black sentiment by chronicling the tragic story of his (widely related)

³⁸⁰ Cf. Pachai, Bridglai. *Peoples of the Maritimes: Blacks*. 2nd rev. ed. Tantallon, Nova Scotia: Four East Publications, 1993. p. 20.

cousins George and Rufus, roots himself in the land with almost religious devotion and finds "some good under [the] crow-fractured, dark blue Heaven" of rural Windsor in Nova Scotia:

[George] had to wade through bushes, spend days cutting poplar trees and maples and spruce and pine. [...] He could tiptoe through the marsh bushes, the thinner woods near the Avon River, tumble into orange-red mud and climb out, or quickly skinny-dip in the river. He'd wander, separate, alone, among lichenized rocks, let salt spray off the Fundy splash his coloured Nova Scotia face. [...] He'd found Paradise.³⁸¹

In her introduction to *Revival: An Anthology of Black Canadian Writing* (2006), editor Donna Bailey Nurse adds that Clarke "crafts a language that might encapsulate his characters' dual experiences of blackness and Canadianness."³⁸² What Clarke thereby endeavors, not without a nationalist tinge one might say, is to emphasize the essential necessity to know, acknowledge and respect African-Canadian history.

By the time of the American Civil War another group of about 600-800 black migrants had made its way from California to what is now British Columbia and settled there, once again in hope of gaining financial prosperity and escaping the harsher racial persecution in San Francisco.³⁸³ They, too, would feel the need to ink their histories and to speak from the place they arrived at. As distinguished from other waves of immigration, these African-Americans came on account of an official invitation by the governor, James Douglas. People were lured by the promises of suffrage and equality, and – as so often in Canadian history – these were not as easily fulfilled as expected.³⁸⁴ It

³⁸¹ Clarke, George Elliott. "George & Rue." *Revival: An Anthology of Black Canadian Writing*. Toronto: McClelland&Stewart, 2006. p. 231.

³⁸² Nurse, D. Bailey "Introduction." *Revival: An Anthology of Black Canadian Writing*. Toronto: McClelland&Stewart, 2006. p.xvii.

³⁸³ Cf. Winks, Robin W. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. Montreal: U of McGill P, 1997; Cf. Compton 2001.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Compton 2001.

was Douglas himself who was to start the tradition of black writing in B.C. Born to a Scottish trader and a free colored woman in British Guyana and equipped with a physical appearance that enabled him to pass for 'white', Douglas lived a life full of ambiguities with regard to his racial identification. In *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001), Wayne Compton claims Douglas as the first black B.C. writer, although it could never be assured that the governor considered himself black. Preserved are Douglas's personal and public correspondences as well as the records of his voyages. In *Bluesprint* Compton published excerpts from the *Journal of James Douglas, 1843*, in which Douglas describes the inception of Victoria.³⁸⁵

From the pioneers arriving from San Francisco the earliest poets of B.C. emerged, namely Priscilla Stewart and Rebecca Gibbs. Stewart's poem "A Voice from the Oppressed to the Friends of Humanity" documents and comments the mass exodus of the black migrants and their journey to British Columbia. Her poetry, Compton predicts, introduced one of the elementary themes that will "recur in black B.C. writing to come".³⁸⁶ It is the ambivalence inherent in the Janus-like process of looking simultaneously backward and forward in describing black Canadian lives. Rebecca Gibbs on her part gave insight into the conditions faced by miners in some of the gold mining towns in B.C.'s interior in the 1860s. Her poem "The Old Red Shirt" features a washerwoman (as she was herself) and reflects the poverty and harsh living conditions of the laborers in the mines.³⁸⁷

Black writings from B.C. also launched the debate around issues of language and 'authenticity' as it should persist maybe not in literary criticism but in public discussions of African-Canadian literary expressions until the mid-1990s. The prose pieces of Mifflyn Wistar Gibbs and Isaac Dickson spurred these controversies in the second half of the 19th century. Clearly, black authors were expected to display an inferior command of English or to show signs of

³⁸⁵ Cf. Compton 2001, p. 20-21.

³⁸⁶ Compton 2001, p. 22.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Compton 2001, p. 22.

some kind of 'ethnicized' style and expression. Whereas Mifflin Gibbs, like Priscilla Stewart and Rebecca Gibbs, adhered to a sophisticated and eloquent flow of words, Gibbs made use of black dialect as a means of strategically exposing the "gullibility of the whites"³⁸⁸ and to express social criticism as well as humor. Compton is right when he demurs at notions of authenticity and notes that

black language in B.C. has always been scrutinized and held to standards of authenticity to which white readers rarely find themselves held. [...] The notion of black speech and writing as something that should be artless and natural in order to be authentic is racist, and denies the agency and individuality of these writers.³⁸⁹

Only a decade earlier, M. NourbeSe Philip had raised a similar concern in *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992), which is shared by many, mostly immigrant, writers: "Male, white and Oxford-educated, he stands over my right shoulder; she is old, Black and wise and stands over my left shoulder – two figures symbolizing the two traditions that permeate my work."³⁹⁰ The endeavor to bridge this split, Philip explains, must be understood as a challenging but creative process, for "each represents what the other is not – each is, to speak, the other's Other."³⁹¹ To solve the problem Philip encourages black writers to engage in a dialogue between the two. Yet the choice of language for the (Caribbean-descended) writer remains complicated:

If you work entirely in nation language or the Caribbean demotic of English you do, to a large degree, restrict your audience to those familiar enough with it; if you move to standard English you lose much of that

³⁸⁸ Compton 2001, p. 24.

³⁸⁹ Compton 2001, p. 24.

³⁹⁰ Philip, M. NourbeSe. "Who's Listening? Artist, Audience & Language" *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*. Stratford, Ontario: The Mercury Press, 1992. p. 26.

³⁹¹ Philip 1992, p. 27.

audience and, along with that loss, an understanding of many of the traditions, history, and culture which contextualizes your work.³⁹²

In any reading of black Canadian writing language should be understood as a significant part of colonization and decolonization processes alike. It is the *choice* of the author that should be noticed and appreciated: a means of creating cultural, social and possibly aesthetic awareness, and – importantly – a creative and political strategy to subvert not only the white-dominated literary tradition but to undermine racialized expectations of any kind. For the African-Canadian writer who is positioned as the Other, who lives out the "in-between" that Rinaldo Walcott described, the choice of language is a "choice resonant with historical and political realities *and* possibilities."³⁹³

Historical and political realities and possibilities have also shaped the experience of black prairie writers as Karina Vernon very recently pointed out in her yet unpublished doctoral thesis *The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing* (University of Victoria, 2008). While both Compton and Clarke see well-founded reasons to lament a "Great Void" in black writing which results from a 65-year interim of publishing silence by black Canadian authors from the 1910s to the mid 1970s, Vernon looks at this period and unearths long forgotten prairie writers and their publications and courageously claims the contentious Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance as "a meaningful figure in black prairie history."³⁹⁴ Long Lance passed for a Native Blackfoot blending out the other integral parts of his mixed heritage like his blackness. His book, *Long Lance: The Autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief* was published in New York in 1928 and became a critically acclaimed but likewise ethnically misread and strongly racialized success story and made its author "the most famous Indian of his time."³⁹⁵ Vernon historicizes Long Lance's *Autobiography* and contextualizes his

³⁹² Philip 1992, p. 37.

³⁹³ Philip 1992, p. 37.

³⁹⁴ Vernon, Karina. *The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing*. (Ph.D. thesis, University of Victoria, 2008). p. 46.

³⁹⁵ Vernon 2008, p. 42.

story in the racial climate of the Canadian prairies during the 1920s. She demonstrates how Long Lance "was not able to acknowledge his blackness"³⁹⁶ in his 'fraud' autobiography due to the racialized politics of his time which incorporated a clear anti-black sentiment after the influx of black settlers from Oklahoma between 1897 and 1912.³⁹⁷ The truth cuts even deeper, as Vernon accentuates. The disavowal of his blackness in his autobiography only too painfully mirrors "the degree to which blackness has been repressed in the prairie imaginary" and manifests the fact that "the prairies have been constructed – politically, culturally, and mythologically – as a 'white man's country'."³⁹⁸

The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing (2008) furthermore offers a new, "territorialized" approach to theorizing long-time blackness in Canada – a way that moves beyond indigenizing metaphors – by exploring the cultural and literary productions of the generations of black writers which have descended from the first wave of migration to the prairies, for example, by contributing an analysis of Cheryl Foggo's coming-of-age narrative *Pourin' Down Rain* (1990).³⁹⁹ It is through learning about the history and the literary legacy of her ancestors that Foggo gains a particular, territorialized sense of belonging at the end of her narrative. The sense of belonging is complex and not without contradictions; it encompasses a notion of identity as something that remains constantly in flux, extends or shrinks, according to necessity and context, from prairie to Canada to North America or even the black diaspora of the world. Cheryl Foggo does

³⁹⁶ Vernon 2008, p. 45.

³⁹⁷ Cf. Winks 1997.

³⁹⁸ Vernon 2008, p. 45, p. 47.

³⁹⁹ Vernon theorizes a "territorialized" prairie blackness by exploring the interrelatedness of 'race' and region. She argues that "contemporary black Canadian cultural studies is, in fact, the study of the relationship of race to place – 'place' being understood broadly as the geographic, diasporic, metaphoric, historic, and poetic spaces in which Canadian blackness abides" (Vernon 2008, p. 139). Already Gilles Deleuze and Félix had pointed towards the two-part process of migration, which, according to their work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), consists of deterritorialization (the rupture with a territory) and the subsequent reterritorialization (the return to a territory). It is this two-fold process that allows for an understanding of (regional) identity as an unstable concept, one that changes as "a necessary moment of things" (Vernon 2008, p. 154). Cf. Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1987.

not simply inscribe her self as "rooted" in a specific terrain, but rather expresses "a more nuanced interrelationship between race and place".⁴⁰⁰ In Foggo's autobiographical account, Vernon concludes, "neither race nor place remains a stable phenomenon, but are ephemeral, changing, and inconstant."⁴⁰¹ Blackness then becomes a *process* and a *performance* rather than a stable aspect of the self.

Exploring the in-between: Current Developments in African-Canadian Literature

It is exactly this procedural and ephemeral aspect of identity that has come to characterize notions of Canadian blackness lately. This multiplicity and flexibility is also reflected in black Canada's contemporary cultural and literary productions. Smaro Kamboureli explains that "no single form of literary representation can adequately reflect a community's complexity. [...] Communities have a social and cultural coherence, but they are also characterized by fluidity. No constellation of literary images can single-handedly mould a community's particular ethos."⁴⁰² Therefore, any attempt to present a catalogue of homogenous themes, motifs, symbols or discursive strategies in African-Canadian literature would have to fail. Subjects, techniques and languages differ as much as the heterogeneous places respective writers speak from. Since black Canadian literature "has come of age over the last decade,"⁴⁰³ as Donna Bailey Nurse claims, a few general ideas may be put forward. Although African-Canadian writing is – and this is important to understand – not restricted to these issues, it often surrounds questions of representation, grapples with the intricacies of 'race', explores constructions of gender, discusses regional specificities or dissects the postcolonial use of language. It has a tendency to appropriate the colonial legacy and re-read it

⁴⁰⁰ Vernon 2008, p. 172.

⁴⁰¹ Vernon 2008, p. 172. For another insightful analysis of the relationship between place and 'race' see Hartmut Lutz's essay "Race or Place? The Palimpsest of Space in Canadian Prairie Fiction From Salverson to Cariou." *The Canadian Studies Issue. Textual Studies in Canada/Études Textuelles au Canada* 17 (summer 2004): 171-185.

⁴⁰² Kamboureli, Smaro. "Introduction." *Making a Difference*. ed. Smaro Kamboureli. Toronto et al.: OUP, 1996. p. 4.

⁴⁰³ Nurse 2006, p. xiii.

within a black Canadian context, while often even transfiguring it into a native form.

Although the discourse of indigeneity is not altogether unproblematic as the seemingly endless debate between two of black Canada's most gifted theorists, George Elliott Clarke and Rinaldo Walcott, shows, some strata of African-Canadian history are still awaiting a careful exploration in literature. Unlike works like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Edward P. Jones' *The Known World* or Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*, which have acquired enduring prominence in African-American literature, the topic of slavery, for instance, remains comparatively marginal in black Canadian writings. "For the most part, slavery in contemporary black Canadian literature has occupied corners or operated as backdrop," Nurse insists.⁴⁰⁴ Some degree of truth in Nurse's statement cannot be denied, but it must also be acknowledged that starting with Josiah Henson's aforementioned autobiography from 1849 several fugitive stories of former African-American slaves have been recovered from the archives.

Wayde Compton, for example, retrieved two slave narratives from early B.C. writers, William H.H. Johnson's *The Life of Wm. H.H. Johnson, from 1839-1900, and the New Race* (1904) and Maria Albertina Stark Wallace's *Notes Made by Marie Albertina Stark (afterwards Mrs. Wallace) from the recollections of her mother, Sylvia Stark* (1966). Both accounts, as Compton stresses, own much of their style to the oral modes of conversation and turn towards the mythical at some point.⁴⁰⁵ Yet it was not until the turn of the 21st century that the theme of slavery has been revived in black Canadian writing. Two publications stand out in this regard: George Elliott Clarke's libretto and play *Beatrice Chancy* (1999) and Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007). While both works are very different in tone and style, they do provide full space to the topic.

Hill, whose *Book of Negroes* has just won the 2008 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, dramatizes the story of 18th-century slavery in an almost enchanting and genuine voice by following the life of an African woman,

⁴⁰⁴ Nurse 2006, p. xviii-xix.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Compton 2001, p. 24-25.

Aminata Diallo, from her abduction as a young girl in her West African village, her enslavement in South Carolina, her liberation by enlisting for serving the British in the War of Independence, her disappointment with the racial oppression in Nova Scotia and her almost miraculous return to Sierra Leone to her death as a respected storyteller and cultural mediator in London many years later. Drawing his information from a historical document, the Book of Negroes, Hill outlines the history of the freed Loyalist slaves who had hoped to be welcome north of the 49th parallel in order to resettle in Nova Scotia and who – in part – departed for Africa in 1792.⁴⁰⁶

In *Beatrice Chancy* multi-genre author Clarke raises the hitherto tabooed subject of interracial violence on Canadian soil. Set in 1801 on a plantation in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, Clarke utilizes the Italian anecdote of Beatrice Cenci – who killed her despotic father for forcing upon her an incestuous relationship – and infuses it with a local Africadian context. Beatrice Chancy is the racially mixed offspring of a black slave woman and her white slave master. She is raised in her master's house as Chancy's and his infertile wife Lustra's only daughter, although legally remaining a slave. In an act of punishment and control, her white father decides that Beatrice is to "learn what it means to be property."⁴⁰⁷ "She'll batten on hardness like any whore," her father claims, "Black slave hussies are only born / To nasty, baste, breed and suckle."⁴⁰⁸ Chancy rapes Beatrice brutally inside of a chapel on Easter for being in love with another slave. While her battered body mirrors the cumulative impact of categories such as 'race', gender and sexuality have on the lives of racially mixed women, her experience becomes a loop in the long chain of black women's oppression, objectification and victimization. Yet Beatrice refuses to be victimized and seeks revenge. She stabs her father to death, is put on trial and hanged on Thanksgiving Day. In spite of her strength, her agency and self-

⁴⁰⁶ In the United States the novel was published under the name *Someone Knows My Name*.

⁴⁰⁷ George Elliott Clarke, *Beatrice Chancy*. Victoria BC.: Polestar Book Publishers, 1999. p. 82.

⁴⁰⁸ Clarke 1999, p. 38.

confidence, Beatrice and her disastrous death are very evocative of the 'tragic mulatto'-fates of the 'mixed-race' heroines of the Harlem Renaissance.⁴⁰⁹

Clarke's play *Beatrice Chancy* is also representative of another, likewise powerful and demanding, development in recent African-Canadian literature: the exploration of 'mixed-race' identities. Clarke's dramatic work speaks from a site of memory whose roots reach back into forbidden spaces of Canadian history. Like him many other black Canadian writers maneuver towards filling westernized frames of perception with a black Canadian context. In transcending borders of race, class, gender, sexuality and language, 'racially mixed' writers construct characters that refuse to be marginalized or *othered*. They claim wholeness by either acknowledging the different parts of their racialized ethnic identities.

In her anthology *Revival*, Donna Bailey Nurse proposes that due to this ability "mixed-race identity can operate as a metaphor for the larger black Canadian experience."⁴¹⁰ And sure enough, the expression of liminal, hybrid identities does not only help to overcome the existing rift between 'indigenous' and diasporic contributions to the literary canon, but might prove a watershed in the perception of Canadian literature as a whole. Racially mixed authors work towards a poetics of liminality by developing a fluid consciousness that extends the meanings of both blackness and Canadianness. "African-Canadian literature is a patchwork quilt of voices," George Elliott Clarke states truly.⁴¹¹ It is "borderless and brazen", if one might borrow a phrase from the Afro-German poet May Ayim.

⁴⁰⁹ There are only very few examples of the 'tragic mulatto' motif in African-Canadian literature to be found, Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* is one of them.

⁴¹⁰ Nurse 2006, p. xvii.

⁴¹¹ Clarke 1997. p. xiii.

3.4. From 'Tragic Mulatto' to 'Zebra Poetics'? - Racial Hybridity in African-Canadian literature

I have the rare distinction – a distinction that weighs like a wet life jacket, but that I sometimes float to great advantage – of not appearing to belong to any particular race, but of seeming like a contender for many.

(Lawrence Hill, *Any Known Blood*)⁴¹²

The image and symbol of the people with "the rare distinction" offers a powerful tool to examine and comment on North American race relations and their representation in literature. Since racial hybridity contradicts the diametrically opposed concepts of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' and represents a flagrant violation of the sacred myth of racial division, mixed-race characters always transcend the established racial polarities and thus reject the philosophical dualism of "purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil".⁴¹³ In literature, the modes of constructing racially hybrid identities are complex and manifold, but generally these identities are marked with ambivalence and liminality.

Some significant differences can be pointed out when it comes to comparing constructions of racially hybrid identities in American and Canadian literatures. The mixed-race character in U.S. American literature usually functions as a reminder of the white-practiced sexual exploitation of black women and it often appears as a literary motif in the 'tragic mulatto', which implies that the biracial protagonist is exclusively categorized as 'black' as a consequence of the rigidly applied one-drop-rule. In contrast, racially hybrid identities in Canadian literature do less frequently adhere to the stereotype of the 'tragic mulatto' and tend to stress the potential chances of identification

⁴¹² Hill, Lawrence. *Any Known Blood*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1997.

⁴¹³ Jordan, Winthrop D. "American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies." *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 3. 19 (1962): 182-200.

rather than the tragedies. The Canadian multicultural experience and the ethnic heterogeneity of the African-Canadian population seem to leave more space for employing alternative modes of racial and ethnic identification.

Looking South of the 49th Parallel

In 1969, former civil rights activist Rap Brown illuminates in his political autobiography *Die, Nigger, Die!* the overwhelming impact of the color line on the everyday experiences of African-Americans and explains that when you are black in America, you are ...

born into a world that has given color meaning and color becomes the most determining factor of your existence. Color determines where you live, how you live, and under what circumstances, if you will live. Color determines your friends, your education, your mother's and father's jobs, where you play, and more importantly, what you think of yourself. In and of itself, color has no meaning. But the white world has given it meaning – political, social, economic, historical, physiological and philosophical. Once color has been given meaning, an order is thereby established. If you are born Black in America, you are the last of that order.⁴¹⁴

As Brown indicates, African-Americans of all skin hues grapple with the infirmities of color bias in the U.S. because of the far-reaching implications of the one-drop-rule. He gives insight into the intricacies revolving around the color line and demonstrates how significant, if not inescapable, the question of 'race' was in the United States at the end of the 1960s. The literary motif of the 'mulatto' has been widely used to reflect the racialization of identities in American society and to depict the consequences of the significance that is laid

⁴¹⁴ Brown, Rap. *Die, Nigger, Die!* New York: Dial Press, 1969. p. 2.

on color in the United States. The 'mulatto' is usually defined in terms of his or her marginality within culture and society; he/she is positioned in a realm of uncertainty, somewhere between center and periphery. Expounding on the social particularities of the character, Johanna Grimes-Williams writes:

generally, the tragic mulatto is physically indistinguishable from whites and often grows up believing that she or he is white. Yet there is an African ancestry [...] and upon having such heritage revealed this character is identified as black and treated accordingly. These characters are 'tragic' because their racial identification results in personality disintegration and even death.⁴¹⁵

George Elliott Clarke posits two archetypes of the 'mulatto': the "pathetic Judas" and the "potential martyr-subversive."⁴¹⁶ He explains that these archetypes:

enjoy a steady and pronounced presence through African Diasporic literature, from the era of slavery to our era of political decolonization and global homogenization. As crosswed – or jinxed – symbols of the meetings of twains that were once 'pure', the mixed-race writer carries the tint of impurity, of blending, of remembered violence, of treachery – or treason – implicit in the flesh.⁴¹⁷

As Clarke indicates above, racial hybridity threatens and disrupts the beliefs of imperialism and was thus subject to either "repression" or "ritual."⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, both mainstream American and African-American writers made use of this motif differently. In the past, reaching its peak in the middle of the 19th and early 20th century, it served to either satisfy a white audience's hunger

⁴¹⁵ Grimes-Williams, Johanna L. "Character Types." *Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. by William Andrews et al. NY: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 127-130. p. 128.

⁴¹⁶ Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*, George Elliott Clarke, 215-216. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. p. 217

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ Ashcroft, Tiffin, Griffith 1998, p. 24

for the exotic – often culminating in highly eroticized depictions of mixed-race women – or as a mirror of the psychologically destructive repercussions of slavery and bondage.

White abolitionist writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Hildreth, for example, presented light-skinned heroes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851) and *The White Slave* (1852), respectively, to capture sympathy, pity and support from their white readers while reinforcing the idea of 'race' at the same time: "How can we enslave one who is 'one of us' by virtue of his or her white blood ...," was one of the most frequently put forward arguments,⁴¹⁹ which demonstrates that the belief in the existence of biologically discrete 'races' and the belief in the intellectual superiority of the white 'race' were not questioned. Due to this, the 'tragic mulatto's' "beauty, near-whiteness, vulnerability and virtuousness made death all the more emotional for white readers."⁴²⁰

In African-American literature, William Wells Brown's *Clotel, or the President's Daughter* (1853) was the first novel featuring a mixed-race protagonist. Originally published in London, Brown's novel came out in the United States under the title *Miralda, or the Beautiful Quadroon: A Romance of American Slavery Founded on Fact* as a series in the *African American Weekly* in the

⁴¹⁹ Berzon, Judith R. *Neither White Nor Black. The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1978. p.13.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's successful abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was partly based on the life of Josiah Henson (1789-1883), who was born as a slave in Charles County, Maryland, and later escaped to Canada after an unsuccessful attempt at buying his freedom and afraid of his owner's intention of selling him in 1830. At Dawn, in the province Canada West, he founded a settlement and school for other fugitive slaves. He spent the rest of his life in Canada until he died in Dresden, Ontario in 1883. Henson is considered one of the earliest Canadian writers because he wrote and published a fugitive slave narrative, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by himself* in 1849. Stowe later even provided a foreword for an extended version of Henson's narrative (published in 1876) to spur further interest in his life story in order to support her abolitionist cause. Cf. Henson, Josiah. *Uncle Tom's Story of his Life: An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom')*. London: Christian Age Office, 1876; Cf. Hill, Daniel. *The Freedom Seekers: Early Settlement in Canada*.

⁴²⁰ Little, Jonathan D. "Mulatto." *The Oxford Companion to African-American Literature*. ed. by William Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 512-513. p. 512.

Other white writers who made use of racially mixed characters are William Faulkner, Mark Twain, Robert Penn Warren, Gertrude Stein, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather; other African-Americans are Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Melba Boyd etc.

winter of 1860-61. The story of *Clotel* is based on widespread rumors about Thomas Jefferson's affair with a slave woman and with its abolitionist rhetoric has close resemblance to white abolitionist fiction. In an attempt to free her daughter from slavery, *Clotel* – a fugitive slave – takes the risk of revisiting Virginia. Being captured by white authorities, *Clotel* eventually prefers death to a return into slavery. Brown paints an ambiguous picture of *Clotel*, who, on the one hand, is presented as an almost-white beautiful victim in the sentimental tradition, but, on the other hand, outwits the slave catchers through her independence and intelligence. Jonathan Little argues that even *Clotel*'s suicide, her ultimate leap into the Potomac River in sight of the Capitol, can be read as a powerful political statement and as a critique of America's rhetoric of liberty and democracy.⁴²¹

Later in the 19th-century, Frances Watkin Harper refrained from depicting a victimized 'tragic mulatta' in her novel *Iola Leroy* (1892). Her heroine embraces her blackness by marrying an African-American minister and dedicates her life to the advancement of black people in the rural American South. Pauline E. Hopkins's mixed-race characters in *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901) and *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in Hidden Self* (1903) rejoiced in their African-American culture. In her novels, which were published serially in the Boston-based *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins aimed at raising awareness about the continuing inferiority of people of color in the aftermath of the Civil War and intended to advance feelings of solidarity and loyalty among black Americans. Hopkins intersected her African-American cultural background with gender issues and problematized restrictive gender prescriptions.⁴²²

In the early 20th-century, Charles Chesnutt and Jessie Fauset portrayed racially mixed heroes and heroines that believed in the possibility of being black and enjoying the privileges of a white middle-class life style

⁴²¹ Little 1997, p. 513

⁴²² Cf. Little 1997; Berzon 1978; Cf. Tate, Claudia. "Pauline E. Hopkins." *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. eds. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster and Trudier Harris. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp.366-367.

simultaneously. James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) and Walter White's *Flight* (1926) recorded the frustrations that led light-skinned blacks to eschew their blackness and pass as white. Their protagonists' decisions to "pass" were spiritually and psychologically destructive; their fates were hence "predictable and melodramatic."⁴²³ More contemporary authors of the 20th-century have pointed to the datedness of the 'mulatto' stereotype. Charles R. Johnson's fictional slave narrative *Oxherding Tale* (1982), for instance, promotes a multiracially mixed future with a multitude of opportunities and chances springing from it.⁴²⁴

Looking North of the 49th Parallel

While the implications of racial hybridity have been widely discussed within U.S. American literary discourses, the equivalent subject has long been neglected in the Canadian context. In *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada* (2001), the first full-length book examining the bi- and multiracial Canadian experience, Ontario writer Lawrence Hill breaks the silence created around the issue and explores the differences between the United States and Canada in their attitudes towards racially mixed people. Hill points out that racial identity in the United States has always been clearly outlined according to its system of essentialized racial classification and the perpetuation of constructs like the 'one-drop-rule'. Canada, however, Hill maintains, offered mixed-race people "a little manoeuvring space" and appears to allow for more liberties in conceptualizing racialized and ethnic identity:

Canadians are quick to point out what we of mixed race are not – we are not white, and we are not black – but they don't tell us what we are. This is the quintessential Canada: the True North, Proud, and Vague. [...]

⁴²³ Little 1997, p. 512.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Little 1997

Growing up, I was aware that Canada provided me with a little manoeuvring space that my American cousins did not have. [...] I had at least some room to concoct my own identity, declare it, test it out, see how it flew out there in my world. This, I think, is what still defines Canada today for a mixed-race person. There is some wiggle room.⁴²⁵

This "wiggle room" or "manoeuvring space" Hill mentions might be explained with the existence of some liberties in terms of conceptualizing racialized and ethnic identities in Canada. Despite the criticism voiced in previous chapters, Canada's official bilingual and multicultural framework can partly be given credit for these liberties. Due to this policy and the historical particularities of the country, Canada represents "a place where the scripts around blackness weren't so solid"⁴²⁶ as Wayde Compton argues. Comparing U.S. American and Canadian 'mixed-race' politics, Compton observes that

Americans have rendered the mixed-race conundrum easier, by virtue of their old traditions of extreme racial vigilance and the 'one-drop-rule'. Because of that old system, even today it is hard to get African-Americans to accept the notion that anybody is 'mixed-race.' To them, everybody even remotely black is black, and any protest against that idea is greeted with suspicion and confusion.⁴²⁷

In contrast, Canadian people

tend to allow whites to define what is and isn't black, and white Canadians do so according to the colour metaphor, which they can't

⁴²⁵ Hill, Lawrence. *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2001. pp. 228-229.

⁴²⁶ Compton, Wayde (interview with Myler Wilkinson and David Stouck). "The Epic Moment: An Interview with Wayde Compton." *West Coast Line* 36. 2 (2002): 131-145. p.138

Although Compton manifests somewhat blurry boundaries of blackness, he continues to observe that this extra space did not imply Canada was free of racism.

⁴²⁷ *ibid.* p. 135.

seem to see *is* a metaphor – to them, unless you are literally black-skinned (and who is?), you are not black, and what's worse is they have no word for what you *are*, and are likely to tell you 'race doesn't matter,' which, if you allow it, will leave you absolutely powerless and abject. That's white Canadian liberalism [...].⁴²⁸

Nevertheless, the 'one-drop-rule' and the idea of the 'color line' have not remained without influence on the Canadian 'mixed-race' experience. By the time of Confederation, historian James St. W. Walker argues, the "color line" had been constituted as dividing line that originated in the importation and perpetuation of racist European and U.S. American ideologies, the major difference being that in comparison to the U.S. the Canadian 'color line' "was upheld by attitude rather than by law."⁴²⁹

In spite of its artificial construction, the 'color line' has had an impact on power relations in Canada and represents much more than a mere spatial metaphor for the persistence of maintaining 'racial' divisions between black and white. Rather, it served and serves to demarcate whiteness in the Canadian imaginary. It also "produces and organizes knowledge, power, and subjectivity."⁴³⁰ To acknowledge the existence of a Canadian 'color line' is thus essential for understanding the 'mixed-race' experience in Canada and constructions of racially hybrid identities in Canadian literature. Canada must be explored as a racialized space that can neither claim to have been a secure, discrimination-free haven for black people, nor rightfully insist on its moral superiority over its neighbor south of the 49th parallel.

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Walker, James. *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*. Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985. p. 8.

⁴³⁰ Kawash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997. p. 4.

Mapping

Bi- and multiracial African-Canadian writers are scattered all over the various Canadian provinces. They are situated, for example, in Central Canada and the prairie region. In Ontario, Lawrence Hill (Oakville, ON), Carol Camper (Toronto, ON), Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar (Toronto, ON), Barbara Malanka (London, ON), Stefanie Martin (Toronto, ON) and Lorraine Mention (North Buxton, ON) individually influence the writing community in Ontario. In Quebec, Haiti-born multiracial artist Myriam J.A. Chancy is to be named as well as francophone Haitian-Canadian writers like Max Dorsinville and Gérard Étienne whose novels feature several 'mixed-race' characters. The lesbian novelist and poet Suzette Mayr or poet and cultural critic Karina Vernon are located in Calgary, Alberta.

Successful community-networking as a basis for creative and personal exchange has been established in Vancouver, and certainly also among Africadian writers in the Maritimes. With regard to Atlantic Canada, George Elliott Clarke argues that "the vicissitudes of maritime life" and the "proximity of different cultural and racial groups to one another" might have fostered the incorporation of "other heritages" in Africadian creative works. Hence, poet and playwright George Borden proudly claims "a mixed heritage of black, native Indian and Dutch ancestry"⁴³¹ in his poetic account of the black experience in Canada, *Canaan Odyssey* (1988), while poet Maxine Tynes explores her mixed Native and African heritage in her poem "Chameleon Silence," in which her lyrical persona joyfully exclaims, "I feel very Indian tonight / very Micmac / Kuakiutk / Huron/ and Black / my tongue growing back 200,500 years."⁴³² Tynes feels bound to the experiences of discrimination, displacement and deculturation that her black and Native ancestors shared.

⁴³¹ Borden, George A. *Canaan Odyssey*. Dartmouth, N.S.: Minuteman Press and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 1988. p. 62.

⁴³² Tynes, Maxine. "Chameleon Silence." Poem. *Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol. II. ed. by George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1992. p. 75.

The unique playwright and actor Walter Borden, rooted in Nova Scotia as well, is also of mixed descent. The child persona in his autobiographical one-man play, *Tightrope Time* (1986), suspects early that "there was something wrong" when he

heard the gentle voices/ which had always seemed protective/ suddenly with urgency/ and ill-concealed pride/ command me to perform and/ earn the admiration/ of our poised and honoured guest/ who, with due consideration/ and unmitigated awe/ bought the goods [from his mother's grocery store]/ and called [his] blue eyes/ honey hair and/ mellow/yellow presence/ A WONDERMENT!⁴³³

Borden's dramatic persona, "filled with calm [...] and hate" because of his rejection and exoticization, takes his box of crayons and throws "the brown into [his] dresser drawer / the white into the fire ..."⁴³⁴ In commemoration of the achievements of the black people in the Maritimes his character later decides to "refuse to take the place/you offered me/ and rather choose to seek/ and find my own."⁴³⁵ Borden prefers self-definition to the acceptance of outside categorization and eventually rejects whiteness as a part of his identity.

With regard to the west coast, editor Wayde Compton acknowledges in his landmark anthology *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001) the special situation of racially mixed writers at Canada's Pacific Coast and points to the peculiarities of the black B.C. experience: its high degree of interaction with other ethnic groups, its lack of a central black community and the incessant flux and shifting within its population.⁴³⁶ In an interview with *West Coast Line* in 2002, Compton almost prophetically claims "the average black

⁴³³ Borden, Walter M. "Tightrope Time." *Testifyin': Contemporary African-Canadian Drama*. ed. Djanet Sears. Vol 1. Toronto: Playwrights of Canada Press, 2000. pp. 498-499.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.* p. 499.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.* p. 500.

⁴³⁶ Cf. Compton, Wayde. "Introduction." *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. ed. Wayde Compton. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001. pp. 17-40.

person in BC will in fact be a light-skinned, mixed-race person."⁴³⁷ Black B.C. seems therefore to be "on the verge of really creating a new way of being black."⁴³⁸

Re-surfacing

Wayde Compton counter-positions the silence around issues of miscegenation in the work African-Canadians and mirrors the racialized geography of B.C. in his anthology *Bluesprint*, which contains a variety of dramatic and poetic contributions of writers such as Michelle La Flamme (1966 -), Janisse Browning (1965 -), Shane Book (1970 -), Kathy Ann March (1962 -), Karina Vernon (1973 -), Joy Russell (1959 -), Sara Singh Parker-Toulson (1977 -) and Compton himself (1972 -). All of these writers exhibit a very complex consciousness concerning issues of inter- and biraciality. Therefore they explore the diversity of spaces and subject positions opening up to them on account of their multiple ancestries quite assertively and proudly.

With the publication of *Bluesprint*, Wayde Compton also unearthed two hitherto almost forgotten black B.C. writers, Truman Green (1945 -) and Arthur Nortje (1942-1970). Truman Green's novel *A Credit to Your Race* (1973) revolves around the interracial relationship of a black porter's son and his white neighbor's daughter in Surrey, B.C. in the 1960s. Showcasing the superficial 'politeness' of Canadian racism, Green described how the young couple is exposed to brutal and unmasked discrimination and hatred when the girl becomes pregnant.

⁴³⁷ Compton 2002, p. 134.

⁴³⁸ *ibid.* p. 136.

Poet Arthur Nortje spent only a few, yet very productive years, in Canada from 1967-1969.⁴³⁹ He taught English in Hope, B.C. and in Etobicoke, ON from 1967-1969, then moved on to work on his Ph.D. at Oxford, Great Britain, where he tragically died of a barbiturate overdose at the age of 28. His contributions to African-Canadian poetry have long remained unnoticed. Posthumously, *Dead Roots*, a collection of his poems was published in 1973 and a complete edition of his works was released by Unisa Press in 2000 under the title *Anatomy of Dark: Collected Poems of Arthur Nortje*.

Born in South Africa and raised during the *apartheid* period, Nortje was clearly aware of the implications of being classified as "colored" (i.e. mixed-race) on his self-understanding. In his essay "Repatriating Arthur Nortje", George Elliott Clarke notes that

for a native of South Africa under *apartheid*, to be coloured is to be divided at the root, torn in at least two directions, and driven, branded like Cain and crazed like Lear, across the face of earth in search of a fresh, unbesmirched – and unbesmirching – nativity.⁴⁴⁰

For Nortje, so Clarke, his racial hybridity was equaled with illegitimacy and alienation: "To be coloured is to be a bastard is to be alone is to be an exile is, then, to be an exilic immigrant [...] and is, lastly, to claim the solitary home of the grave."⁴⁴¹ Similarly, literary critic Grant Farred hints that Nortje felt his

⁴³⁹ After the inclusion of three of his poems in Harold Head's important (though not first) black Canadian literary anthology, *Canada in Us Now* (1976), Nortje's works have lain wrapped in shadows until Wayde Compton and, more recently, George Elliott Clarke recovered the poetic achievements of Nortje.

Cf. Compton 2001; Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Repatriating Arthur Nortje" [unpublished essay, by permission of author].

⁴⁴⁰ Clarke, "Repatriating Arthur Nortje", pp. 8-9

⁴⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 7- 8

"colouredness with keenness unrivalled."⁴⁴² Nortje's poetry reflects feelings of alienation and ambivalence around his mixed-race background, which did not cease when he chose exile in Canada.

Self-Definition: Defying Classification

In spite of Arthur Nortje's tragic fate, Wayde Compton manifests that Canadian mixed-race writers and artists usually avoid "the autoexoticist 'tragic mulatto' narratives" and instead "seek to dismantle binary and standardizing racialized epistemologies"; they "take power over and detour hegemonic notions of 'authenticity' that are, ultimately, the very roots of racism."⁴⁴³ Compton himself defies purist conventions and propagates the needs for self-definition:

We will have to take care to define ourselves in a way that maintains our sense of community and our very real traditions, and not succumb to binarisms that would keep us individuated and, at the same time, voiceless, like Douglas was forced to be voiceless about his racial experiences.⁴⁴⁴

Self-definition has been a goal hard to achieve as the existence of bi- and multiracial identities has long been ignored, if not consciously erased, in Canadian literary and cultural discourses. Both African-Canadian critics and the mainstream literary establishment have tended to overlook the experiences of racially mixed Canadians. Although references to biraciality and interracial contacts date back to the 17th-century, it was not until the 1990s that the number of works exploring issues of inter- and biraciality significantly increased. Gaining more publishing opportunities, racially mixed artists could actively

⁴⁴² Farred, Grant. *Midfielder's Moment: Coloured Literature and Culture in Contemporary South Africa*. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2000. p. 56.

⁴⁴³ Compton, Wayde. "Introduction." *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. ed. by Wayde Compton. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001. pp. 17-40. p. 35.

⁴⁴⁴ Compton 2002, p. 134.

begin to fight against their erasure: They created a communicative network for the critical and literary exchange among Canada's racially hybrid writers.

Two key publications of the mid-1990s contributed to the surfacing of 'mixed-race' voices in particular. In 1994, multiracial artist and activist Carol Camper edited a transnational anthology, *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* (published by Sister Vision in Toronto), which draws together a multitude of 'mixed-race' women from Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Camper's anthology unites the experiences of immigrants and native-born people as well as those of eternal globetrotters and sojourners, features bisexual and self-proclaimed "dyke" contributors, established authors, journalists and academics along with women who took up the pen for the first time. *Miscegenation Blues* sketches the heterogeneity of the multiracial diaspora and elucidates shared pains and constraints while underlining the mutual need for communication and solidarity.

In 1996 *HypheNation* was issued as a special mixed-race edition of Calgary's *absinthe* magazine. Edited in a collaborative effort by Mark Tadao Nakada, Louise Saldanha and Aruna Srivastava, *HypheNation* contains poetry, prose, drama and visual arts as well as comic or experimental hybrid blending of art forms. It gives voice to the diversity of Canada's mixed-race community. The artists articulate the impediments of being bi- or multiracial Canadians and position their black, First Nations, Asian and South Asian, or European-descended backgrounds in an attempt to transcend racialized constructions of ethnic difference(s).

Credit for lending much needed space to 'racially' and ethnically mixed writers must also be given to the Vancouver-based journal *West Coast Line*. Thanks to its founding editor Roy Miki and current editors Glen Lowry and Jerry Zaslove, *West Coast Line* has for a long time been an important outlet for the creative and critical expressions of a truly heterogeneous authorship. In the spring/fall of 1994, for example, *Colour. An Issue*, a special double issue with a

thematic focus on the impact of 'race' and visibility on the everyday lives of non-white Canadians, was co-edited by Fred Wah and Roy Miki. *Colour. An Issue* includes contributions by many 'racially' hyphenated black writers like Suzette Mayr, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, Janisse Browning or Mercedes Baines. Wah's and Miki's collection truly corresponds to their intention of creating a "transitional zone" and a "forum of diversity" for Canadian artists of color. Likewise, Peter Hudson's guest editorship resulted in the publication of a special African-Canadian issue of *West Coast Line* in 1997, entitled *North: New Directions in African-Canadian Writing*. In his editorial Hudson mourns the "absence of Black literary production in the writing of Canadian cultural histories" and counters whitestream perceptions of African-Canadian writing as recent immigrant writing by his insistence that, for blacks, "Canada – the North – is a space of competing narratives, memories and imaginative trajectories."⁴⁴⁵ To give evidence for some of these "competing narratives", *North* incorporates not only the writings by indigenous black Canadians like George Elliott Clarke (who proudly claims to be of seven generations Africadian descent) or (former and maybe no longer) 'immigrant' voices of Claire Harris or Lillian Allen, but also features contributions by 'racially mixed' Vancouver poets Wayde Compton and Mercedes Baines as well as a short story by Calgary-based Suzette Mayr.

Approaching the "Third Space" in Canadian Literature

By reflecting and incorporating transcultural concepts such as Homi Bhabha's notion of in-betweenness or Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of borderlands-identities⁴⁴⁶, racially mixed Canadian writers locate themselves within traditions like Chicana criticism and Black Feminism as well as in Native, Métis and other

⁴⁴⁵ Hudson, Peter. "Editor's Note: In the Country of the Snow Blind." *West Coast Line*. 31.1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994; Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinters Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987.

postcolonial discourses. In terms of cultural and literary analysis, Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space" – "the cutting edge of translation and negotiating"⁴⁴⁷ – offers an alternative to preconceived notions of belonging as it allows to read identities as lingering in a contradictory and ambivalent space which, nevertheless, is able to engender enormous productive capacities. The hybrid in-between disrupts therefore not only the performance of the presence, but likewise transforms prevailing epistemologies, envisions identities beyond an essentialized labeling and eludes the politics of polarity.

Similarly – but more inclusive of voices marginalized by sexism and homophobia – Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands, "a vague and undetermined place [...] in a constant state of transition,"⁴⁴⁸ emphasizes the incessant shifting and multiple embracing of fluid identities while transforming the "uncomfortable territory"⁴⁴⁹ into a fertile space for resistance, un-naming, defiant self-expression and creative production.

The "uncomfortable territory" of the racialized hyphen thus constitutes a complex, contradictory and yet creative space. Calgary poet Fred Wah, for example, poetically claims in his essay "Half-Bred Poetics" that the space of the hyphen represents

the operable tool that both compounds difference and underlines sameness. Though it is in the middle, it is not in the centre. It is a property marker, a boundary post, a borderland, a bastard, a railroad, a last spike, a stain, a cipher, a rope, a knot, a chain (link), a foreign word, a warning sign, a 'head tax', a bridge, a no-mans land, a nomadic, floating

⁴⁴⁷ Bhabha 1994, p. 38.

⁴⁴⁸ Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*

magic carpet, now you see it now you don't. The hyphen is the hybrid's dish, the mestiza's whole wheat tortillas (Anzaldua 194), the métis' apple (red on the outside, white on the inside), the happa's egg (white out, yellow in), the mulatto's café au lait.⁴⁵⁰

Exploring this space might offer new perceptions of Canadian literature as a whole. To resist the silence created around issues of bi- and multiraciality the racially and/or ethnically hybrid writers engage in what Wah calls re-, trans- and borderlands-poetics. From their multifaceted subject positions, they reclaim the hyphen, redefine, revision, and reconstruct Canadian history and critique its socio-political reality; they critically interrogate racism-infused language; they translate, transfer, and transposition themselves to situate their identities in a self-defined creative space.⁴⁵¹

Aspects of Genre

The hybridity that bi- and multiracial writers live is also fleshed out in their choices of genre. They frequently merge the boundaries between prose, poetry and drama and try out experimental visual art forms like comic, photo collage and even graffiti. They employ techniques of blending different forms of texts, including oral, written and performative variants. Wayde Compton's poetry collections *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999) and *Performance Bond* (2004), for example, incorporate hip hop and sound elements. The dramatic and lyrical works of Michelle La Flamme and Mercedes Baines are equally informed by performance arts like dub poetry. George Elliott Clarke's plays and librettos *Beatrice Chancy* (1999) and *Québécoisité* (2003) merge dramatic elements, verse and music. Suzette Mayr's novels *Moon Honey* (1995) and *The Widows* (1998) move freely between various literary traditions and make conscious use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and

⁴⁵⁰ Wah, Fred. "Half-Bred Poetics." *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*. Fred Wah. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000. pp. 72-73.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 72.

popular history books, respectively, to disrupt, to open her readers' minds to a multitude of perspectives, to fill Western frames of perception with a black Canadian context in order to transcend the prevailing borders of 'race', class, gender, sexuality and language.

Multiple Choices for Identification

Modes of identification among racially hybrid writers in Canada and their strategies of constructing literary identities vary as well. Ontario-based writer and feminist activist Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, for instance, despises the whiteness in ancestry. She proudly identifies as a black woman and describes herself as "Ms. Edge Innate" in order to acknowledge her biracial ancestry. Yet she also suffers from "a bi-dialectical existence", being spiritually rooted in Trinidad and feeling transplanted to Canada – for her a country pervaded by an invasive whiteness.⁴⁵²

Writers like George Elliott Clarke, Maxine Tynes, and George Borden, recognize the First Nation fibers in their backgrounds, but exhibit a clear Black Nationalist stance. Quebecois writers of Haitian origin, e.g. Gérard Étienne and Max Dorsinville, mirror in their novels the historically motivated and undisguised hatred against 'mulattoes'. Ontario novelist Lawrence Hill dissolves national borders and finds his protagonists' biracial identities rooted in both African-American history and black Canadian place. Alberta poet and novelist Suzette Mayr explores borderlands identities by having her characters embrace a multitude of shifting and dynamic universes. Vancouver's Wayne Compton uncovers the 'mixed-race' black as the history and future of B.C.'s

⁴⁵² Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "Ms. Edge Innate." *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. pp. 2-7. ; Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "The Blood Is Strong (A Bi-Dialectical Existence)." ...but where are you really from? ed. Hazelle Palmer. (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1997. pp. 93-96; Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not be Me." *Talking About Identity: Encounters in Race, Ethnicity and Language*. eds. Carl E. James and Adrienne Shadd. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001. pp. 115-121

black population while simultaneously forging diasporic cultural connections to Africa, the U.S. and the Caribbean.

On the whole, racially hybrid African-Canadian writers construct characters that refuse to be marginalized, othered and made into "a problem". They claim wholeness by either acknowledging all the different parts of their cultural ancestries or by opting for one of their ethnic backgrounds, usually without denying others. They work towards a new poetics and develop a specific consciousness that extends the meanings of both blackness and Canadianness.

Towards a Zebra Poetics?: Voicing the Racially Hybrid Subject

African-Canadian mixed-race writers' personal experiences, their historical knowledge and their socio-political consciousness(es) are reflected in the creation of a unique literary aesthetics. Nova Scotian scholar George Elliott Clarke even felt prompted to announce the emergence of a black Canadian "zebra poetics."⁴⁵³ The designation derives from publications like Calgary-based writer Suzette Mayr's poetry chapbook *Zebra Talk* (1991) or the witty self-declaration of Lawrence Hill's protagonist Langston Cane V, who dubs himself "Zebra Incorporated" at the end of his novel *Any Known Blood* (1997). The zebra metaphor, Clarke contends, is employed in Canadian literature to "challenge puerile categorizations of [the authors'] complex selves."⁴⁵⁴ Lawrence Hill confirms Clarke in his supposition and maintains that

'Zebra', of course, sounds fairly ridiculous. I would not use it in serious conversations, but I prefer it to 'mulatto.' Indeed, 'mulatto' offends me more than 'nigger'. To say 'nigger' is to say 'I hate you because you're

⁴⁵³ Clarke 2002, p. 222.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 232.

Black.' At least I know where I stand. But 'mulatto' reduces me to half-status – neither Black nor white.⁴⁵⁵

Although the zebra metaphor mockingly and self-ironically recurs throughout African-Canadian mixed-race literature, it would be disconcerting or even inappropriate to speak of a "zebra poetics." Apart from the unsuitable zoological comparison, the "zebra"-metaphor reinforces the black/white binary. It might also foster the idea that blackness takes precedence over other backgrounds like First Nations' or Asian ancestries that black Canadian writers proclaim as well. If one wants to prevent falling into the trap of calculating "blood" and avoid the re-inforcement of a white-dominated hegemony or a hierarchy of cultures, 'zebra' should remain a metaphor reserved to the use of racially mixed artists who, mockingly or not, feel comfortable with its application.

Since racially hyphenated Canadian artists refuse their reduction to half-status, image-based tropes of mixed-race people that reinforce the existing binarisms should be discarded. Instead, a poetics of cohesive fragmentation could offer a new form of providing sites of inclusiveness, incessant shifting, discontinuity and permanent revolution in literary discourse. Without being restricted to racialized notions of identity, hyphenated writers (whether sexually, ethnically, culturally, or linguistically etc.) can try out interrelated spaces and reconcile all parts of their complex selves to a fragmented yet whole identity.

Such new configurations of the themes of miscegenation, bi- and multiraciality can transcend racial boundaries and underline that the emotional constraints experienced by racially hybrid people are, in fact, the result of racialized constructions of ethnicity and culture, intracaste color prejudice, homophobia, sexism and the perpetuation of an imperialist, white-

⁴⁵⁵ Hill, Lawrence. "Zebra: Growing up Black and White in Canada." *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identities*. ed. by Adrienne Shadd and Carl James. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2001. pp. 44-50. p. 50.

supremacist ideology (including its adherence to a diametrical binary logic). By filling the interstitial spaces between center and periphery with their unique and multiple voices, Canadian mixed-race writers not only contribute to a redefinition of the African-Canadian literary canon and the national Canadian imaginary but likewise critique any attempts to create uniform, homogenous definitions of blackness. Hence, Janisse Browning concludes in her poem "Yes, and more," published in Wah's and Miki's *Colour. An Issue*, "Yes, / I'm black / and there is more to this."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ Browning, Janisse. "Yes, and More." *West Coast Line*. 28.1-2 (Spring/Fall 1994): 85.

4. EXPLORING AFRICAN-CANADIAN BORDERLANDS

4.1. Borderlands Poetics in the Writings of Suzette Mayr

Suzette Mayr is a racially mixed writer from Alberta, who frequently examines the question of biraciality and its impact on contemporary Canadian society in her works. In her novels, she illustrates the problematic issue of Canadian blackness and observes how this blackness is defined and represented. She focuses on the aspect of racial identity and how it relates to categories like ethnic, cultural and national identity as well as to categories like gender and sexual orientation.

Mayr is of German and Caribbean descent. She was born and raised in Calgary, where she still lives and works today. Her fiction has appeared in several ethnic and regional anthologies such as George Elliott Clark's acclaimed *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African Canadian Writing* (1997), Peter Hudson's and Roy Miki's *North: New African Canadian Writing* (1997), Fred Wah's and Roy Miki's special West Coast Line edition on writers of color called *Colour. An Issue* (1994), or in *Threshold* (1999), an anthology of significant new Albertan writers. In short, Mayr's writing has been widely anthologized and she is usually categorized as an African-Canadian writer,⁴⁵⁷ not as a German-Canadian writer. Apparently, 'race' and visibility are decisive aspects in terms of outside categorization and inside identification,⁴⁵⁸ because both are linked to the necessity of preserving the hegemonic cultural imaginary.⁴⁵⁹ In consequence, the construction of affirmative mixed-race identities in Canada seems problematic.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Clarke 1997, Cf. Miki, Roy and Fred Wah (eds.). *Colour: An Issue. West Coast Line 13/14* (Spring/Fall 1994). After Suzette Mayr's presence as a Canadian Studies Fellow in Germany, the number of critical essays on her writing about German culture in Canada increased. Literary scholar Doris Wolf, for example, published 2 critical essays on Mayr within the context of German-Canadian Studies.)

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Karrer, Wolfgang and Hartmut Lutz. "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality." *Minority Literatures in North America: Contemporary Perspectives*. eds. Wolfgang Karrer and Hartmut Lutz. Frankfurt/Main, 1990. pp. 11-64.

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. Ginsberg, Elaine. "Introduction." *The Politics of Passing*. Elaine Ginsberg. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. pp. 1-18. p. 5

In response to these difficulties, Suzette Mayr stresses that her understanding of being a Canadian feminist writer of color clearly transcends the questions of exclusion and victimization.⁴⁶⁰ She refrains from branding all whites as racist oppressors. Instead, she suggests that as a Canadian writer of color her task is to provide space for the very diverse experiences of those people whose voices have rarely been heard – voices which respect the regional, linguistic, cultural, racial and aesthetic differences in Canada. Suzette Mayr embraces those voices which cross gendered, ethnic and 'racial' divides, those which are constructed different even by the "Othered", those who live in borderlands.⁴⁶¹

Her writings can be defined as a borderlands-fiction.⁴⁶² They embody transcultural encounters between Canada, the United States, Germany and the various Caribbean islands. Mayr explores how cultures meet and transcend⁴⁶³. Accordingly, the themes of her writings range from globalization and tourism, nationalism and migration to patriarchal domination, economic exploitation and environmental protection. Furthermore, Mayr describes the social changes wrought by ethnic and racial frontier experiences. Her fictional characters live on the cutting edges of cultures and explore the intricacies revolving around artificially constructed 'racial' borderlines. Their transcultural identities are hinted at in various linguistic code-switching strategies and cast a new light on identity formation as an everlasting dynamic process of melding, or fusion of ethnic backgrounds, 'racial' origins and cultural experiences.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Hudson, Peter. "Editor's Note: In the Country of the Snow Blind." *West Coast Line*. 31..1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 5.

⁴⁶¹ For a cultural analysis of Mayr's work consult: Sturgess, Charlotte. "Bridging the Gap: Transcultural Figurations in novels by Lai, goto and Mayr." *Readings from a Distance: European Perspectives on Canadian Women's Writing*. Eds. Martin Küster and Chralotte Sturgess. Augsburg: Wißner, 2008. Pp. 216-228; Cf. also Petersen, Katie: "Defying Categorization: The Work of Suzette Mayr." *Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*. 23.2 (Winter 2004): 71-75.

⁴⁶² Cf. Wah, Fred. "Half-Bred Poetics". *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity. Critical Writing 1981-1999*. Fred Wah. Edmonton, Alberta: Newest, 2000. pp. 71-96.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Mårald, Elisabeth. *In Transit: Aspects of Transculturalism in Janice Kulyk Keefer's Travels*. Umea: Univ. of Umeå, 1996.

In creating a transcultural borderlands-fiction, Mayr challenges the cultural assumptions inherent in the literary and social discourses on multiculturalism. Canada's public policy, the acceptance and celebration of distinct cultural heritages, continues to reign as the dominant, politically correct, framework through which ethnic identity is examined. However, where so many different cultures struggle for recognition and survival, it can be easy to slide from a position of awareness and respect for ethnic differences to a moment when those differences become insurmountable. Cultures then become enclosures. Cultural exchange turns into ethnic war.⁴⁶⁴

Asked about the function of cultural literacy in an officially multicultural country like Canada and about her personal identification as a feminist writer of color within the Canadian literary establishment, Suzette Mayr replied:

... the big thing I am concerned with is representation I suppose. The Canadian literary establishment has this tendency to want to fit writers (of color especially) into neat categories and often be representative of the entire group. For example, when discussing the topic of writing by black women in Canada, the most often chosen examples are writers like Dionne Brand, Makeda Silvera, and NourbeSe Philip. This is fine, except that they are all originally first-generation immigrants to Canada, and they are all located in Central Canada, and often little effort is made to examine writing by black women writers elsewhere in the country. They do not represent Canadian prairie experience, they don't represent second, third, or fifth generation Canadian black women's experience.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Walcott, Rinaldo. "A Tough Geography": Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada." *West Coast Line. New Directions in African-Canadian Writing*. ed. Roy Miki. 22 (Spring/Summer 1997b): 38-51.

I don't think anyone's writing should have to represent the work or experience of an entire group, but this happens all the time.⁴⁶⁵

Suzette Mayr defies tokenism and unproblematic classification. Her writing cannot and must not be categorized according to binary, mutually exclusive categories. As a biracial and multiethnic writer, Mayr challenges the established dichotomies within the Canadian literary establishment and calls attention to contexts, relationships, intersections and wholes instead. Along this line, Suzette Mayr struggles with issues of 'race', ethnicity and culture, three concepts that strongly overlap in usage. In 1991, James Davis – in *Who Is Black?* – defined culture, as "a shared pattern of behavior and beliefs that are learned and transmitted through social communication."⁴⁶⁶ In contrast, ethnicity has been referred to by Poo-Kong Kee as "a complex amalgam of language, religion, traditions, symbols, literature, music, and, most importantly, an internal and external perception of difference."⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it is significant to remember that ethnicity fails to pay attention to "the question of hegemony based on race."⁴⁶⁸

By breaking dichotomies and revealing social hierarchies, Suzette Mayr deconstructs practices of racism. She reiterates Joel Williamson's statement in *The Crucible of Race* (1984) that "there are, essentially, no such things as 'black' people or 'white' people."⁴⁶⁹ "Black" and "white" function much more as politically *constructed* transcultural or transcendental *racial* categories, which cannot reflect the immense diversity of subjective positions, social and historical experiences or ethnic identities– as Stuart Hall stated in his groundbreaking work *New Ethnicities*.⁴⁷⁰ Mayr confirms that if the concept of 'race' lives on

⁴⁶⁵ Email: Bast-Mayr, February 20th, 2001

⁴⁶⁶ Davis 1991, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁷ Poo-Kong in Gunew 1994, p. 49.

⁴⁶⁸ Karrer/Lutz 1990, p. 11.

⁴⁶⁹ Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relationships in the American South since Emancipation*. New York: OUP, 1984. p. 522.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London, New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 223-227. p. 225.

today, it does not do so because we have inherited it from our forbears of the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century, but because we continue to create it today. ⁴⁷¹ Hence, 'races' do not exist as discrete, bounded, biological and ultimately pure entities. Instead, they must be seen as social constructions predicated upon the recognition of difference. ⁴⁷² 'Race' is a mutable concept "with specific historical, culture-bound, symbolic and structural meanings."⁴⁷³ It is a powerful social imaginary that reflects highly contested representations of relations of power.

Mayr recognizes the existence of power relations like patriarchal domination and white supremacy in Canada and Germany. She exposes them as what they are – myths and social practices.⁴⁷⁴ As already Howard Adams pointed out,

white supremacy dictates that whiteness is beautiful, that mainstream life-styles are the most desirable, and that mainstream life is the only successful way of life. At the same time, white supremacy disfigures ... the whole Canadian nation. ⁴⁷⁵

Suzette Mayr asserts non-hierarchical identities in all aspects of her writing as well as in societal life. Her fictional characters question the established borders in both German and Canadian society by positioning themselves within the available frameworks of ethnicity, 'race', and gender. Instead of reinforcing the dichotomous system of racial and gendered classification, they claim to be bearers of multiple subject positions.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Fields, Barbara. "Slavery, Race and the Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* 181 (May-June 1990): 95-118. p. 181.

⁴⁷² Cf. Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 17.2 (1992): 253.

⁴⁷³ Small in Ifekwunigwe 1999, p. 12.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Adams, Howard. *Prison of Grass. Canada from the Native Point of View*. Toronto: General Publishing, 1975. pp. 9-10.

⁴⁷⁵ Adams 1975, p. 9.

Mayr portrays how her characters' racialized and ethnic identities intersect with other aspects of identity formation such as gender, sexual orientation, age, social class and region; they cannot be classified by either the one or the other category. As a biracial writer, Mayr acknowledges the embeddedness and relationality of 'race', class and gender and their triple impact on the experiences of women of color. In many ways, her characters represent the "both/and" rather than the "either/or".

By making use of the transcultural concepts of in-betweenness and borderland-identities,⁴⁷⁶ Mayr places herself in the tradition of Chicana criticism, Black Feminism and Native discourses. Authors like Chicana-Nez Percé poet Inés Hernandez, Lesbian Chicana-Anglo playwright and activist Cherrie Moraga, Laguna-Pueblo visual artist and essayist Carol Lee Sanchez, mixed-race Mexican-Native American novelist Leslie Marmon Silko and African-American poet Melba Boyd verbalized the feeling of living at the heart of the color line and describe the particulars of a unique liminal or Meridian existence. Black Feminist writers like Melba Boyd, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker expressed similar identities. Nevertheless, Mexican-American cultural theorist and Feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa was among the first to articulate the idea of borderlands. "Borders," so Anzaldúa, "are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge." ⁴⁷⁷ Anzaldúa writes further:

Borderlands are physically present where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper class touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. ... It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape (n.p.) ...

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Moraga, Cherrie. *Loving in the War Years*. Boston: South End Press, 1983. Moraga 1983; Cf. Anzaldúa 1987.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25.

A borderland is the vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'.⁴⁷⁸

The 'mulatto', the 'half-breed', those who incorporate Anzaldúa's "uncomfortable territory" within themselves, those who represent "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third,"⁴⁷⁹ they are the ones Suzette Mayr gives voice to in her poetry and fiction writing. Her novels reflect a world of constant and multiple transformations, a world in which time and space are no longer chronological or linear, a world where sometimes even reality and magic merge.

However, Mayr does not escape into universalism, i.e. "multiculturalism at its logic extreme."⁴⁸⁰ Universalistic tendencies would not render the 'racial' dichotomy void; they simply disguise it. Suzette Mayr avoids proclaiming a 'raceless' future by offering – what Jose Vasconcelos called – a "fifth race" or a "cosmic race."⁴⁸¹ Instead, she openly refuses biologically based categorizations and points to their social constructedness. She considers Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands a means of self-designation and a symbol of fluid and dynamic identities – i.e. identities that can be abandoned, modified and altered

⁴⁷⁸ Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25.

⁴⁷⁹ Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁰ Spaulding, Carol Roh. "The Go-Between People. Representations of Mixed-Race in Twentieth Century American Literature." *American Mixed Race. The Culture of Microdiversity*. ed. Naomi Zack. Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Boston: 1995. pp. 97-112. p. 111.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Vasconcelos, Jose. *La Raza Cosmica. Mision de la Raza Ibero-Americana*. Mexico City: Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1962.

whenever necessary or wanted. Borderlands offer a possibility of turning the negative experiences of non-belonging and of being marginalized within the margins into an affirmative positive concept of self-identification.

4.1.1. Suzette Mayr's *Zebra Talk* (1991)

In 1991 Suzette Mayr published a poetry chapbook with the apt title *Zebra Talk* with Calgary's disOrientation Press, in which she explores issues of inter- and biracialism for the first time. The poems of *Zebra Talk* are written in free verse and refrain almost exclusively from punctuation to form a loosely segmented whole. Mayr abstains from furnishing most poems with a title (with the exception of "Love Homosexual" and "Love Heterosexual") and has the reader weave the single fragments of the chapbook together. The various segments interanimate each other, for despite their fragmentation the experiences of marginalization and unstableness are inherent in all segments of the chapbook. Thematically, Mayr's *Zebra Talk* grapples with the infirmities of 'racial' prejudice and homophobia and delves into their interrelatedness to the objectification of the racialized and eroticized female body of color. The lyrical persona confronts her reality of juggling with two 'racial' legacies and ethnic heritages. Mayr strategically makes use of stereotypes and racialized images that reverberate distorted media representations and internalized fears. She throws back the 'racial gaze' and exposes the volatility and constructedness of 'race' as the basis of white supremacist thought.

In the first part of the chapbook, Mayr's persona concentrates on the vexed question of her 'racial' genealogy and family relations.⁴⁸² "Zebra lips clamp / Your eyes feel cold on this page," writes Mayr on the first page, the two lines singled out and isolated.⁴⁸³ They fill the poem with coldness, silence and pensiveness right from the start. The image that follows is one of violence and pain. Metaphors of death and uproar frame this segment. In a witty and provocative tone, Mayr transfers the image of 'serial murder' to the idea of familial serial suicide and provides a sharp contradiction to a reader's

⁴⁸² Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." George Elliott Clarke. *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002a. pp. 211-237.

⁴⁸³ Mayr, Suzette. *Zebra Talk*. Calgary: disOrientation Press, 1991. p. 1.

expectations of a loving and caring core family.⁴⁸⁴ The family is set in an environment of tensions and internal struggles; the center of stability turns into a disrupted series of suicides:

Only men commit serial murders.

Women only kill those closest to them. Sometimes suicide.

The serial suicide since my family is a serial too.

...

How funny. How funny. How funny.

Time to commit a serial suicide. ⁴⁸⁵

What follows is a powerful mapping out of the persona's skin politics. The skin, detached from or stuck onto the racialized body, recurs throughout the chapbook (and reappears in many poems of 'mixed-race' writers or writers of color in general along with other parts of the body like hair, lips etc.) as a 'racial' signifier. In Mayr's poem the skin is a source of pain "split open by / one drip two drips of white vinegar / A twisted rainbow of alphabets."⁴⁸⁶ The implications of skin color transform the family into a three-headed racialized monster ⁴⁸⁷:

Skin on a drum.

The skin stretched over a moving rib-cage

The skin stretched and bitten by two other heads on this

three-headed body

2 brothers 1 sister. 3 heads and one body

plus 1 and 1 parents.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Karrer/Lutz 1990.

⁴⁸⁵ Mayr 1991, p.2.

⁴⁸⁶ Mayr 1991, p.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Clarke 2002a

(Zebra pelt stretched over a hot and bloody center.) ⁴⁸⁸

The zebra's 'mulatto' skin/pelt covers a "hot and bloody center", signifying the "volcanic core" of a long history of violence, pain and death. ⁴⁸⁹ The brown skin of the 'mulatto' implies a historical indictment of the ceaseless sexual exploitation of women of color; it becomes a powerful reminder of the legacy of slavery.

In the second part of this segment, Mayr's persona remembers her grandparents: "a grandfather flower-potted in a European grave-yard around / his plot is blotting paper for steel wool tears. Next door / is the war document." ⁴⁹⁰ The legacy of war, death and Nazism reverberates. The speaker's second "another brother grandfather" "is unpotted" and his "monument is made of grass." ⁴⁹¹ While one grandfather is worshipped for killing and death, the second grandfather is displaced, uprooted, remains uncelebrated and is held responsible for having "scattered a genetic thing / you know his grandchildren inherited it." ⁴⁹² The speaker's European grandmother is a war widow "married to death" with "cobalt eyes", "eyes dead dying blue" and "her world war 2 face [is turned] to the wall." ⁴⁹³ The "other grandmother" is associated with "boiled black-eyed peas and rice"; she constitutes the "one who guides our mother / through her nightmares and bathes our live mulatto skin / with her dead mulatto sweat." ⁴⁹⁴ She is also "made of grass but also of sand and the sun that slaps the faces of blind white tourists." ⁴⁹⁵ Mayr creates the image of an almost stereotypical Black West Indian grandmother, placing her into the matriarchal center of the family as a source of nourishment, guidance and "her dead mulatto sweat" represents another painful embodiment of the Caribbean's

⁴⁸⁸ Mayr 1991, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁹ Clarke 2002, p. 222.

⁴⁹⁰ Mayr 1991, p. 3.

⁴⁹¹ Mayr 1991, p. 3.

⁴⁹² Mayr 1991. p. 3.

⁴⁹³ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.*

history of colonization and slave breeding. By stirring up these oppositions, Mayr evokes the imperialist and racist structures of Western epistemology and pinpoints the destructive impact of those structures on generation after generation of people of color.

The persistent threat of violence is carried onto the next segment of the chapbook, in which Mayr refers to the interrelatedness of 'race' and gender as categories of identification and oppression and illustrates their double impact on the lives of women of color. She exposes the stereotypical image of the sexually degenerated and morally loose 'racially' mixed female body. Mayr refutes the exoticized objectification of mixed-race women and their reduction to a commodity of White male desires. In her introduction to her anthology *Miscegenation Blues*, editor Carol Camper states:

It is as if our basic degeneracy as women of colour is magnified by white ancestry. Our so-called 'Whiteness' increases our 'beauty' along with our awareness of it, driving us to a frenzy of bitter abandon so agreeable and piquant to our White pursuers.⁴⁹⁶

In a fragmented language and eschewing most of the order giving punctuation, Suzette Mayr mocks the white pursuer and his desire to

Understand

Under

stand stand

under look up her skirt from below through a staircase
perhaps look up under her skirt and maybe you'll under
stand what it is you want to understand
that there never were never will be never

⁴⁹⁶ Camper, Carol. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. xxi.

aren't any obvious tan stripes. Too bad.⁴⁹⁷

Mayr's persona returns the "look", the 'racial gaze' that is directed at women of color and their "zebra skin" and that is trying to decipher the speaker's 'racial' make-up in order to answer the white pursuer's curiosity and exotic imagination.

The next image in the poem describes how Mayr's lyrical speaker listens to a song about "growing up good-looking / and white in the time before people died of venus diseases,"⁴⁹⁸ featuring two lovers, "Lady" and "Never-gonna", and their animalistic one-night-stand. The ever-present threat of violence and objectification is transferred to the act of sexual intercourse. While Lady and Never-gonna "play their venus games to a syncopated drum / beat their bodies clamp belly-to-belly like slugs for hours / for hours for hours", the speaker transforms her body, "she dances she closes her eyes raises / her arms from the elbows her knees sink together mermaid / shape ... Mermaid shape. No legs. / Nothing between them then you don't see you understand."⁴⁹⁹ Mayr's lyrical persona repudiates the eroticized stereotypes cast at the body and chooses a "safe" – asexual – female body instead. Her depiction of the act lacks even the faintest imagination of romanticized love-making. This passage in the chapbook highlights the pernicious influence of internalized racist biases reflected in self-hatred and withdrawal. Mayr renders any biological foundation of 'race' a papery social construct,⁵⁰⁰ when the speaker concludes that "Slugs are not annelids. Their bodies never / were never will be never / aren't segmented or striped."⁵⁰¹ She refuses objectification and claims wholeness instead.

On the opposite page, Mayr's persona engages in interrogating her father about her 'racial' origin and wants to know "are you a zebra what color is the

⁴⁹⁷ Mayr 1991, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Clarke 2002a

⁵⁰¹ Mayr 1991, p. 4.

pelt underneath / the white and white stripes of Germany and downtown / cowtown?"⁵⁰² His insufficient reply to himself, "easier to be an asshole," ⁵⁰³ attempts to erase the reality of racism.⁵⁰⁴ For the white immigrant father the problem "is the easiest" since it "is in his tongue" not in his skin, the daughter resists. Silence surrounds the issue of 'racial' mixture – a silence that has long become part of the discourse, even part of the grammar⁵⁰⁵. In her experimental prose-poem *No Language is Neutral*, Dionne Brand similarly noted on the politics of silence around issues of 'race' and the history of racism:

Silence done curse god and beauty here, people does hear things in this heliconia peace a morphology of rolling chain and copper gong now shape this twang, falsettos of whip and air rudiment this grammar. Take what I tell you. When these barracks held between their stones halters, talking was left for night and hush was idiom and hot core. ⁵⁰⁶

In spite of the prescribed silence, Mayr's persona insists to know "who is we now?"⁵⁰⁷ George Elliott Clarke concludes that "black racial identity is nothing but a series of questions regarding origins. The insistent need for this interrogation is what liberal commentators wish to end. But there can be no easy peace." ⁵⁰⁸

The next segment consists of two poems entitled "Love: Heterosexual" and "Love: Homosexual." Mayr shifts the focus to homophobia, introducing the category of sexual orientation through creating a poetic opposition between those two poems. In "Love: Heterosexual" the speaker is "coloured earth" and due to the "dirt [she eats] by handfuls" her body has become like "a flower

⁵⁰² Mayr 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁰³ Mayr 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Clarke 2002a

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Wah 2000, "Half-Bred Poetics"; Cf. also Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingston* for a poetic exploration of silence

⁵⁰⁶ Brand, Dionne. "Interview with Dagmar Novak." *Other Solitudes*. Eds. Linda Hutcheon and M. Richmond. London: Oxford University Press, 1990. pp. 271-277. p. 23.

⁵⁰⁷ Mayr 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Clarke 2002a, p. 223.

pressed between the stained and buggy pages of a book." ⁵⁰⁹ Her lover, on the other hand, is "a man made of earth" with "blue iris wires" and "smoke between his hips." ⁵¹⁰ The dirt the speaker represents most likely the legacy of racism and sexism which made her head derail. Internalized doubts and fears are visualized in violent images. The speaker is tormented by "the bladed way he sat inside [her]" and it becomes impossible for her to "forget about the knives", to "forget about annelids." ⁵¹¹ The interrelatedness of racism and sexism shapes the reality of life in all its ramifications. Notably, Mayr makes use of a rich tunnel and train imagery (and keeps reminding the reader of the constructedness of this poem and of the categories of identification at stake), rousing a sense of segmentation and emptiness:

He left in a train segmented. Coat buttoned fly zipped zipping
flies around his head under and around his purple flowwver.
A man made of earth. (A Caboose kissed bare and a lot of
tunnel imagery.) A head (my head) derailed by (tick tick tick) ⁵¹²

The lyrical persona eventually hears "the sound of [her] songs sung dead." ⁵¹³

In "Love: Homosexual", the speaker's would-be lover Yvette "slips bright white thoughts into plain brown wrappers / drives needles into walls to prove their points and kisses / me straight on the mouth homophobia and all with thick / brown lips and a thick brown tongue." ⁵¹⁴ Seeking for fulfillment and a potential soulmate, Mayr's speaker "thought it was through race we were related brown skin / and all", hoping that "by tearing off / her skin I might find more earth". Yet what she found was "nothing but a hot bloody center" again.⁵¹⁵

⁵⁰⁹ Mayr 1991, p. 6.

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹¹ *ibid.*

⁵¹² *ibid.*

⁵¹³ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Mayr 1991, p. 7.

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

The speaker's inability to transcend the destructive implications skin color, has her call upon a pseudo-phallus in shape of her brother.⁵¹⁶

The only way to understand her is to love her. To get inside
her. I'll leave it to a brother. I'll leave it to a staircase.

My brother with ringlets once dropped acetic acid
onto the back of a wetted, blind worm. He found an exploding
rainbow of alphabet.

The screams of my burning Yvette.⁵¹⁷

The final screams of the persona echo her self-hatred, solitude and pain, and resound the internalization of sexist and racialized stereotypes and prejudices.

In the last segment of her chapbook, Mayr returns to her initial interrogation of family origins and racial identification.⁵¹⁸ After the speaker's numerical musings about the importance of alleged racial markers like hair – "the repository of the soul"⁵¹⁹ – she maps an outline of her family's with "straight clamped lips and a small white dink and the blackwhite / stripes of mulattoed Zeebras."⁵²⁰ The final long line of the poem reiterates the persona's initial question about racial identification – this time directed at her mother, but "Mother chooses not to speak. Does she hear only a stool-pigeon coo from the center I try to make her?"⁵²¹ Silence persists. The circle of violence continues in spite of the various efforts of racial reconciliation. The speaker's attempts to make a center with the support her family or lovers fail. "The centre of what?" is the question the speaker is left with at the end of the poem.⁵²²

⁵¹⁶ Cf. Clarke 2002a

⁵¹⁷ Mayr 1991, p. 7.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Clarke 2002a.

⁵¹⁹ Mayr 1991, p. 8.

⁵²⁰ Mayr 1991, p. 9.

⁵²¹ Mayr 1991, p. 10.

⁵²² *ibid.*

Mayr's *Zebra Talk* exposes identity politics as fragile constructions based upon white supremacist thinking and rooted in an unrelenting colonial legacy. Strained by racist, sexist and homophobic discrimination, Mayr's lyrical persona is eventually incapable of creating a center for herself. Yet she also resists fragmentation, repudiates the notion of being reduced to halfness and claims wholeness for herself. Her final question keeps reverberating and pinpoints the difficulties in negotiating the black-white discourse.⁵²³

⁵²³ Cf. Clarke 2002a

4.1.2. *Metamorphoses and the Racialized Body: Suzette Mayr's Moon Honey (1995)*

Suzette Mayr's first novel, *Moon Honey*, appeared in 1995 and was published under the general editorship of Aritha van Herk by NeWest's Nunatak Fiction. *Moon Honey* is a humorous and tale of love affairs and magical transformations. In her review of the novel, literary critic Lisette Boiley contended that Mayr had created a "1990s urban Canadian 'novel of passing' and a tale of psychological, social, cultural, and familial fragmentation and isolation," ⁵²⁴ while offering a humorous portrayal and critique of "the debilitating shallowness of contemporary middle class, white and not-quite-white, university-experienced but not necessarily 'educated', too-conservative-to-really-be-generation-Xers, urban Canadian heterosexual sex, dating, and marriage rituals." ⁵²⁵

In a fragmented structure and with two narrative strands, Suzette Mayr enfolds the story of Carmen and Griffin, both young and white, head-over-heels in love and struggling against Griffin's overprotective mother Fran. When in an intense eruption of racialized tension Carmen transforms/is transformed into a "black" or rather "brown" woman, her struggle against exoticism, racism, patriarchy and pejorative constructions of female sexuality begins. The first narrative string of the novel centers on the intersection of sexual and racial politics and insists on the obsolescence of socially constructed binarisms like black/white or male/female. The second string is interposed in *Italic* typeface and gives insight into the memories of various women related or acquainted with either Griffin or Carmen. Acting as an alter-plot to the love story between Griffin and Carmen the segments reveal a long fostered legacy of homophobia, distorted images of femininity, racism and sexism. Mayr illustrates the psychological pain(s) at the root of each character's transformation, which will ultimately affect their identity constructions and guide their social and

⁵²⁴ Boily 1997, p. 167.

⁵²⁵ Boily, Lisette. "Review: 'Moon Honey' by Suzette Mayr. Edmonton: NeWest, 1995." *West Coast Line*. 31.1 (1997): 164-68. p. 165.

gendered expectations towards others. The italicized segments endow the novel with its "history [to be] etched out in the negative."⁵²⁶

Mayr makes use of a variety of intertextual references in her novel. Carmen's transformation from invisibility to visibility and her retreat into her basement apartment – filled with the echoes of the dominant cultural codes and modes transmitted through the ever-running television set at the end of *Moon Honey* – alludes to the bitter fate of Ralph Ellison's nameless protagonist in *Invisible Man*.⁵²⁷ Carmen's name has also been a source for speculations. It might hint at the tragic and exoticized heroine of George Bizet's (1838-1875) opera *Carmen*.⁵²⁸ Likewise, the name of Rama – Carmen's *female* restaurant manager and the trigger of her racial transformation – is reminiscent of the *male* hero of the Ramayana in Hindu mythology.⁵²⁹ By transgressing the gender border, Mayr claims Rama as a feminist reconfiguration of patriarchal structures and personifies in her the post-colonial politics of naming.⁵³⁰

Notably, *Moon Honey* begins with an epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, announcing to "tell of bodies which have been transformed into shapes of a different kind" (n.p.). Mayr engages in a feminist revision of Ovid's work, claiming that metamorphosis "always signals a happy alternative."⁵³¹

This is how metamorphoses work. They happen all the time. Women turn into trees, birds, flowers, disembodied voiced at the moment of

⁵²⁶ Mayr 1995, p. 166. Cf. also Boily 1997.

⁵²⁷ Cf. Boily 1997

⁵²⁸ Cf. McClary, Susan. *George Bizet's Carmen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Cf. Gould, Evelyn. *The Fate of Carmen*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1996.

⁵²⁹ In Hindu mythology, Rama is one of the most cherished deities of India and is celebrated as a shining example of loyalty, courage and strength. The Ramayana holds that Prince Rama is banished from his kingdom and denied his right to the throne by his stepmother, who prefers to place her natural son onto the throne. Rama withdraws into the forest where he lives with his wife Sita. When Rama drives off some Rakshas from the forest, their demonic leader Ravana seeks revenge, abducts Sita and keeps her in prison on Lanka Island. With the help of magical forces, Rama is provided with a bridge to the island and is able to kill the demon and liberate his wife.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Kroetsch, Robert. "Unhiding the Hidden." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 394-396; Ashcroft, Bill et al. "Place." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 391-393.

⁵³¹ Mayr, Suzette. *MoonHoney*. Edmonton: NeWest, 1995. p. 113.

crisis, just before anger, grief, desperation eats them alive. [...] At the most horrible moments bodies transform into bears, nightingales, bats. But which bodies? Who is so lucky? White girls in a blasted moment grow the bark and flow with the sap of coloured girls. But this is only one moment.⁵³²

The transformations in the novel range from white to brown, and extend to human to bird, single to married, coupled to single, straight to gay, vegetarian to carnivore and so on. They effectively criticize the notion of essentialized, fixed identities and open up a new frame for the affirmation of a multiplicity of different, submerged identities within an individual.⁵³³

John Howard Griffin's first-person narrative *Black Like Me* (1961) has likewise been a source of reference for Suzette Mayr.⁵³⁴ The American journalist and author Griffin (1920-1980) had chemically darkened his skin pigments and – passing as a black man in the deep and yet segregated American South of the late 1950s – Griffin experienced "a land of lynchings, segregated lunch counters, white-only restrooms, and a color line etched in blood" to explore the nature of racism.⁵³⁵ Equipped with a unique double perspective, Griffin realized that all of a sudden "everything was different. Everything changed."⁵³⁶ Suzette Mayr's transformation of Griffin's encounters crisscrosses both racialized and gendered borderlines, pointing to both the constructedness and arbitrariness of those borders and to their undeniable impact on the processes of identity formation. Accordingly, features of John Howard Griffin resurface in both Carmen and Griffin.

On the one hand, Carmen's lover Griffin exhibits the journalist's voyeuristic obsession with 'racial' difference; he emerges as "a white voyeur,

⁵³² Mayr 1995, p. 25.

⁵³³ Cf. Boily 1997

⁵³⁴ Cf. Clarke 2002a

⁵³⁵ Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me* (1961). New York et al.: Signet, 1996. N.p. (backcover)

⁵³⁶ Griffin 1961, p. 196

lusting after 'exotic' pussy."⁵³⁷ Mayr's Griffin is thrilled at his girlfriend's transformation and at "her new *pelt*."⁵³⁸ Convinced that "black women are sexy" (49), Griffin admits to Carmen that he had "always wanted to sleep with a black woman", after all, "once you slept with a black, you never go back."⁵³⁹ On the other hand, Mayr has her female protagonist change her skin pigmentation from white to brown, thereby placing particular emphasis on racialized female subjectivities. Significantly, Carmen's alteration took place as a result of her changed 'racial' consciousness and an increased 'racial' sensitivity.⁵⁴⁰ Her transformation is curiously evocative of a similar passage in John Howard Griffin's narrative account:

I stood in the darkness before the mirror, my hand on the light switch. I forced myself to flick it on. In the flood of light against white tile, the face and shoulders of a stranger – a fierce, bald, very dark Negro – glared at me from the glass. He in no way resembled me. The transformation was total and shocking [...] I was imprisoned in the flesh of an utter stranger, an unsympathetic one with whom I felt no kinship. All traces of the John Griffin I had been were wiped from my existence. Even the senses underwent a change so profound it filled me with distress. I saw in the mirror and saw reflected nothing of the white John Griffin's past. No, the reflections led back to Africa, back to the shanty and the ghetto, back to the fruitless struggles against the mark of blackness. [...] I knew now that there is no such thing as a disguised white man, when the black won't rub off. The black man is wholly Negro, regardless of what he once may have been. I was a newly created Negro who must go out that door and live in a world unfamiliar to me. The completeness of this transformation appalled me. It was unlike anything I had imagined. I became two men,

⁵³⁷ Clarke 2002a, p. 224

⁵³⁸ Mayr 1995, p. 27.

⁵³⁹ Mayr 1995, p. 26.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Clarke 2002a, p. 235.

the observing one and the one who panicked, who felt Negroid even in the depth of his entrails.⁵⁴¹

Carmen turned into a brown girl in a moment of defiant rage when the "hot bloody center" of Mayr's *Zebra Talk*⁵⁴² erupts in Rama's restaurant, the place where Carmen works as a waitress during study breaks and a place loaded with ethnic tensions. Rama is a Canadian woman of color, "originally from India or somewhere, and so sensitive"⁵⁴³ as Carmen observes while fully giving in to popular stereotypes. Rama is constructed the Other, her Canadian citizenship is ceaselessly questioned and substituted for an immigrant identity. Carmen is eager to satisfy her prejudicial curiosity to decode Rama's 'racial' and ethnic past and fires the ultimate questions of exclusion at her employer: "Where do you come from, Rama? ... originally you know?"⁵⁴⁴ Refusing to give in to Carmen's racist interrogations, Rama hesitantly replies that her parents originally come from Winnipeg. Carmen persists, "You speak without an accent, just like you're Canadian. You know, with Canadian parents ..."⁵⁴⁵ Of course, Rama is "not like other coloured people" since she doesn't even "act coloured"⁵⁴⁶ and a lot of times Carmen would not even notice Rama's different skin color. Rama's sensitive reactions to such outright racist behavior are misinterpreted as "angry and bitchy,"⁵⁴⁷ after all, "people don't mean to be mean" and, after all, this isn't "a racist town, it's not like the KKK goes galloping up and down the streets or something."⁵⁴⁸ Through Carmen's demeanor, Suzette Mayr exposes the continual denial of racism and discrimination in Canada, critiques the nationalist construction of identity that excludes visible

⁵⁴¹ Griffin 1961, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁴² Mayr 1995, p. 2.

⁵⁴³ Mayr 1995, p. 12.

⁵⁴⁴ Mayr 1995, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁵ Mayr 1995, p. 19-20.

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ Mayr 1995, p. 21.

⁵⁴⁸ Mayr 1995, p. 20-21.

minorities, and renders the national imagination of Canada as the epitome of liberty, free will and justice a myth.

Carmen demands Rama to educate her, to show her the difference, to prove where all this racism is that she complains about. Rama returns the 'racial gaze' with a magical force and

gives Carmen a *look* which pulls apart Carmen's face, peels off Carmen's skin. *I cut you you bleed I cut me I bleed*, burrows through the layers of subcutaneous fat and splays out her veins and nerves, frayed electrical wires, snaps apart Carmen's muscles and scrapes at Carmen's bones, digs and gouges away Carmen's life. The color of Carmen's pink and freckled finders and forearms deepens, darkens to freckled chocolate brown and beige pink on the palms of her hands. Her hair curls and frizzes, shortens. Hairs dropped into a frying pan kink up around her face, curl into tight balls on the back of her neck. Her skin, covered in a thin layer of dry skin, flakes from where she missed with the skin lotion this morning. Her hair is drier, finer; irises freshly dipped in dark brown cradle her pupils, and her scars, old knotted scars from childhood, from last week when she touched the hot oven with the back of her hand, open her eyes and glare pale against her skin. Her history is etched out in the negative.⁵⁴⁹

Shortly after her transformation into a brown girl, the same questions about ethnic origin and national belonging that were once addressed to Rama are directed at Carmen now, and Carmen is prepared "to give these dumb white people what-for."⁵⁵⁰

The alteration of her body from white to brown triggers a connection between the black body and a politically black consciousness.⁵⁵¹ Carmen stops

⁵⁴⁹ Mayr 1995, p. 22-23.

⁵⁵⁰ Mayr 1995, p. 24.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. Clarke 2002a

being oblivious to the racism and the pool of distorted ethnic representations presented to her in media, commercials and everyday life, and acquires "some kind of radar over the past year, her skin so sensitive to stereotype." ⁵⁵² The television helps her to deconstruct the dominant code of whiteness and to contemplate its relationship to the discourse of blackness. ⁵⁵³ She watches "black teenagers on the TV arrested and hand-cuffed, their heads forced down" ⁵⁵⁴ and is confronted with another commercial for Aunt Jemima maple syrup she "farts in disgust" ⁵⁵⁵; she "collects bits and pieces of information, history, news, images of lynchings and water hoses aimed at people, and stores them in her growing pocket of rage." ⁵⁵⁶

In the insurance office she is employed, Carmen is the only woman of color. She feels the isolation and alienation of the margin. Those in the center slam a flood of racist comments and ethnic stereotypes in her face. First Nations people "never pay bills on time", "Chinese people are smarter," ⁵⁵⁷ the Calgary Stampede is dominated by "too many rednecks" and all cabs in town are driven by some "Sikh or Sheik or whatever you call 'em in the turbans." ⁵⁵⁸ Until Mika – a Japanese Canadian Lesbian – joins the office, Carmen remains unable to resist discrimination. Yet Mayr does not establish a close bonding of sisterhood between both women despite their shared experience of oppression and marginalization. The barrier is perpetuated by Carmen's homophobic stance. Prejudiced against Mika's sexual orientation and irritated because "Mika doesn't look or act like any lesbian she's ever seen on TV," ⁵⁵⁹ Carmen searches for alleged tokens of Lesbianism such as armpit or leg hair, a black leather jacket

⁵⁵² Mayr 1995, p. 169.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Boily 1997

⁵⁵⁴ Mayr 1995, p. 170.

⁵⁵⁵ Mayr 1995, p. 169.

⁵⁵⁶ Mayr 1995, p. 170.

⁵⁵⁷ Mayr 1995, p. 80.

⁵⁵⁸ Mayr 1995, p. 82.

⁵⁵⁹ Mayr 1995, p. 85.

mutates into a uniform.⁵⁶⁰ At the same time she is driven by the desire to know "what women actually do together."⁵⁶¹

Carmen feels trapped in her racialized female body and disgusted at people's fascination with her hair texture or skin color.⁵⁶² The mirror that once "was her friend" throws back the disfigured image of a clown when she tries to put on "white" make-up and transforms her into a "dark brown ogre."⁵⁶³ Resembling Ralph Ellison's nameless protagonist in *Invisible Man*, Carmen retreats into invisibility and "doesn't see herself for weeks. She remains inside her head, wanting to poke out her own eyes ... she looks wrong. She looks WRONG."⁵⁶⁴ Suzette Mayr exposes the negative and distorted images as the source of black women's self-hatred and self-abnegation and places their longings for wholeness and fulfillment in the center.

Carmen's physical transformation also triggers a significant change in her relationship to her lover Griffin. In the initial chapter of *Moon Honey*, Suzette Mayr introduces Carmen and Griffin as they are having premarital sex under the pool table in his parents' basement. They have "concussive sex in the same room as the wooden inlay picture of three happy black people, Africans she supposes, with long thin necks, baskets on their heads, thick red lips and gold hoops in their ears."⁵⁶⁵ The picture is a gift Griffin's mother had brought as a souvenir from "some place where blacks live, obviously,"⁵⁶⁶ but it later turns out to be a gift from his unfaithful mother's boss-lover. Canada is not among their choices. Blackness is transferred to foreign lands. Ignorant about the legacy of slavery and racism, Carmen's and Griffin's "bones clash rhythmically in the dark, bodies pale and pasted together, a four-legged, two-headed amoeba."⁵⁶⁷ Carmen's growing awareness of 'racial' difference and its

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. Mayr 1995, p. 85.

⁵⁶¹ Mayr 1995, p. 87.

⁵⁶² Cf. Mayr 1995

⁵⁶³ Mayr 1995, p. 56.

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Mayr 1995, p. 1-2.

⁵⁶⁶ Mayr 1995, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Mayr 1995, p. 9.

implications makes her recognize their interracial "shifting chessboard pattern"⁵⁶⁸.

Griffin's skin suddenly so pale, so *white* and her skin so brown, so *black* in the diffused light. Their bodies two ropes of contrasting colours twined then falling apart and braided together then falling apart again. She rubs his chest, spreads her fingers across his rib cage, confused by the colour contrast between his rib, her fingers.⁵⁶⁹

She notices "how people stare" because she and Griffin are "a mixed couple now", yet Carmen is still thrilled at the thought of having cute little "cocoa-babies" with him.⁵⁷⁰ She attempts to solve her (his?) problems by getting married to him, and while – back in her white days – Carmen considered the institution of marriage "territorial and possessive,"⁵⁷¹ it now offers an organization

she has developed infinite respect for. [...] Marriage solves problems, commands respect and approval. That oh so subtle nod of the waiter's head as he notices their matching gold rings, her hyphenated name on the list of reservations, the waiter leading them to their table in an expensive restaurant. What a lovely young couple, people at other tables will say, whereas now Carmen and Griffin are hardly ever noticed except as an odd, interracial couple. Just lovers. Illicit, slumming with a member of another race before really settling down. Or worse, people probably think she's his mistress, while his real wife waits at home.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁸ Mayr 1995, p. 44.

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ Mayr 1995, p. 29.

⁵⁷¹ Mayr 1995, p. 9.

⁵⁷² Mayr 1995, p. 92.

Carmen has internalized the destructive stereotypes attributed to a black woman's body. To organize her wedding distracts her from confronting the fact that Griffin's behavior is guided by racist and sexist ideologies. Moreover, the options of wedding that Carmen (and later Griffin) exercise reflect society's gender socializations and racial assumptions.⁵⁷³

Gradually, however, Carmen's internal conversion proceeds and she begins to feel annoyed at Griffin's racist "brain-between-his-legs"-behavior and insists that you (or the white pursuer) cannot "*have* a black woman", "you can have leprosy ... but you cannot *have* people."⁵⁷⁴ Her annoyance mirrors her growing awareness of the embeddedness of categories like 'race' and gender and their share in what Black Feminist critics designate the "simultaneity of oppression."⁵⁷⁵

At the end of the novel, Griffin marries his 'racially' mysterious girlfriend Renata (whose great-great-grandmother, "one slave among many,"⁵⁷⁶ "appears in the calluses on Renata's hands and the soles of her feet, hard as fingernails, her strong and springy hair."⁵⁷⁷ Three hours after the wedding, however, Renata confesses to be in love with somebody else and elopes with Mika, the true love of her life (and the only true love in *Moon Honey*). Renata and Mika reverse society's expectations of a romanticized heterosexual honeymoon and create a *moonhoney*.⁵⁷⁸ The reversal of expectations, the refusal to fix things in a stable order seems to be the survival strategy Suzette Mayr proposes. Mika and Renata break the circle of oppression, and define themselves according to their own needs and in correspondence with their specific gendered, sexualized and historicized subjectivities. Carmen, on the other hand, concludes that

⁵⁷³ Cf. Boily 1997

⁵⁷⁴ Mayr 1995, p. 49.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell-Scout and Barbara Smith. *All the women are White, all the Blacks are Men, but some of us are brave*. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1982; Brewer, Rose. "Theorizing Race, Class, and Gender." *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. London: Routledge, 1993.

⁵⁷⁶ Mayr 1995, p. 177.

⁵⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. Boily 1997

being a brown girl almost feels like being drunk. She tries to remember the days when she was white and sober, but she can only think of herself as brown – as having, always been brown, so that she marvels at how well she pulled off being white. Fooled them all, fooled everyone, even herself, the best magic trick of all. A reverse Oreo cookie, an inside-out coconut, the juice running down the sides and spilling all over the floor. Now she is brown and drunk out of her mind. She's sipped and gulped so much she's drunk, drunk out of her skull, dead drunk, past drunk, so drunk she's sober, her mind as sharp and bright as the point of a new needle. That's what being a white girl turned brown girl is all about. Or a brown girl who was brown all along but nobody knew, not even herself. Only now learning to enjoy the taste of the drink, not just an intoxicating cocktail, but an empowering elixir. [...] The world is a tidy place."⁵⁷⁹

Carmen has not been able to free herself from societal expectations. Although equipped with an increased 'racial' and gendered awareness and sensitivity, she is about to be caught up in societal traps again when she picks up her phone to call Griffin. Lisette Boily concludes that Mayr's Carmen resembles Bizet's opera heroine in her tragic failure and acts as a comprised version of the 19th-century 'tragic mulatto'. George Elliot Clarke, however, contends that Carmen is "neither some stereotypical 'vamp' nor some 'racially' confused albino. Rather she is the embodiment of the question of racial identity."⁵⁸⁰ In view of Carmen's attempt to reiterate the circle of oppression, Clarke finds the novel's final line, "the world is a tidy place,"⁵⁸¹ an "anemic and unconvincing" ending.⁵⁸² However, it certainly also offers a glimpse of Canada's reality of the 1990s. The novel's ending underscores the fact that racialized social structures cannot be replaced without time and the persistent effort to raise consciousness about the existence of racism and its effect on the everyday lives of people of color.

⁵⁷⁹ Mayr 1995, p. 211-212.

⁵⁸⁰ Clarke 2002a, p. 227.

⁵⁸¹ Mayr 1995, p. 212.

⁵⁸² Clarke 2002a, p. 226.

4.1.3. *Canadian Hodgepodge* in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows* (1998)

In her second novel *The Widows*, which was published in 1998, Suzette Mayr relates the story of three German-Canadian women in their seventies and eighties who, one day, weary of a world that does not seem to need or want them, decide to commit an eye-opening dare-devil stunt at Niagara Falls. Hannelore, her spinster sister Clotilde and Clotilde's lesbian lover Frau Schnadelhuber steal an orange, space-aged barrel from the Royal Auditorium in Edmonton. They drive across the Trans-Canada Highway to Ontario and undertake a prodigious drop from the waterfalls. Together with Hannelore's neurotic genius granddaughter Cleopatra Maria, the three ladies are accompanied and repeatedly hindered by the selfish ghost of Annie Edson Taylor – the first woman ever to survive a drop over Niagara Falls in 1901.

In *The Widows*, Mayr explores not only the experiences of elderly immigrant women in the German-Canadian community of Edmonton, Alberta, but likewise depicts the experiences of 'racially' mixed people. Mayr underlines that bi- and multiracial people in Canada are being marginalized within the margins, i.e. they share the experience of not being accepted as a significant part of the 'others'.⁵⁸³ The American 'one-drop-rule' is often, even if unconsciously, applied to rationalize sexual and 'racial' stereotyping. The idea or rather myth of 'racial' purity has served "to racialized dominated groups as it suited dominant interests,"⁵⁸⁴ but their existence is – in contrast to the United States – hardly recognized in Canada. Mayr provides borderlands space for bi- and multiracial people in her fiction and calls for their legitimate acknowledgement in Canadian society.

With a sharp sense of humor, Suzette Mayr describes the tense relationship between Hannelore, who had been socialized within the

⁵⁸³ Cf. Barrath, Debra A. "Race and Racism: Marginalization within the Margins." *American Mixed Race. The Culture of Microdiversity*. ed. Naomi Zack. Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Boston: 1995. pp. 279-285. p. 283.

⁵⁸⁴ Zack, Naomi. "Introduction: Microdiversity vs. Purity." *American Mixed Race. The Culture of Microdiversity*. ed. Naomi Zack. Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Boston: 1995. pp. xv-xxv, p. xvi.

background of racialized nationalist and sexist ideologies in Nazi- and postwar West Germany and her German-Canadian borderlands granddaughter Cleopatra Maria, who "changed personalities dependent on where she was."⁵⁸⁵ Cleopatra Maria struggles against her grandmother's preconceived notion of a presumably "white" German-Canadian identity and strongly rebels against the sexist stereotypes attached to her exoticized and racialized body.

Next to Cleopatra Maria, there are at least two more noteworthy 'mixed-race' characters in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*. One of them is Rosario, Cleopatra Maria's mother und Hannelore's unwanted "mongrel" daughter-in-law.⁵⁸⁶ In fact, Rosario is a multiracial and multiethnic woman and a descendant of African slaves shipped to the Caribbean on the Middle Passage. Mayr refrains from introducing Rosario as an immigrant but establishes her as a native-born Canadian woman of color. Hence, her presence in the novel does not only signify the collective experience of slavery for people of African descent in North America, but, most importantly, points to the fact that Canada has had a long African presence and a lengthy history of slavery and racist discrimination itself. Rosario's multiethnic and multiracial background functions as a link between the African-Canadian experience of oppression and the similar experiences of other visible minorities in Canada. Accordingly, Suzette Mayr breaks with two long-fostered Canadian myths: the myth of the North Star, which envisioned Canada as a symbol of freedom and moral superiority, and the myth of the "just come immigrant", which imagined "black" immigration to Canada a recent phenomenon.⁵⁸⁷

A third mixed-race character in *The Widows* is Hedwig, Frau Schnadelhuber's daughter. At the first glance Hedwig does not appear to be of particular significance to the novel, at least not with regard to its plot. However, the reader eventually finds out that Hedwig's father was an (African-)American who – stationed as a soldier in Germany after the World War II – passed as

⁵⁸⁵ Mayr 1998, p. 65.

⁵⁸⁶ Mayr 1998, p. 17.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. Walcott 1997b

white. Therefore, Hedwig represents one of the "Nachkriegsbabies" or "Besatzungskinder,"⁵⁸⁸ children born to white mothers and black fathers in the years after the war. These children were not only considered unwanted in postwar German society but their mothers were denounced as sexually and morally loose. They were considered to have mocked and insulted the wartime sacrifices of German men, to have endangered the cult of true German womanhood and to have soiled Nazi German Aryan purity by becoming "race traitors."⁵⁸⁹ Accordingly, Hedwig's inclusion in the novel constitutes a symbol for the continuum of non-white people of German ancestry – a fact that has been and still is widely denied in contemporary German society.

Mayr emphasizes many similarities between contemporary German and Canadian society and underscores the obvious parallels between the inflexible ideas of what constitutes German-Canadian and African-Canadian identities. Reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Toni Morrison's "ornamental vacuum,"⁵⁹⁰ people of African ancestry in Germany and Canada constitute non-official and official visible minorities that are, in effect, rendered invisible in public affairs.⁵⁹¹ Both societies keep promoting mutually exclusive, binary categories like "black" and "white", foreign and native. These socially constructed categories have been based and fostered on racist and nationalist ideologies to strengthen the national myths of the German and Canadian nation-states, even if multicultural and immigration policies attempt to signal otherwise.⁵⁹² There seems to be no space for what the African-Canadian critic Rinaldo Walcott phrased "indigenous blackness"⁵⁹³ in both countries.

⁵⁸⁸ Oguntoye, Katharina. *Eine Afro-Deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von 1884-1950*. Berlin: Hoho-Verlag, 1997; Oguntoye, Katharina. *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992.

⁵⁸⁹ Heinemann, Elizabeth. *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. p. 44.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1992. p. 59.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Lutz, Hartmut. "'Is the Canon Colorblind?' On the Status of Authors of Color in Canadian Literatures in English." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 44.1 (1996): 51-81.

⁵⁹² Cf. Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*. Toronto: Insomniac, 1997a. p. 42.

⁵⁹³ Cf. Walcott 1997b, p. 41.

Consequently, to be "black" and "at home" in Germany and Canada is to both belong and not belong. It represents an "in-between position" ⁵⁹⁴; it indicates living in borderlands.

In *The Widows*, Cleopatra Maria experiences living in borderlands. She encompasses 'racial' and ethnic borderlands herself. She embodies the composition of a "white" (allegedly Christian, civilized, superior) German heritage and a "black" (supposedly heathen, uncivilized, inferior) ancestry. Cleopatra Maria is constructed as different, as Other, as exotic – on account of her non-Caucasian or non-African physiognomy. She incorporates the "uncomfortable territory" that Gloria Anzaldúa spoke of.⁵⁹⁵ She is both black and (German-)Canadian; and neither fully African nor totally "white". Yet, Cleopatra Maria's non-white and not-black-enough appearance is considered a flaw in both her German-Canadian and African-Canadian identity. Evoking Audre Lorde's poem and essay "Ist dein Haar ein Politikum?" (1993), Cleopatra Maria's hair becomes a symbol for racial frontier borderlands:

Hannelore wrestled with Cleopatra Maria's fine, frizzy hair. This is your mother's hair, grumped Hannelore. No, it's my hair, said Cleopatra Maria. Oma, you're doing it *wrong*. Cleopatra Maria's tiny hands scrabbled the air with irritation, she screamed. Because of the hair, because of the nasty sound of her grandmother's voice. We'll go for some nice cake, said Hannelore as she pulled rhythmically with the comb at the hair on the screaming baby's head..." ⁵⁹⁶

The option to constitute a cohesive and affirmative cultural identity as a German-Canadian woman of color is not offered to Cleopatra Maria. The family's rejection of her ambiguous biracial status has led her to feel isolated and self-conscious about her identity. Yet, she strongly depends on her family

⁵⁹⁴ Walcott 1997b, p. 41.

⁵⁹⁵ Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25.

⁵⁹⁶ Mayr 1998, p. 15.

and keeps struggling for acceptance. She is unable to uphold social contacts besides her closest family members. All of her "friends" are beyond their 70s. She rejects strangers. If not even her family can provide her with the necessary feelings of unrestricted acceptance and respect, how could she ever expect strangers to see more in her than a racialized object, an ethnic misfit? Karrer and Lutz illustrate the relationship between an individual from a visible minority group and mainstream society in their cooperative essay "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality":

the individual's experience is described as a movement circling outward from an emotional core. At the center we would find the relationship towards (grand-)parents and brothers and sisters, or, spatially, the house, the igloo or hut, and historically, the early childhood, while at the outward perimeter we would find the forces and agents of dominant society: school, churches, army, business, work, politicians etc. Thus, the "typical" protagonist will find her- or himself exposed to two divergent forces: a centripetal one, pulling him or her back to her or his origins, or, negatively, forcibly pushing him or her back to his or her "place" as a result of discrimination, and a centrifugal one, spinning him or her towards dominant society (and assimilation) in an attempt to overcome the stifling narrowness of home, ghetto or reservation or as a process in which the individual succumbs to the American Dream and the (im)material attractions to dominant society, promising economic success, upward mobility and recognition, thus pulling him or her away from home.⁵⁹⁷

Yet, in case of a biracial individual like Cleopatra Maria the supposedly stabilizing "emotional core" at the center equals the dominant society. Her family is not able to protect her from negative outside influences and provide

⁵⁹⁷ Karrer/Lutz 1990, p. 28.

her with a self-affirmative identity. The dominant, white supremacist society at the outward perimeter, on the other hand, doubts her group belonging even more. Repeatedly, Cleopatra Maria is asked if she was adopted. This underscores her experience of difference:

The clerk asked Cleopatra Maria was she adopted? Cleopatra Maria said *no*. The clerk smiled serenely at Hannelore. Hannelore busily tied her shoelaces. Cleopatra Maria dropped a platform shoe very loudly. Cleopatra Maria sulked, and Hannelore expected better because Cleopatra Maria was about to enter university, a child prodigy. Cleopatra Maria muttered something that sounded like 'Fucking Aryans' but Hannelore ignored her. Hannelore's Cleopatra Maria wouldn't have said such a thing ... Hannelore's Cleopatra Maria wouldn't know a word like Aryan.⁵⁹⁸

Apparently, a non-white individual like Cleopatra Maria is not expected *to belong* to the ethnic group of German-Canadians. Both Cleopatra Maria and Hedwig occupy a marginal position within their families, the German-Canadian community, and the majority society. Their existence and their struggle for acceptance question the ethnic and racial self-understanding of German-Canadians within Canada's official policy of multiculturalism. Their resistance challenges the socially constructed idea of "Germanness" as well as the romanticized North-Star-imagination of "Canadianness". Mayr indicates that the binaries constituting the German identity – i.e. white equaling German, non-white equaling non-German – have been transferred to the construction of a distinctive color-coded German-Canadian identity. Hence, the understanding of what constitutes a German-Canadian identity nowadays appears to be just as problematic and ideologically burdened as the concept of "Germanness" as such. Instead of succumbing to these preconceived notions, Suzette Mayr

⁵⁹⁸ Mayr 1998, p. 65.

underlines strongly that the applied racial dichotomies simply reinforce and legitimate a concept of "race" that functions on the basis of exclusion in order to keep white supremacist structures in Canada and Germany working.

If, then, contemporary Canadian society does not allow for Cleopatra Maria to belong to the ethnic group of German-Canadians, should she identify as African-Canadian instead? Nevertheless, Cleopatra Maria refuses to be pressured into identifying as exclusively African-Canadian simply on account of her skin color or hair texture. Mayr stresses that her fictional characters will not succumb to outside categorizations. What renders Cleopatra Maria different is not her multicultural African/German/Canadian upbringing but her ambiguous racialized status within a whiteheadian society. As stated before, Canadian society does not, recognize "indigenous Canadian blackness"⁵⁹⁹ but links "blackness" to the overwhelming presence of Caribbean immigrants. For Mayr, it appears to be partly influenced by the United States' conception of the 'one-drop-rule'.

Now, if there is no space for "indigenous blackness" in Canada, how could there be possibly space for an affirmative biraciality? Is "blackness" of skin enough to *make* somebody African-Canadian? Should mixed-race individuals and writers simply be "absorbed" within the African-Canadian community? The dilemma of Canadian blackness encapsules the difficulty to determine what constitutes an African-Canadian identity today. Is it African? Caribbean? Immigrant? Canadian? Black? Brown? All-but-white? Is it an "American phenomenon that somehow crept north"?⁶⁰⁰ Is it a weakened extension of African-American? Or rather a symbol of moral superiority in contrast to the United States?⁶⁰¹ Is it possibly black *and* Canadian? Or does that signify a contradiction in itself?

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Walcott 1997b

⁶⁰⁰ Alexis, André. "Borrowed Blackness." *This Magazine*. (May 1995): 14-20. p. 18.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African Americanisms, or the Structures of African Canadianité." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 63 (Spring 1998): 1-55.

In view of these intricacies, it is no surprise that many African-Canadian writers have wrestled with the idea of Canadian "blackness". Toronto-based writer M. NourbeSe Philip, for instance, refers to her fellow African-Canadians as "victims of cultural confusion,"⁶⁰² poet Carol Talbot expresses a "long-term identity crisis,"⁶⁰³ critic Adrienne Shadd talks about "being a nonentity in our own country,"⁶⁰⁴ and the Nova Scotian writer George Elliott Clarke relates to African-Canadians as "divided beings" with a "poly consciousness"⁶⁰⁵ in the sense of W.E.B. DuBois.⁶⁰⁶ Canadian blackness remains ambiguous.

Being a Canadian writer of color herself, Suzette Mayr is painfully aware of this dilemma as well. As a result, she carefully avoids displacing her fictional characters' mixed-race identities in favor of monoracial ones and clearly distinguishes between ethnic and racial attributions. Mayr reflects inside versus outside identification. She proposes that Cleopatra Maria's experience of being constructed as different and exotic, of rebelling against racist and sexist stereotypical ascriptions to her body, of feeling excluded and repudiated from mainstream society – all of that coalesces with the experiences of racialized people in Canada in general. Hence, Cleopatra Maria's blackness reflects the vast diversity of black subjects' cultural and historical ramifications and links her experiences inextricably to centuries of racial oppression and white supremacy in Canada. Instead of clinging to the fixed notions of both German- and African-Canadian identities, Suzette Mayr exposes the notion of essentialized identities as fragile, insubstantial constructions and proclaims a fluid understanding of identity instead. She asserts hybrid or multiple identities based on inclusion rather than on exclusion.

⁶⁰² Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*. Stratford, Ont.: Mercury Press, 1992. p. 16.

⁶⁰³ Talbot, Carol. *Growing Up Black in Canada*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1989. p. 93.

⁶⁰⁴ Shadd, Adrienne. "Where are you really from? Notes on an 'Immigrant' from North Buxton, Ontario." *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity*. eds. Carl James and Adrienne Shadd. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994. pp. 9-15. p. 9.

⁶⁰⁵ Clarke 1998, p. 17.

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. DuBois 1986, p. 364.

In order to rise above the unproblematic presumptions of "whiteness" or "blackness" in Canada, Mayr explicates how issues of 'race' dynamically relate to issues of gender and sexuality so that those categories are basically inseparable. She creates fictional characters that bear the dire consequences of the tensions between the clearly drawn black/white dualism and are trapped in racial prejudices and gender assumptions alike. In *The Widows*, Cleopatra Maria learns from a very early age that her family, the German-Canadian community and the majority society preferred boys to girls. Once again, it is her grandmother Hannelore, who serves as the hegemonic barometer of cultural, racial, and gendered expectations:

Hannelore bragged in church to her many acquaintances about her pregnant daughter-in-law, hopefully, it would be a boy, her father had preferred boys, Hannelore also preferred boys. Hannelore would be a grandmother in three months, and hopefully it would be a boy. The other women in her pew nodded in agreement. Yes, a boy. Good, a boy.

Frau Drechsler, in the pew in front of Hannelore and Clotilde peered at Hannelore and said, Instead of making your granddaughter miserable before she's even born, maybe you should pray she comes out with only one head instead of two.

But it was too late. Hannelore's granddaughter, all the way on the other side of the Atlantic, heard Hannelore, and her eyelids clenched even harder in fury; her hands, curled into fists from the moment she was conceived, punched the hard, dark walls of the uterus in frustration. Would nothing ever change? When she rushed out the vaginal canal, her body lurching over the precipice, she screamed bloody murder at her Oma.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁷ Mayr 1998, p. 9.

Cleopatra is convinced that "it was hell being a woman," ⁶⁰⁸ that she was "nothing but a girl burden." ⁶⁰⁹ She is terrified to become "a teenage nymphomaniac in need of guidance ... looking to get knocked up because that's how all girls end up eventually." ⁶¹⁰ Even Cleopatra Maria's superior intellectual abilities and her exceptional academic achievements cannot rationalize her fears. She has internalized the stereotypical images of black female sexuality. The apprehension that her body might be objectified and controlled by men makes her abandon sexuality in its entirety. She takes birth control pills like vitamins, undergoes pregnancy tests several times a day, coils from public toilets and swimming pools and eventually develops an almost obsessive bond to her notebook.

In *The Widows*, Suzette Mayr draws particular attention to the distractions revolving around the ascription of racist and sexist stereotypes to Cleopatra Maria's body. She strategically points to the application of stereotypes in order to unmask the gender- and color-coded expectations of the social environment. In *Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination*, bell hooks points to the nature and social function of stereotypes:

Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken – are not allowed. ⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ Mayr 1998, p. 133.

⁶⁰⁹ Mayr 1998, p. 134.

⁶¹⁰ Mayr 1998, p. 134.

⁶¹¹ hooks, bell. "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination." *Cultural Studies*. eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler. New York: Rutledge, 1992. pp. 338-346. p. 341.

Mayr critically exposes the politics of sexuality. Sexuality is linked to issues of race and gender as well. Stereotypes attributed to women of color often refer to their sexual behavior and even more so to male expectations. Whereas black womanhood is associated with sexual aggressiveness, promiscuity and an insatiable sexual appetite, the ambiguous racial status of biracial women even allows for the projection of multiple male fantasies based on color-coded clichés like virtue and immorality, attractiveness and savagery, spirit and flesh.⁶¹² Consequently, both the black and the biracial female body have been viewed as an attractive, exotic and accessible commodity that would acquiesce white men's sexual desires.⁶¹³ Interestingly, images of black and mixed-race female sexuality have been strongly contrastive to descriptions of white female sexuality. Values like piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity have been ascribed to it. Most importantly, however, Euro-Centric ideologies have linked white women's sexuality to sinfulness since the protection of patriarchal hegemonic structures is at stake.⁶¹⁴

The repression or sublimation of Cleopatra Maria's sexuality serves as a survival strategy; the question remaining is, however, whether this can be regarded an act of rebellion against stereotypical descriptions or a way to give in to them in a self-destructive, pathological way? Distorted conceptions of "black" and "white" female sexuality lead to Cleopatra Maria's psychological fragmentation. All of that renders impossible Cleopatra Maria's constitution of an affirmative biracial self-understanding in general and of a positive self-conception as a German-Canadian woman of color in particular. To illustrate her fictional character's fragmentation, Suzette Mayr makes use of two divergent myths of female sexuality that Cleopatra Maria is pressured to choose

⁶¹² Cf. hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1984b; Cf. Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999.

⁶¹³ Cf. Davis 1991; Hernton, Calvin. *Sex and Racism in America*. New York: Grove Press, 1965; Cf. hooks 1984; Cf. Williamson, Joel. *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, London: Louisiana State University, 1995.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Welter, Barbara. *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the 19th Century*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1976.

from. Her aptly chosen name becomes a signifier of Cleopatra Maria's racial heritage. On the one hand, the myth of Maria is offered to her – the embodiment of white submissive Christian woman – and motherhood;⁶¹⁵ Cleopatra, on the other hand, epitomizes the exoticized 'femme fatale'.⁶¹⁶

Cleopatra Maria's openly constructed name becomes an indicator of her biracial genealogy and simultaneously refers to displacement and outside definition. Hence, Mayr pays crucial attention to the dynamics of naming in *The Widows*. She recognizes naming as a "a primary colonizing process"⁶¹⁷ and as a "crucial signifier of control over place and thus of power over the inscription of being."⁶¹⁸ Hannelore, for example, attempts to shorten her granddaughter's name to "a less exotic, more appropriate name,"⁶¹⁹ but her parents Dieter and Rosario insist on Cleopatra Maria being called by her complete name. Both grandmother and parents apply outside definitions to Cleopatra Maria, the first making the effort to adjust the name to her idealized notion of "Germanness", the latter underlining their daughter's biracial origin. Cleopatra Maria is very susceptible to these external influences and feels trapped in social expectations and gender socializations alike. She feels pressured to identify with either the one or the other mode – though neither one seems appropriate and satisfying to her needs.

Accordingly, Cleopatra Maria struggles with the images of both Maria and Cleopatra. Maria's virginity and purity, her unquestionable obedience, her life without sinfulness, her claim to infallibility and self-sacrificing motherhood turn her into a female almost goddess and render her an unobtainable ideal.⁶²⁰ Suzette Mayr accentuates that clinging to such a crippled conception of Maria

⁶¹⁵ Cf. Radlbeck-Ossmann, Regina. "Maria in der Feministischen Theologie." *Handbuch der Marienkunde*. Vol. 1. eds. Wolfgang Beinert and Heinrich Petri. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1996. pp. 435-465.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. Flamerion, Edith. *Cleopatra. From History to Legend*. New York: New Horizons, 1997.

⁶¹⁷ Ashcroft 1995, p. 391.

⁶¹⁸ Ashcroft 1995, p. 392.

⁶¹⁹ Mayr 1998, p. 11.

⁶²⁰ Cf. Beinert, Manfred. "Die mariologischen Dogmen und ihre Entfaltung." *Handbuch der Marienkunde*. vol. 1. eds. Wolfgang Beinert and Heinrich Petri. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1996. pp. 267-363.

would aim at keeping women in their subordinate position and could thus impossibly serve as a long-lasting model of identification for Cleopatra Maria. Likewise, she discards a possible identification with the patriarchal myth constructed around Cleopatra. Interestingly, the majority of critical works on Cleopatra's life takes painstaking care to trace back Cleopatra's "civilized" Greek cultural origin to explain the extraordinary political and economic power Cleopatra exercised.⁶²¹ Accordingly, the same works also draw upon Cleopatra's "barbarian" black ancestry to portray her as a ruthless and power-hungry *femme fatale*, who abuses her appearance to seduce and manipulate men.

Feminist scholars have reevaluated these one-sided and male-oriented postulations lately. Suzette Mayr readily incorporates these new views on Cleopatra in her novel. Many of the recently "discovered" personality traits of Cleopatra found their equal in Cleopatra Maria. Mayr proposes that it was rather Cleopatra's outstanding intellectual abilities, her fluency in several foreign languages and her remarkable knowledge in the sciences than the "civilized" Greek part of her origin that made her as an imperial ruler politically, judicially and economically independent in her times.⁶²² Cleopatra Maria displays all of these qualities and thereby takes part in the reevaluation of the myth of Cleopatra. Thus, Suzette Mayr's fictional mixed-race characters are assigned a special role in dispelling the "myth of the monolithic derived European-derived male and his values and culture as the norm."⁶²³ Mayr insists that "stereotypes must die so that our whole selves can live."⁶²⁴ Externally imposed narratives, mythologies and values must be removed before authentic self-expressions can be found.⁶²⁵ Cleopatra Maria must obliterate, or – at least – reevaluate the myths of Maria and Cleopatra to discover her true self.

⁶²¹ Cf. Clauss, Manfred. *Kleopatra*. 2nd revised ed. München: Beck, 2000.

⁶²² Cf. Flamerion 1997

⁶²³ Nash, Philip Tajitsu. "Multicultural Identity and the Death of Stereotypes." *Racially Mixed People in America*. ed. Maria Root. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publication Inc., 1992. pp. 330-332. p. 331

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*

⁶²⁵ Cf. Bennett in Hilf, Susan. *Writing the Hyphen: The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature*. Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2000.

Accordingly, Cleopatra Maria defiantly challenges the gender roles and racial attributes offered to her. She picks Athena, the "smartest, meanest professional virgin ever," ⁶²⁶ to become her role model. Athena, it seems, incorporates traits of both Maria and Cleopatra; and her full armor provides Cleopatra Maria with the necessary defense and weapon to be guarded against exoticized prejudice. Yet, Cleopatra Maria does not simply adopt the model of Athena, but modifies it according to her own specific needs.

At the end of the novel, after the memorable accomplishment of her grandmother, Cleopatra Maria confronts the ghost of Annie Edson Taylor – who in spite of selfish rivalries – eventually forges a spiritual bond with the women at Niagara Falls. Suzette Mayr includes the historical figure of Annie Edson Taylor. She uses excerpts from history books to recreate the myth around Annie Edson Taylor's dare devil stunt. Then, Mayr immediately deconstructs this myth by making Annie become an active part of the plot:

Mrs. Anna Edson Taylor of old age and poverty. Her sixty-three-year old body survived the pounding water of the Falls ... but it was the world outside the river that finally murdered her and she dies at the age of eighty-three, destitute and alone. Obscurity consumed her and spit her out in pieces. ...

Cleopatra Maria prepares herself to meet with Annie. Finally have constructive dialogue instead of scary, crabby waitresses; ... She puts on her born-again virgin's armour, designed it herself, and glides from her body in the hotel restaurant to Annie's furious bones across the Canadian-American border. ...

While Cleopatra Maria wrestles the femurs, Annie's floating ribs try to stab her in the back, knuckle bones aim for her eyes. Annie's bones pound at the metal covering Cleopatra Maria's body and Cleopatra Maria covers her head with her arms, hears a thousand tin cans. ...

⁶²⁶ Mayr 1998, p. 217.

Tell her to come eat! shouts Friedl at Cleopatra Maria. Eating with friends is good for the soul! ...

Cleopatra Maria lies down next to the bones. You saved their lives, she whispers. The bones completely still.

Friedl watches the woman gather her skirts around her, the skirts dripping large blobs of mud, dead fish, and Niagara River garbage. The woman seats herself at the extra place setting at the table, Hannelore and Clotilde too busy eating to notice. Friedl smiles broadly. Blinks only once at the smell. Come, says Friedl. Eat. ... That's better, nicht? says Friedl to the woman. Everything in order.⁶²⁷

Mayr describes Annie's act as the desperate yet defiant attempt of an impoverished American woman to escape starvation and death in the poor house. The heroic deed of an American woman's bravery turns into a matter of bare survival in a patriarchal society that does not provide space for aged women. Niagara Falls, the epitome of Canadian and American romantic honeymooning, is portrayed as a symbol of economic exploitation and an appalling, meaningless tourist attraction. Most importantly, however, Niagara Falls unites the experiences of women from both societies and sets them in the broader framework of worldwide institutionalized patriarchal domination.

The pseudo-physical crossing of the Canadian-American border symbolizes Cleopatra Maria's spiritual border-crossing. She begins to understand the similarities between her dare-devil ancestor Annie Edson Taylor and her own displacement as a woman of color within a white majority society. The spiritual meeting with Annie makes her comprehend the significant power of female bonding and the importance of constructive cross-border communication. At last, Cleopatra Maria is going to claim her "in-between"-place as a biracial woman within women's history in general and within contemporary Canadian community in particular. She will commit her

⁶²⁷ Mayr 1998, pp. 236.

personal dare-devil stunts by standing up against her grandmother's dominant behavior and her racially prejudiced attitude and by seducing lab-technician Niven to overcome her fear of female sexuality. Cleopatra Maria will eliminate binary outside categorizations and exercise her own individual choices for – as Inés Hernandez phrased it: "I am ... aware that what is *me* has no name but what I choose to give it." ⁶²⁸

⁶²⁸ Hernandez, Inés. *Con Razón Corazón*. San Antonio, TX: M&A Editions, 1987. p. 54.

4.2. 'Reverse Doublestuff', or from Halfness to Wholeness: The Poetry of Mercedes Baines

*By creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave – la mestiza creates a new consciousness.*⁶²⁹

(Gloria Anzaldúa)

In "A Place of Critical Mass", an interview with Rumble Productions (Bentall Centre, Vancouver, BC), Vancouver poet, performer, director and drama teacher Mercedes Baines explained that it was through getting in touch with the theatre world that she became aware of her various subjectivities as a racially mixed Canadian woman. It was through the casting patterns of theatre companies that she realized that her 'brown-ness' imposed certain impediments to her pursuing a career as an actress and director. She recognized the importance of juxtaposing arts with politics. Accordingly, Baines argues:

Art is political. A brown woman on stage telling stories is political. It doesn't matter if we don't want it to be that way, it just is. So, if you accept that and better yet embrace it, then it can be an evolution; however, I do find though at times it is a burden. I am not interested in writing about my brown skin in every play I write. I have done it, and I may do it again. But I am more than what my parents made me and those are the things I want to write about; that may include my experience of being a racially mixed woman in Canada or it may not. I think that is political too, because there is an expectation that the brown folks will solely write for themselves and it is then much easier to maintain status quo and remain in the margins of artistic expression.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute books, 1987. p. 80.

⁶³⁰ Baines, Mercedes (2004). "A Place of Critical Mass." <http://www.rumble.org/trans/trans7-3.htm> [Accessed on: December 1, 2004]

Baines's refuses to be trapped in any kind of identity that is solely based on constructs like 'race' or 'mixed-race'. Neither as an individual person nor as an artist does she wish to be assigned a definite racialized category. The thematic scope of her theatrical work and her poetry reaches beyond the mixed-race experience and incorporates issues of sexuality, gender, history and its reconstruction as well as topics like love, relationships and family. Hence, Baines's writings should be understood as an aesthetic expression of her complexity as a Canadian individual and simultaneously as a political response to feelings of systematic exclusion and marginalization. To repudiate an imposed peripheral identity, Mercedes Baines affirms and describes her heritage as a unique and powerful blending of "Afro-Canadian, French, Irish, Danish and Native"⁶³¹. Acknowledging her holistic centre, she contends,

I struggle – sometimes with joy, sometimes with tears of rage or confusion – to find my identity in all those bloodlines that have come together to create me. I actively resist being boxed into any of my cultural/ethnic identities. To allow myself to be labelled as only part of myself limits my creative/spiritual expression.⁶³²

In the poems selected for this analysis, Baines frequently embarks upon a journey of self-discovery, confrontation and resistance. She reveals the power relations at the core of Canadian identity politics as well as the implications of national (non-)belonging, cultural omission and historical denial. Another recurring motif in her poetry constitutes the 'racial gaze' directed at women of color and its underlying suggestion of women's objectification and stereotypically distorted perception in popular culture. In her investigation of the mixed-race experience in Canada, Baines sets out to deconstruct prevailing attitudes towards non-white women in general and towards racially mixed

⁶³¹ Camper, Carol. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. 380

⁶³² Baines in Camper 1994, p. 380

women in particular. Challenging the dichotomy of half-ness and wholeness, her poetry exposes the contrived nature of diametrical oppositions like whiteness and blackness and reveals them as constructs predicated upon the perpetuation of white supremacist power structures in Canadian society.⁶³³ Baines destroys the myth of the hypersexual 'mulatto woman' and claims a self-defined, strong and courageous self. By forcing her readers to look beneath the roles that stereotype and racial prejudice compel, her poetry aims at creating a new gendered and de-racialized consciousness of the mixed-race experience in Canada.

From Innocence to Knowing: Foiling the Conspiracy of Silence

The poem "**Brown Child**" (1994), published in the special West Coast Line edition *Colour an Issue* (1994), is dedicated to Baines's mother Dorise. Steeped in the Canadian experience, it manifests the worries of a white mother over the future well-being and safety of her mixed-race child and generally ponders upon racially mixed people's struggle for individuality and wholeness. The open-formed poem begins with an undisturbed image of innocence: a little "brown child, mixed child, mulatto child" (194) skipping and singing down the street, watching her pigtails bouncing in the shadow on the sidewalk in the warm sun. The image recurs throughout the poem, framing it from its beginning to the end. However, the first verse's short list of tags for racially mixed people and its range from a descriptive 'brown' over an ambiguous 'mixed' to the stereotypically grounded and derogatory term 'mulatto' already foreshadows the probability of destruction:

⁶³³ In her doctoral dissertation *Living Beyond the Gender Trap: Concepts of Gender and sexual expression envisioned by Marge Piercy, Cherrie Moraga and Leslie Feinberg* (2001) Heike Gerds challenges the stifling nature of dichotomies in her detailed analysis of conceptions of gender, sex and sexual orientation as restrictive social constructs which primarily serve to perpetuate monolithic forms of identity. Cf. Gerds, Heike. *Living Beyond the Gender Trap: Concepts of Gender and Sexual Expression envisioned by Marge Piercy, Cherrie Moraga and Leslie Feinberg*. Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2004.

Brown child, mixed child, mulatto child
skipping/singing down the street
watching your pigtails bounce in your shadow
on the sidewalk
in the warm sun.

Brown child, mixed child, mulatto child
your bloodlines push against each other
the world will demand you identify with only parts of yourself.⁶³⁴

The girl's shadow on the sidewalk does not reveal her skin color or other alleged 'racial' signifiers.⁶³⁵ She remains invisible; her body is de-racialized for a flickering moment. Her invisibility, however, must also be seen as obscure. It not only serves as a means of temporary protection against white-induced racism, but likewise mirrors society's inability to acknowledge her existence as a racially mixed Canadian and to see beneath the socially imposed roles and compelling stereotypes. Invisibility might pre-empt others' attempts at defining her, but it will also pre-empt her self-expression. Through rich symbolism and metaphors as well as through allusions to popular culture, the poem's narrator forces the reader to see what the innocent girl cannot anticipate yet. Baines indicates that the girl will one day become extremely vulnerable to the identity thrust upon her as a racially mixed Canadian woman. The girl's shadowed image constitutes a foreshadowing of the struggle for self-definition against

⁶³⁴ Baines, Mercedes. "Brown Child." Poem. *West Coast Line*. 28.1-2 (Fall/Spring 1994): 194-195; p. 194

⁶³⁵ Baines's symbolic image of the shadow is also evocative of Ralph Ellison's bildungsroman *The Invisible Man* (1952) whose nameless protagonist feels trapped in the invisibility of America's oppressive and racially prejudiced society. He claims that others' refusal to see him made him an invisible man. He lives hiding from the world, underground with thousands of shining light bulbs. A similar scene can be found in Lawrence Hill's novel *Any Known Blood*, whose prologue begins with the shadowed reflection of an interracial couple making love above a dry good store in Oakville, Ontario.

societal expectations awaiting her, "no matter [her] mother's white womb kisses and tears" (194).

As the poem progresses, Baines posits the carefully constructed image of the girl's innocence against images of brutal violence such as the child's "hand bloody on [her] white dresser" (194); lyrical elements are interspersed with prose passages to emphasize the fierce contrast between the girl's protected childhood and the painful "life sentence that is racism,"⁶³⁶ as George Elliott Clarke phrased it. Baines predicts how the undisturbed moments of happiness will be obliterated. She reveals the American one-drop-rule as the driving force of identification, not only in the United States but in Canada as well: "One drop of black blood makes you black / Octoroon, quadroon, half and half, salt and pepper" (194). Baines exposes the constructed nature and arbitrariness of the concept by shifting from racially loaded metaphors to arbitrary food metaphors. Nevertheless, the impact of the one-drop-rule continues to be powerful and influential in Canada as well.

Mercedes Baines denies half-ness and demands a holistic definition of her persona's identity. To her, the complexity of the individual self must be honored rather than subdued in the interests and misguided expectations of someone else:

You cannot carve out parts of yourself
and put them on top of your dresser
with your white Barbie and Ken.
What will your mother say with part of your heart,
part of your hand bloody on your white dresser?
Cut out your white self?
Cut out your brown self?

"This nose is white, this butt is definitely black, this thick mass

⁶³⁶ Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. pp. 211-237; p. 228.

of curls nothing but black these eyes are white no maybe black
no maybe I'm adopted and do not belong to either white or
black but am a new species."⁶³⁷

The narrator deconstructs the code of racialized genetics and rejects identification on such a basis. Baines declines to classify her persona according to exclusive binarism and instead assertively claims the existence of a "new species". Her persona shifts away from the outwardly imposed position of being 'either/or' but upholds to be a rather unique celebration of a 'both/and'-composite. The poem rejoices in the lyrical persona's mixed identity, strongly demands a right to unrestricted vitality and, as Clarke proposes, makes the 'tragic mulatto' beautiful.⁶³⁸ Through the compilation of (childhood-related?) food metaphors, Baines declares brown-ness of skin a comforting and self-satisfactory normality:

Warm sun gets your skin closer to your brown self.
Mixed shades of brown/delicious scents and tastes
Honey-warm and sticky
Caramel coated smooth and creamy
Toffee cream
Maple walnut icecream mmmmmmmmm
Warm sun
Me I'm more like almond sweet and nutty⁶³⁹

At the end of Baines's poem the shadow containing/imprisoning the invisible image of the little girl has disappeared and the narrator joyfully exclaims:

⁶³⁷ Baines 1994, "Brown Child", 194.

⁶³⁸ Clarke 2002, p. 229.

⁶³⁹ Baines 1994, "Brown Child", p. 195.

"Brown child, mixed child, mulatto child / Little girl grow wild and dance and laugh in the warm sun."⁶⁴⁰

Baines's poem "**Age of Innocence**" (1994)⁶⁴¹, likewise published in *Colour an Issue*, explores the persona's gradual shift from a position of innocence to one of conscious awareness of racial discrimination. "I did not always feel this way", Baines's lyrical persona begins, "I did not always know the reason for the odd feelings / or the whisperings behind my back or right in my face" (196), reflecting her past and foreshadowing a changed future. From the beginning to the end of the poem, her female persona will have shifted from a position of innocent blindness to the racism inherent in language, societal structure and other people's conduct towards a position of sad awareness and determined resistance.

Confronted with everyday experiences of racial discrimination, Baines's persona is infused with self-reproach and doubt. Believing to be abnormal, to have "an overactive hallucinogenic imagination", she wrestles with internalized racism, self-hatred and socially imposed shame – the lasting legacy of colonialism. Fairy-tale like in a repetitive pattern, the lyrical persona narrates:

There was a time I did not have a name for it.
I thought I was weird because no one else seemed to notice.
The conspiracy of silence.
There was a time I just ignored it and chalked it up to an
overactive hallucinogenic paranoid imagination.
Ha ha just my imagination.
[...]
I do fear people will think me crazy if I say it.
If I speak it.
If I call you nice people

⁶⁴⁰ Baines 1994, "Brown Child", p. 195.

⁶⁴¹ Baines, Mercedes. "Age of Innocence." Poem. *West Coast Line* 28.1-2 (Spring/Fall 1994): 196-197.

racists (who are really trying I know to understand).⁶⁴²

The burden of silence created around the existence of personal racist conduct and institutionalized racist structures in societal order suffocates her. The need to articulate the yet nameless "it" becomes urgent and a matter of survival. "There was an age of innocence. / I am no longer in that place" (196), Baines's persona proclaims. The "age of not knowing" (196) has ceased because her reality as a woman of color has been shaped by experiences of marginalization, alienation, estrangement and perpetual rejection. "The brutality of fists and language have raped [her] mind" (196), her perception of reality has irreversibly been changed:

I no longer see straight
everything is warped and bent out of shape
I wonder if the bus driver is speaking loudly because she is deaf
or she thinks I don't understand
her tongue lashing between two thin white lips
I wonder if the man talking to me thinks my blackness
will wrap around him and happily fuck out my insatiable sexual
appetite ... or is he just talking to me?
Why do students ask where I am from
like it is a matter of course I am not from here
an alien in the classroom⁶⁴³

In undisguised prose language – sometimes underscored by short dialogic structures resembling the dichotomy between whiteness and Otherness – and poignant lyric images, Baines has her persona recall a representative hotchpotch of prejudicial (de)formative incidents which reflect the demonization of women

⁶⁴² Baines 1994, "Age of Innocence", p. 196.

⁶⁴³ Baines 1994, "Age of Innocence", p. 197.

of color by a prescriptive whiteness and lingering racialized stereotypes of the 'Other'.

The "conspiracy of silence" around issues of 'race' and racism makes it impossible for her to attempt constructing a positive image of her own self. Motivated by the terror of racism Baines's persona is determined to resist, but unable to ignore the "bad taste" (197) which has settled in her mouth or to disregard what's "creeping up [her] back" (197). Sadness mingles with rage and she is ready to burst: "If someone calls me exotic one more time / I think I will spit and scream and froth at the mouth ..." (197). Refraining from clinging to a position of victimization, Baines directly addresses the (white) reader and demands that her pain be acknowledged, her voice be honored. She refuses to tell her story, breaks the silence and insists on being heard:

This is my story.

Listen.

This is my voice

honor

it by accepting just for today that this is my reality

therefore it is real.⁶⁴⁴

Belonging and Exclusion: A Matter of Home

In 1997, Toronto-based African-Canadian journalist, artist and writer Hazelle Palmer published an anthology with Sister Vision bearing the title, "...*But Where Are You Really From?*". The anthology assembles the creative expressions of 32 hyphenated non-white Canadian women and one man, among them black Canadians, Asian Canadians, racially and/or ethnically mixed people, Lesbians, mothers etc. All of them share the experience of marginalization and exclusion and wrestle with the idea of home. In her introduction, Palmer states:

⁶⁴⁴ Baines 1994, "Age of Innocence", p. 197.

A sense of belonging in Canada is elusive for those of us who share part of our lives here. No matter how long we or our families have lived here, we are still not readily accepted as Canadian. It is frustrating to be born or raised in a country where you are constantly made to feel like an outsider. [...] Where are you *really* from? or Where are your parents from? are loaded questions for people of color born or raised in Canada. The questions suggest that we do not "look" Canadian. It also suggests that the questioner, perhaps unknowingly, needs to match us to a country that he or she thinks is more representative of what we *do* look like. [...] This probing of our ancestry keeps us forever foreign, forever immigrants to Canada. Moreover, the questions are by nature racist; their faulty premise assumes that because we are not white we could not be Canadian. Their logic is based on colonialist and racist assumptions about what Canadians look like and what is it to be Canadian.⁶⁴⁵

The criterion of visibility is thus decisive in terms of being accepted as a welcome member to the Canadian nation-state or not.⁶⁴⁶ Those whose "looks" fail to blend in with the white mainstream – as it is reflected throughout the media and popular culture – are constructed as Other on the basis of a perpetuated colonialist heritage and denied a sense of unrestricted belonging.

Mercedes Baines's poem "**Mulatto Woman: a honey beige wrapper**" (1994) was published in Carol Camper's landmark (and hitherto unmatched)

⁶⁴⁵ Palmer, Hazelle. "Introduction." "... *But Where Are You Really From?*" ed. Hazelle Palmer. Toronto: sister Vision, 1997. pp. v-x; pp. v-vi

⁶⁴⁶ On the significance of visibility in the process of constructing difference read Karrer, Wolfgang and Hartmut Lutz. "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality." *Minority Literatures in North America: Contemporary Perspectives*. eds. Wolfgang Karrer and Hartmut Lutz. Frankfurt/Main, 1990. pp. 11-64; also read Lutz, Hartmut. "Is the Canon Colorblind?: On the Status of Authors of Color in Canadian Literature in English." *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literatures*. Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien. Vol 11. Hartmut Lutz. Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2002. pp. 126-153.; cf also Bannerji, Himani. "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'." *Literary Pluralities*. ed. Christl Verduyn. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998. pp. 125-151.

anthology *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* (1994) and enquires into intricacies of belonging and issues of identity. Above all, Baines muses on the status of racially mixed people in a colonialist and racism-infused society:

Mulatto woman Mulatto woman
Brown tones sepia tones
shades summer / winter any season
Mulatto woman / Mulatto woman
Where is home
Where is home
Where is home⁶⁴⁷

Baines's raises the universally problematic theme of racially mixed people's national and communal belonging and infuses it with a Canadian context. Her "mulatto woman" is apparently not welcome to Canada and her place of belonging is perpetually cast doubt on. The question "Where is home?" constitutes an integral part of the persona's quest for her own identity; it becomes central to the woman's self-understanding and her undertaking to position herself within Canadian society. Yet the answers given to this central question remain unsatisfactory and mirror the peripheral existence of racially mixed people within society's hegemonic structure:

Mulatto woman Mulatto woman
Are you white - No
Are you black - No.
Well You could be black if you wanted to be black you
could pass for black if you acted more black but you
cannot pass for white

⁶⁴⁷ Baines, Mercedes. "Mulatto Woman: honey beige wrapper." Poem. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. 37

In this context, Baines also interrogates the insinuations fundamental to the politics of 'passing'. As a mixed-race woman, Baines's persona is expected to identify as black, although even this option appears not undisputed. Colorism within the black community exerts pressure on racially mixed people to prove their blackness, often by reinforcing stereotypical behavioral patterns.⁶⁴⁸ To identify as black, however, does not correspond to the lyrical persona's self, to her understanding of wholeness. She would have to 'pass' for black to be accepted. 'Passing' would consequently lead to personal self-denial, emotional asceticism and alienation.⁶⁴⁹

The lyrical persona is equally barred entrance to the white community because of her "honey beige" (37) visibility and the socially imposed regulative of the one-drop-rule whose influence lingers due to the incessant reinvention of 'race' and the perpetuation of racist societal structures.⁶⁵⁰ Baines reacts to this exclusion by re-defining the meaning of whiteness. Whiteness is exposed as the skin of oppression.⁶⁵¹ Baines reveals that it is nothing more but an invented social category, a symbol of power and a metaphor for domination:

Hey ... I'm white

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. Hill, Lawrence. *Black Berry*

⁶⁴⁹ For further details on social constructions of 'racial' signifiers and the politics of passing consult Bennett, Juda. *The Passing Figure. Racial Confusion in Modern American Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996; Berzon, Judith R. *Neither White Nor Black. The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1978; Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

⁶⁵⁰ For information on the development and perpetuation of the one-drop-rule in the United States see Davis, James F. *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1991; for a discussion of 'race' and its incessant social reinvention to maintain a white-supremacist hegemony Cf. Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London, New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 223-227; Cf. Hall, Stuart. "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. eds. Les Back and John Solomos. London, NY: Routledge, 2000. pp. 144-153; for a detailed analysis of the interrelatedness of issues such as 'race', gender, sexuality and class consult Fields, Barbara. "Slavery, Race and the Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review*, 1990. p. 181; Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 17.2 (1992): p. 253.

⁶⁵¹ For a discussion of the terror of Whiteness cf. hooks, bell. "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination." *Cultural Studies*. eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler. New York: Rutledge, 1992. pp. 338-346.

Hey I'm white
Hey I'm white
I could be just give me a chance I'll oppress everyone
and deny my racism because it does not exist in Canada
we are far too nice and besides real Canadians are
white ask anybody who is not from here and they will tell
you
So where are you from?
Mulatto woman Mulatto woman
Honey beige in the shade.⁶⁵²

Baines discloses the myth of Canada as a racism-free country, and locates her experience of multiple exclusions within the geographical realm of Canada's borders. She delineates that in popular culture Canadianness is equated with whiteness. Not to be white means to be Othered, to be constructed as different, as immigrant, as exotic, as an unwelcome glitch.

In terms of poetic technique, Baines almost entirely refrains from the use of punctuation marks in her poem as if nothing is to stop her flow of words, her persona's acknowledgement of a self-defined identity. The longer prose sections (strongly imitating oral speech) do not need to be segmented to make sense. They fuse into a cohesive, meaningful whole – just like the different parts of Baines's persona cannot be separated either. She, too, represents a cohesive whole. Her different parts can neither be singled out nor modified, in fact, they emerge as imaginary constructs with no correspondence in reality. They are truly non-existent.

The initial problem posed in the poem, however, remains unsolved at its end. Societal white-supremacist structures and racialized prejudices are presented as far too ossified for racially mixed people to feel themselves at home and be accepted in Canada without having to sacrifice some of their

⁶⁵² Baines 1994, "Mulatto Woman", p. 37

multiple subject positions. Hence, Baines's mixed-race lyrical persona lingers "in the shade" (37) – beautiful but invisible.

With an analogous thematic focus, Mercedes Baines created the poem **"Where are you from? A Broken Record"** (1994)⁶⁵³, also published in Carol Camper's anthology. The piece ponders again the issues of belonging and exclusion. Baines's poem reflects the anger, pain and frustration provoked by the question "Where are you from?" and strips bare its underlying pejorative assumptions of foreignness and innate difference. The author creates a fictive dialogue between a white man and a woman of color, interrupted at times with the reflective thoughts of the lyrical narrator. The dialogic structure stays a "broken record" (151), incomplete yet indelible and paradigmatic for a plethora of racially mixed women's daily encounters with racism and sexism in Canada:

So ...uh... where are you from?

A white young lusty man asks hoping for a delicious exotic entrée.

I look around knowing he is asking me but I'm still surprised
the record plays on

He has not asked my white women friends / only me.

Assumption: Plain white wrappers come from nowhere but here
but plain brown wrappers must be from someplace else / Not from
here definite – ly

*Not from here.*⁶⁵⁴

The conversation between the "lusty young man" (151) and the "plain brown wrapper" (151) continues while "the record plays on and on" (151) – establishing a link between past and present and repetitive like the ceaseless history of

⁶⁵³ Baines, Mercedes. "Where are you from? A Broken Record" Poem. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. 151-152.

⁶⁵⁴ Baines 1994, "Where are you from?", p. 151.

women's sexual exploitation. Baines seeks to expose to view the momentous intersection of categories like 'race' and class. She explores how the interrelatedness of 'race', gender and sexuality fits into conceptions of how non-white women see themselves and are seen by others. Women of color are exoticized and reduced to "wrappers" – decorative yet empty shells, objects to be devoured, and things to be possessed. Baines's lyrical persona opposes her exclusion and insists on her nativity, on her Canadianness. She is adamant to her interlocutor's penetrating inquiries and unmasks his underlying racist attitude and his sexual desire:

Where are you from?

Why – I ask / do you want to taste the exotic? To fuck another
other?

Does it make you feel ...

*Well you look like you could be from Trinidad, Spain, France not
from here, South America, not from here def-in-ate-ly not from here.*

He smiles hopeful thinking he's impressed me ... the record plays on
and on.

I am from here – actually.

Oh - he says truly disappointed. It was not the answer he was
looking for. He did not ask the right question.

The right question would be: Why is your skin the shade it is? Why
is your hair the texture it is? Why are your lips and hips full / your
eyes brown?⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁵ Baines 1994, "Where are you from?", p. 151.

Baines refuses to provide a "simple answer" (152) or to be fitted "in a simple box" (152). Pulling together all diverse lineages that have created her, the poet pays homage to all of her ancestors and their contributions:

It depends on the day
The colour I feel.

Today I am Black and beautiful with my heart full of song and my
hips full of music [...]

Yesterday I was white
Tribes of Irish French Danish
Methodical, inward spirit meditate, white light staring at my brown
self laughing loud.

Tomorrow I will be red – heartbeat to drum – walking on a long
journey.⁶⁵⁶

Baines deploys the motif of the imaginative journey into the past as a means of juxtaposing her persona's experiences with that of her ancestors in a pre-colonialist setting. She remembers "what it was like when the earth did not have an owner" (152), "when we would have also laughed loud" (152) and "when black skin did not need explanation" (152). The process of remembering engenders a foundation of strength, a way of healing.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ Baines 1994, "Where are you from?", p. 152.

⁶⁵⁷ Healing by way of remembering and voicing one's story is, for example, also a thematic strain of African-American novelist Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where her female protagonist Sethe 'rememories' in order to overcome the trauma of slavery and child loss. African-Canadian playwrights Sharon Lewis and Maxine Bailey employ the motif in their drama *sistahs* to transcend a multitude of boundaries and to establish a unifying female bond. It's also a recurring motif in a lot of Canadian Métis and First Nations' works, e.g. in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*.

Equipped with this new source of empowerment, Baines's persona acknowledges her multiracial body/individual self as a product of history, (voluntary and involuntary) migrations, and the enduring legacy of colonialism. Her face becomes a reflection of her ancestors' sufferings and joys. Her identity must be understood as trans-generational, transnational and transcultural:

Do you see my face trans form with each invocation?
Ask me where I am from?
I am from here
and everywhere
I am multinational/United Nations/United in one body
Bloodlines intermixed/travelling
centuries
To create me
a Millennia of inter racial fucking
I am from here – especially here.⁶⁵⁸

Baines surpasses the borders of the Canadian nation reaching out to the more global/diasporic connotations of racial mixture. She recalls "a Millennia of inter racial fucking," places her own story within the diasporic black and multiracial experience and breaks the silence created around issues of sexual exploitation, miscegenation and interracial violence. At the end of her poem, Baines returns to the Canadian setting to determinedly reassert her demand for an acknowledged space for racially mixed people. Her final words, "I am from here – especially from here" (152), emphasize that Canada cannot free itself from historical responsibility. The self-ascribed moral superiority of Canada – which found its most recent expression in a state- supported policy of

⁶⁵⁸ Baines 1994, "Where are you from?", p.152.

multiculturalism⁶⁵⁹ – is first of all a construct. Baines deconstructs that myth by rejecting simplistic binary categorization and by voicing the story of "Bloodlines intermixed / travelling centuries" (152). Her understanding of identity speaks in favor of shifting, fluidity and unity.

Reversing the 'Racial Gaze': Claiming a Holistic Self

In her poem "**Half Baked Zebra Cake**", published in the special West Coast Line issue *North: New Directions in African Canadian Writing* (1997), Mercedes Baines brings into play elements of dub poetry, phoneme constructions, inner rhymes and allusions to pop culture in order to weaken the notion of the 'mulatto' as incomplete, insufficient, inadequate, a flaw. As George Elliott Clarke argued in his essay "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics", Baines discards the relationship between being "half-breed" and "half-baked":⁶⁶⁰

Half Bred
Half Bread
Half Baked
Halfbaked
crazy
Not completely cooked
soft on the inside
brown on the outside
Oreo for real
Reverse Doublestuff
[...] ⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁹ Kamboureli, Smaro and Fred Wah. "Shrink Wrapped: The National Packaging of Race Writing." *The Atlantic Literary Review*. 2.4 (October-December 2001): 132-40.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. Clarke 2002a, p. 227.

⁶⁶¹ Mercedes Baines, "Half-Baked Zebra Cake." Poem. *West Cost Line* 31. 1 (Spring/ Summer 1997): 132.

Stereotyped as "Reverse Doublestuff" (132) and identified as "an illegal product of two races", Baines's lyrical persona is not "definable" (133). She is "too light / too dark" (133) to be accepted by either side and confronted with both the colorism within the black Canadian community and the prevailing attitude of white-supremacist thinking.

The poem's setting is a "restaurant that sells Zebra Cake" (132). Baines introduces the "zebra cake" as the poem's central metaphor, alluding at color and food symbolisms when her narrator ironically exclaims, "It's a personal favorite / It's very good / - very moist - very Betty Crocker meets Aunt Jemima in the 90s" (132). Baines's allusion to pop culture underscores that only few images of blacks and even less images of racially mixed people are accessible in public culture and how distorted, romanticized and/or exoticized even these appear. An affirmative and holistic understanding of her existence as a racially mixed Canadian woman seems unattainable. Baines's recurrent use of the "zebra cake"-metaphor and other food metaphors uncovers the racism implicit in such a terminology and the self-destructive psychological pain brought about by the internalization of such light-hearted racialized prejudice:

I eat it [the Zebra Cake] as a metaphor for devouring myself – kind of a new age mother / goddess thing. / I know waiters don't get the joke / perhaps it's really not that funny / as I eat my own derogatory definition with a smile and a chocolate / rush.⁶⁶²

However, Baines returns the "look" – returns the pierce of the 'racial gaze'⁶⁶³ – and proudly announces her right to speak, her right to be whole. Clarke argues that Baines "moves from a position of defensiveness to one of, not only opposition to any limiting conception of herself, but one of aggressive

⁶⁶² Baines 1997, "Half-Baked Zebra Cake", p. 132.

⁶⁶³ For a critical introduction on the politics of the 'racial gaze' and its impact on the lives of non-White Canadian women cf. Bannerji, Himani. "Returning the Gaze: An Introduction." *Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics*. ed. Himani Bannerji. Toronto: sister vision Press, 1993. pp. ix-xxiv.

proclamation".⁶⁶⁴ In majuscule letters, Baines thus proclaims a 'raceless'/multiracial future, shifting from a lyrical "I" to a lyrical "we" to boost the emphasis and importance of her declaration:

THE FACE OF THE FUTURE
GET OVER IT.
DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT
GET OVER IT.
THE FACE OF THE FUTURE.
TAKE A LOOK.⁶⁶⁵

The psychological anguish expressed by the lyrical persona locates racially mixed people in the context of historical atrocities in Canada.⁶⁶⁶ By making it public, by breaking the silence created around it, Baines obliterates the porous myth of Canada as a morally superior and politically more liberal country free of discrimination. In a dialogic confrontation with the imagined historical white persecutor, Baines insist on the acknowledgement of a mixed-race presence and calls to mind the existence of slavery and interracial violence in Canada. Baines's persona is outraged at the customary comfortable ignorance of white Canadians and refuses to acquiesce in historical forgetfulness:

'Oh, you're mother is white? Oh ...'
Silence. Nod. Eyes flit back and forth.
"No, my mother was an Irish princess and my father a (don't say it)
ah ... well ... was a slave.
My last name: Baines. a white woman has the same last name.
Says we might be related.
I think: Yeah, your great great grandfather raped my great, great

⁶⁶⁴ Clarke 2002a, p. 228.

⁶⁶⁵ Baines 1997, "Half-Baked Zebra Cake", p. 133.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. Clarke 2002a

grandmother because he owned her.
Not a very pleasant thought at a party.
Not very nice thoughts.
I keep it inside – until I feel like puking history on her feet. Then I
just change the subject and
eat more cake.⁶⁶⁷

The final lines of the poem leap back to the subject of internalized stereotypes and self-hatred. Baines's persona seems to resign and continues to helplessly eat up her pained self. However, her previous impatient yet powerful outbursts of resistance and her emphasis on the "NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT" suggest an unbending will, subversive energies and a potential for resistance.

Baines's poem "**Bus Fucking**" (1994) also explores the politics of the 'racial gaze', the impact of repressed anger, frustration and self-doubt. It offers a gendered insight into the everyday experiences of a racially mixed woman whose in-between status and constructed difference seem to make her even more desirable, more exotic. Baines's persona reflects the difficulties of creating "your own / reality" (150) when "each day I push through the sea of white eyes staring at / me on the bus / as if I were some strange fruit / as if my vulva was hanging outside my skirt whispering exotic / welcomes" (150). The lyrical persona is confronted with the look/stare of a man on a bus and his apparent sexual interest in her body becomes offensive and penetrating. His objectification of her body causes emotional distress and psychological strains. Baines stresses how the effort of constructing a positive self-image is deformed in the face of sexualized, racialized stereotypes and prejudiced expectations:

It is not a compliment to say he is staring because I am
attractive. It is not a compliment. I see the rolling eye balls. I feel
the emotion ... it is not benign. I hear the stereotypes about my

⁶⁶⁷ Baines 1997, "Half-Baked Zebra Cake", p. 133.

sexuality, my birthplace, my otherness drip from his eyes like crocodile tears.⁶⁶⁸

To feel whole and safe becomes a complicated undertaking. Yet Baines does not allow her persona to be victimized and objectified:

I return his stare.

He looks down
or thinks I am coming on to him
as if my skin and my sex were an invitation
to random bus fucking.⁶⁶⁹

Baines's persona returns his stare, hoping to impose similar feelings of distress and discomfort on her spectator. The line is singled out, remains isolated in the poem, underlining the significance of resistance by reversing the 'racial gaze'.

Hair Issues, or Tracing Medusa: Creating a New Myth

Resistance is also advocated in Mercedes Baines's poem "**sadie mae's mane**" (1994), published in *Colour an Issue*. The author raises the issue of "hair" as an unabashedly scrutinized marker of her female persona's 'racial' difference, as a signifier of the narrator's "mysterious bloodlines".⁶⁷⁰ The penetrating 'racial gaze' of the white spectator in the poem becomes again offensive and reduces Baines's lyrical persona to an exoticized object and a hyper-sexualized figment of the white male imagination. Her hair – the target of his racist attention and desire – is transformed into something mysterious; it represents a metonymic image for the narrator's 'Otherness'. "How did my hair get this way? / no one

⁶⁶⁸ Baines, Mercedes. "Bus Fucking" Poem. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. 150.

⁶⁶⁹ Baines 1994, "Bus Fucking", p. 150.

⁶⁷⁰ Baines, Mercedes. "sadie mae's mane." Poem. *West Coast Line*. 28.1-2 (Fall/Spring 1994): 198.

wants to believe it is natural / My hair is an aberration of mutated beauty of my strained mixed / heritage"⁶⁷¹, the persona cries out, unable to match white-constructed beauty ideals with her reality of being, consequently feeling defaced and maimed, seeing herself as an abnormality. Baines illustrates how expectations of black and racially mixed women are linked to a warped sense of self-definition that is developed in relation to the cultural norms of white women's outward looks.

In addition, Baines hints at the ambivalence attributed to the racially mixed woman, who, on the one hand, seems to be irresistibly attractive as the perfect embodiment of male sexual desires and who, on the other hand, represents the incarnated *femme fatale* to be feared and avoided: "You look, you stare as if it [her hair] has lips and is whispering in the city air some hair fantasy / Do not come too close it will envelope you and I will not even notice / want to touch it?"⁶⁷² Baines's lyrical persona continues provocatively, lurking and luring:

Want to touch it?

Come closer

Want to feel it?

Come closer

Want to stroke it?

Come closer

Want to smell it?

Want to come closer?⁶⁷³

Transforming her ambivalence into power, Baines evokes the image of the snake-haired female creature Medusa in the final lines of "sadie mae's mane" as both trope and apotroptic symbol, i.e. it appears to be a metaphorical representation of evil while warding off evil simultaneously. Medusa signifies

⁶⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁷² *ibid.*

⁶⁷³ *ibid.*

both a potent weapon of defense and a black-identified self-representation. The poet stirs up the well-known classical (i.e. patriarchally constructed) Greek myth of Medusa and projects it against her earlier Neolithic matrifocal representation. In classical Greek mythology Medusa is described as the hideous Gorgon with venomous snakes upon her head, who had once been a stunningly beautiful woman with golden locks but was punished by the goddess Athena and turned into an ugly monster because Medusa was said to have desecrated Athena's temple with the sea-god Poseidon.⁶⁷⁴ Medusa then begins to make use of her powerful gaze to petrify her male enemies. She turns them into stone monuments. Eventually overpowered and beheaded by Perseus, Medusa's cut off head is used by Athena as a martial force to subdue her foes.⁶⁷⁵

Baines embraces the persistent fascination with Medusa that derives from her ambivalence. Medusa's elusiveness comprises beauty, desire, power and danger. As Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers emphasize in the introduction to their collection of feminist essays, *The Medusa Reader* (2003):

What is most compelling in the long history of the myth and its retellings is Medusa's intrinsic doubleness: at once monster and beauty, disease and cure, poison and remedy. The woman with snaky locks who could turn the unwary into stone has come to stand for all that is obdurate and irresistible.⁶⁷⁶

In literature and theory, Medusa's "intrinsic doubleness" has offered fertile ground for a plethora of divergent interpretations. In the most 'canonical' (i.e. patrifocal) of literatures, Medusa frequently appears as a powerful force against

⁶⁷⁴ Details vary with regard to that point. In one version Medusa was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. Smith, Barbara. "Greece." *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. ed. Carolyne Larrington. London: HarperCollins Publ., 1992. pp.66-101; Garber, Marjorie and Nancy J. Vickers . "Introduction." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 1-7; Cf. Rose, H.J. *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*. London: Methuen, 1964; Cf. Lefkowitz, M.R. *Women in Greek Myth*. London: Duckworth, 1986; Hard, Robin. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. London et al.: Routledge, 2004.

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. Garber/Vickers 2003, p. 1.

which men are weak. She represents the forbidden that must be resisted, the embodiment of misery and independence.⁶⁷⁷ She was feared in both Greek and Roman mythology as recorded by Homer and Ovid, respectively,⁶⁷⁸ sources and details, however, slightly vary. In the Middle Ages, Dante and Petrarch warn against Medusa's stunning powers.⁶⁷⁹ In Romantic fashion, writers like Goethe, Pater, Rossetti and Swinburne have referred to Medusa in many of their works and depicted her as an the doubled danger of beauty and terror, as "the tempestuous liveliness of terror"⁶⁸⁰ in Percy Bysshe Shelley's words. Mercedes Baines takes benefit from Medusa's dangerous and terrifying aspect. She exploits the figure's monstrosity as a symbolic shield against the 'racial gaze' of the white viewer and reveals the male fear of being petrified, i.e. controlled, by a woman. Medusa reverses the glance directed at her and claims its powers.

In spite of Baines's 'monstrous' representation of Medusa the poem "sadie mae's mane" must also be seen as part of a tradition of feminist and postcolonial revision that was initiated in the 1970s by French feminist writer and theorist Hélène Cixous. In her influential essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), Cixous transformed the image of the Medusa from that of terrifying monstrosity to stunning subversiveness. "She is not deadly, " Cixous wrote, "She is beautiful and she's laughing."⁶⁸¹ Women have been taught to turn away from their bodies, to feel shame and to keep silent about their sexuality. Hence, women's bodies and women's sexuality, so Cixous, have been yoked and

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Garber/Vickers 2003, pp. 73-74, 79-80;

In psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud then established the pungent view on Medusa as a symbol for the male fear of castration: the snakes wreathing her head are equated with the fearful possibility of phallic womanhood. (Cf. Freud, Sigmund. "Medusa's Head." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 84-85.

⁶⁷⁸ Homer refers to the Gorgon creature in his account of the last year of the Trojan war in the *Illiad* (c. 750-725 B.C.). Medusa is implicitly mentioned in the story of Perseus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 43 B.C. – 17 B.C.).

⁶⁷⁹ In his *Inferno* (c. 1310-1314), Dante Alighieri makes reference to the monster Medusa, Petrarch in his sonnets compares the beauty of his beloved Laura to being enchanted and captivated by the look of the Medusa (c. 1327-1374).

⁶⁸⁰ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery." Poem. *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 75-76; p. 76.

⁶⁸¹ Cixous, Hélène. "The Laughter of the Medusa." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 133-134; p. 133.

censored. To overcome their subjugation, they should reclaim their bodies and learn to understand the infinite and mobile complexity of their selves, appreciate their bodies as a space of thousand thresholds promising various directions.⁶⁸² Following Cixous's feminist re-thinking of Medusa and challenging the Freudian interpretation as a symbol for men's fear of castration,⁶⁸³ Medusa must be re-evaluated as a sign of women's subversive, self-sufficient sexuality and creative energy.⁶⁸⁴

In his essay "Death in the Eyes," Jean-Pierre Vernant, a radical re-thinker of classical studies at the Collège de France, furthermore points to Medusa as a symbolic representation of the Other. In ancient Greece, his argument goes, representations of the Other (barbarians, slaves, strangers, youth and women) always appeared deformed because they had been constructed with reference to the norm of the male adult citizen. Medusa's monstrosity thus "systematically plays on the confusion of human and bestial elements, juxtaposed and mingled in a variety of ways."⁶⁸⁵

Mercedes Baines's stresses the relationship between racially mixed women's metaphorical mutilation, their (social and economic) disempowerment within hegemonial societal structures and the continuous reinvention of non-white women's constructed 'racial' and gendered Otherness. Baines's literary claim on Medusa puts forward a strong claim on black female power. She counters misogynist interpretations of Medusa with her rediscovery of Medusa's matriarchal African origin and her depiction as a female figure of dynamic empowerment, vigor and resistance. Like much of Greek myth, the story of Medusa is rooted in African, gynocentric elements and was originally imported to Greece from Libya where Medusa was worshipped as the serpent

⁶⁸² Cf. Cixous in Garber/Vickers 2003, p. 134.

⁶⁸³ Freud, Sigmund. "Medusa's Head." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 84-85.

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. duBois, Page. *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representation of Women*. Chicago, Ill. et al.: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

⁶⁸⁵ Vernant, Jean-Pierre. "Death in the Eyes: Gorgo, Figure of the Other." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 210-222; p. 212.

goddess of the Libyan amazons.⁶⁸⁶ Images of pre-Hellenic Medusa accordingly portray her hair as dreadlocks, a trace of her African origin. In the African legend, the motif of the forbidden gaze occurred as well, for it was inscribed that no one was allowed to lift her veil for a look upon her face was to glance one's own death as she saw the viewer's future.⁶⁸⁷

In Baines's poem, Medusa's hair becomes a metonym for black/Othered women's transformative powers, a capacity originated in her persona's painful recognition of "not being the same".⁶⁸⁸ Such a reinterpretation of Medusa offers a deliberate choice of black-identified representation.⁶⁸⁹ Baines calls upon Medusa's power: Medusa's Black power!⁶⁹⁰

Notably, in Sanskrit *Medha* and in Greek *Metis*, the name Medusa stands for "sovereign female wisdom;" some etymological explanations also argue that the name was derived from the Greek word "medousa" for guardian, queen or ruler.⁶⁹¹ Matriarchal Medusa was represented as a very complex mythological creature. She symbolized the cycles of time as past, present and future as well as the cycle of life as life, death and rebirth; she was considered the guardian of the thresholds, and the Mediatrix between the realms of heaven, earth and the underworld. Medusa was universal creativity and destruction in eternal transformation; she destroyed in order to recreate balance; she purified. She signified the wholeness beyond duality. Medusa was a symbol of the full potency of female creativity, a powerful and untamable female force.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. Caputi, Jane. "On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking." *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. ed. Carolyn Larrington. London: HarperCollins Publ., 1992. pp. 425-440, p. 431; Cf. Walker, Barbara. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myth and Secrets*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983. p. 629; Cf. Sjöö, M. and Mor B. *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering Religion of the Earth*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987. p. 209.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Walker 1983; Cf. Walker, Barbara.. *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988; Cf. Gimbutas, Marija. *Die Zivilisation der Göttin: die Welt des Alten Europa*. Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 1996.

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. Goodman, Lizbeth. "Who's Looking at Who(m): Reviewing Medusa." *The Medusa Reader*. eds. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York et al.: Routledge, 2003. pp. 272-275. p. 274.

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid*.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. Smarrt, Dorothea. "Medusa? Medusa Black!" *Mythic Women/Real Women: Plays and Performance Pieces by Women*. ed. Lizbeth Goodman. London: Faber and Faber, 2000. pp. 259-262.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Garber/Vickers 2003, p. 3

With the introduction of patriarchy to Greece, however, the sacred image of Medusa as an ancient symbol of female power and wisdom became unacceptable and her ancient North African roots were belied.⁶⁹² Racist attitudes were developed and encouraged among the Greeks who intended to conceal their African and Semitic cultural roots.⁶⁹³ She was transformed into a horrid, ugly monster – a threat to male rationality and power. When Perseus decapitates Medusa with his crescent sword and Athena's support, Medusa's female wisdom and her creative powers are ultimately silenced, demonized and obliterated. Her mythological beheading symbolizes her degradation and, in more generally, the subordination of women to male supremacy. The act limits her potential and stops her development. Her spiritual powers and her forces of female creativity are halted; her role as dynamic mediatrix between the different realms is denied; her life-giving, death-wielding powers are controlled, tamed, and mastered by the male order. The cycles of life and nature are forced to conform to a linear male perspective.

Mercedes Baines's narrator in "sadie mae's mane" refuses to be objectified by White men. In an act of defiance she detaches "[her] mane" (198) (and its racialized connotation) from her body, from her identity as a racially mixed woman and repudiates the carefully constructed 'racial' signifier:

I say I will cut it and you react as if I will cut my forearm
 Medusa head / it lives beyond my being.
 I take the hair off my head it moves like hissing snakes and
 speaks

⁶⁹² Patriarchy was introduced to Greece during the bronze and iron age of first millenia Greece. The sacred mother deity was replaced with a supreme father. Earth and heaven were split eternally. Through myths male heroes and Gods were invented to subjugate female forces. The creation of the God Apollo, who tamed and subordinated the female serpent dragon Eurinaes, represented the rising patriarchy and reflected male economic and political interests. The overpowering of the Eurinaes the old matrifocal civilization vanished and was replaced by a patriarchal system of Olympic Gods. (Cf. Walker 1983; Walker 1988; Gimbutas 1996).

⁶⁹³ Cf. Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afrocentric Roots of Classical Civilization*. London: Vintage, 1991.

a beacon of my mysterious bloodlines.⁶⁹⁴

The persona's hair, however, continues to carry symbolic meaning "beyond being" (198). Baines transforms the racialized hair into a shield of defense. Like Medusa's head – which returns the racialized and sexualized gaze by petrifying its viewers even after it had been detached from her body – the lyrical persona's hair lives on, becoming a "beacon" (198) – simultaneously sign and a warning. By filling the myth of Medusa with new contents, Baines creates a new consciousness about visibility, racialization and the need for self-definition.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁴ Baines 1994, "sadie mae's mane", p. 198

⁶⁹⁵ In culture, hair is a very contested space reflecting power relations. On the socio-political connotations of 'hair' read Lorde, Audré. "Ist dein Haar ein Politikum?" *Schwarzer Feminismus: Theorie und Politik afro-amerikanischer Frauen*. ed. Gloria I. Joseph. Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993. pp. 107-111.; Cf. also Hill, Lawrence. *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2001.

4.3. Polyvalent Blackness in African-Canadian Drama: Difference and Healing in Maxine Bailey's and Sharon Lewis's *Sistahs* (1994)

African-Canadian literature is very versatile and it gives voice to a wide variety of black subjectivities, among them possibly the voices of racially mixed Canadians (if they choose to identify with the black Canadian community). In relation to W.E.B. DuBois's African-American notion of the double-consciousness,⁶⁹⁶ Africadian scholar George Elliott Clarke therefore coined the term poly-consciousness to make it applicable to the black Canadian context:

DuBois conception applies meaningfully to us, for we also exhibit a divided being. [...] Yet the African-Canadian consciousness is not simply dualistic. We are divided severally; we are not just Black and Canadian but also adherent to a region, speakers of an official language (either French or English), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or national group), all of which shape our identities, African Canadians possess, then, not merely a double consciousness but also a poly consciousness.⁶⁹⁷

In African-Canadian drama, various playwrights have reflected this poly-consciousness by depicting a multiethnic/multiracial consortium of black identities.

Andrew Moodie, for example, wrote a humorous and witty drama, *Riot* (1995), set in Toronto during the turbulences of the LA riot of 1992 that followed the acquittal of the policemen charged with the Rodney King beating and their reverberations on Yonge Street in Toronto. Dispelling stereotypes and celebrating the diversity of Toronto's black Community, Moodie gives insight into the lives of 6 young black Canadians who differ markedly in their origins,

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. DuBois 1903

⁶⁹⁷ Clarke, George Elliott. "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African Americanisms, or the Structures of African Canadianité." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 63 (Spring 1998): 1-55. p. 17.

attitudes and histories. His characters are immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean or black-skinned indigenous Canadians, speaking numerous languages, having diverse regional affiliations and differing racialized experiences. Exploring black and white discourses of race and racism, Moodie insists on black difference while emphasizing the existence of a plethora of black Canadian subjectivities. Along this line, African-Canadian cultural critic Rinaldo Walcott argues:

The play's insistence on Black difference, while sometimes didactic, makes clear that it is impossible to attempt to articulate a singular Black Canadian-ness. The privileging of Black difference in the play means that audiences view a complex range of cultures which makes the repeated case for blackness as multiple and polyvalent.⁶⁹⁸

In *Sistahs* (1994), Maxine Bailey and Sharon Lewis likewise celebrate black difference and explore the polyvalent nature of Canadian black subjectivities (including the expression of mixed-race identities). Significantly, their play displays the African-Canadian polyconsciousness as an essential part of their characters' self-understanding. In 18 episodic scenes, Bailey and Lewis work across representations of gender, race, class and sexual orientation and relate the stories of five black Canadian women who meet in a kitchen to comfort their friend Sandra in her sickness and her confrontation with death by cooking an "everybody-bring-something-soup".

Sandra is a Trinidadian Canadian and a professor of world history, sick with cancer, and determined to make peace with her past and her daughter Assata, who is growing up in Canada and struggling with finding her own space in the black community of Canada and the diaspora. Present are also Deliah (a middle-class Jamaican-Canadian and Sandra's Lesbian lover), Reah

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. Walcott, Rinaldo. "Riotous Black Canadians." *Testifyin': Contemporary African Canadian Drama*. Vol. 1. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2000. pp. 3-5. p. 5.

(Sandra's racially mixed half-sister who is grappling with the infirmities of her own repressed sexuality and her biracial identity) and Cerise (Sandra's Canadian-born friend who acts as a mediator between the different generations of women and who forges a bridge between their various experiences).

The initial episode of the play already introduces the subject of women's oppression and pain. Sandra's cancer becomes a symbol of the endless circle of oppression; the surgical removal of her female reproductive organs becomes a metaphor for the Middle Passage, representing black women's loss of stability and security, the loss of their reproductive capacity. Sandra's pain, her sadness and her desperation transcend time and place. They speak of the pain, sadness and desperation of all exploited and marginalized women in the world. It's the soup the women prepare together in which these women's memories and stories can be found:

Sandra	Then came the sullen acceptance that their fate was to serve, be born, work, and die under threat ...?
Assata	Kill the gravillicious ... cells.
Dehlia	You never see cells on their own.
[...]	
Sandra	I carry my story in my womb. Most women do, but not all.
Rea	They know no boundaries.
Cerise	Even a mother's womb is not a safe home for her child.
Assata	In one soup is the taste of all our mothers.
Sandra	The end ... signalled? ⁶⁹⁹

At the beginning of the play several boundaries keep the women at distance: Boundaries created between generations, between regions, islands, 'races', on account of different sexual preferences or class divisions. The relationship between the siblings Rea and Sandra is especially strained with

⁶⁹⁹ Bailey, Maxine and Sharon Lewis. *Sistahs*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1994. p. 283.

tension. Being racially mixed, Rea feels the pressure of the black community to assert her blackness. As a reaction to the frequently mocking remarks about her ethnic belonging and her group affiliations, she tries perming her naturally straight hair into Afro-curls.⁷⁰⁰ To her, it is her hair that represents the most visibly racial signifier that excludes her from the black community and questions her belonging. Confronting and acknowledging her multiracial heritage, Rea eventually realizes that she is Canada's "history in the flesh" and claims wholeness instead of being reduced to some kind of peripheral half-status. She turns a negative trait into a personal, unique asset:

Rea	I'm Indian.
Sandra	Half Re-
Rea	My daddy is a whole man, was a whole man.
Sandra	Our mother was a whole woman.
Rea	All black and ... all Indian.
Sandra	History in the flesh.
Rea	A mutation?
Sandra	Variation.
Rea	Unique. ⁷⁰¹

In the course of the play, it becomes clear that Bailey and Lewis not only reverse negative attributes into politically powerful elements of self-description but they decidedly reject the creation of boundaries of any kind – national, regional, sexual, cultural, racial. The kitchen, for example, symbolizes a significant space of both confrontation and negotiation. In opposition to Sandra's bleeding womb, the kitchen represents a borderlands space in which boundaries can be exposed as arbitrary and artificial constructs, in which

⁷⁰⁰ Bailey/Lewis 1994, pp. 296-297.

⁷⁰¹ Bailey/Lewis 1994, p. 319.

Canadian food and memories 'from back home' merge into a reconciliation of past and present.⁷⁰²

Bailey's and Lewis's play eventually becomes a powerful testimony of black Canadian women's potential to restore the self and the community through transmitting rites of healing and reconciling.⁷⁰³ To them, women's bonding provides the key to survival: It is about sharing similar stories and about voicing similar pain. Once the characters in the play have shared their stories, once they have voiced their pain at the end of the play, the different and seemingly irreconcilable ingredients of the soup transform into a tasting whole:

Assata	When did this big pot of water, spices, and stuff start to taste like soup.
Dehlia	It's alchemy.
Rea	It's magic.
Dehlia	Alchemy is magic.
Cerise	It's Voodoo.
Assata	It's Obeah.
Sandra	Sistahs.
Dehlia	It's soup. ⁷⁰⁴

In a nutshell, Bailey and Lewis emphasize that racialized constructs like blackness and whiteness only acquire meaning in a binary opposition to each other. They stress that gendered identities and notions of black female sexuality are inextricably linked to the categories of 'race' and ethnicity – and expose them as social constructs. Aware of the papery-thin social construction of such binarisms, Bailey and Lewis eventually advocate a female-centered movement beyond dividing borders. They stress the importance of memory and of sharing

⁷⁰² Cf. Davis Andrea. "Healing in the Kitchen: Women's Performance as Rituals of Change", p. 280.

⁷⁰³ Cf. Sears, p. 279. For an in-depth exploration of 'healing' in an indigenous context consult Episkew, Jo-Ann. *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009.

⁷⁰⁴ Bailey/Lewis 1994, p. 328

these memories with each other in order to embark upon a collective journey from fragmentation towards wholeness.

4.4. 'An Exile in the Land of My Birth': Racial Mixture and National Belonging in the Autobiographical Writings of Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar

This is her home

this thin edge of

*barbwire.*⁷⁰⁵

(Gloria Anzaldúa)

*Because I grew up in this country, because I can speak the language, understand the nuances, the not-saids, the thought pattern, because I can decipher the white response, I am considered Canadian. But I hate this indefinable term. "Oh Edge, you're so Canadian!"*⁷⁰⁶

(Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar)

Ontario writer Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar designates herself as a "mixed-race-woman-of-color-Caribbean-Black-Asian-Aboriginal-Hispanic-Indo-Brown,"⁷⁰⁷ or, in short, identifies as a "TrinCan of Trinidadian/Ukrainian-Canadian heritage."⁷⁰⁸ In her three autobiographical prose pieces "Ms. Edge Innate" (1994), "The Blood is Strong (A Bi-Dialectical Existence)" (1997), and "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not By Me" (2001) she struggles to come to terms with questions of Canadian identity politics, the meaning of Canadianness and its relationship to issues of racial and ethnic mixing. As a racially mixed woman, the lasting impact of a gendered Canadian 'colour line' has led her to feel discomfort with Canadianness as a category of

⁷⁰⁵ Anzaldúa, Gloria. "The Homeland, Aztlán / El otro México." *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Gloria Anzaldúa. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. pp. 23-35; p. 35.

⁷⁰⁶ Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "Ms. Edge Innate." *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women*. ed. Carol Camper. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994. p. 4

⁷⁰⁷ Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "The Blood Is Strong (A Bi-Dialectical Existence)." *...but where are you really from?* ed. Hazelle Palmer. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1997. p. 95.

⁷⁰⁸ Hernandez-Ramdwar in Camper 1994, p. 385.

belonging.⁷⁰⁹ To her, Canadianness constitutes a metaphor for whiteness, i.e. it constitutes a disguise of centuries of colonialist oppression and historical denial and reflects a hypocritical ethical superiority. It does neither provide a useful option for her personal identification nor does it circumscribe her sense of home. She feels estranged and displaced in Canada, as if she were a "tropical bird in captivity,"⁷¹⁰ wandering between Canada and Trinidad, never quite at home.

The black Canadian community confronted Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar with white-supremacist prejudice just as much as with colorist rejection. The silence created around aspects of racial mixing denied her an affirmative identity. She certainly acknowledges the divergent stands of her genetic heritage but points out that cultural affiliation is not innate but mainly a matter of personal choice. Hernandez-Ramdwar feels rooted in the Caribbean and larger black diaspora. Thus she claims an identity as a diasporic black woman in terms of framing a political and aesthetic standpoint to speak from. Her cultural, physical and emotional subsistence resembles living on an edge or within psychological and spiritual borderlands.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Feminist Gloria Anzaldúa impressively illustrates the shape of that uncomfortable territory of borderlands as the embodiment of hatred, anger and exploitation. It speaks of the legacy of racist and sexist attitudes created on the basis of Westernized epistemologies. Yet Anzaldúa likewise stresses that this place of contradictions can be transformed into a creative space to speak from.⁷¹¹ "Living on borders and in margins," Anzaldúa writes, "is like keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien'

⁷⁰⁹ For a critical discussion of the socio-political influence and historical emergence of the North American 'color line' consult Samira Kawash's sophisticated analysis of the construction of the color line in the American and wider postcolonial context. (Kawash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity and Singularity in African-American Narrative*. Stanford UP, 1997.)

⁷¹⁰ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997, p. 95.

⁷¹¹ Anzaldúa 1999, "Preface to the first edition" (n.p.)

element."⁷¹² Canada epitomizes that 'alien' element for Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar; it is her borderlands, her edge of liminal existence.

Evoking Anzaldúa's thoughts, Hernandez-Ramdwar states in "The Blood is Strong (A Bi-Dialectical Existence)":

I am legally, technically, semi-culturally, 'naturally' a Canadian, but for all the years I've been in Canada I have never once felt 'at home'. The connection, the electro-magnetic field, the early emotional pull that I am supposed to feel when walking where my navel string is buried is non-existent. I have always felt a stranger, in transit, as if I should be carrying another passport, as if someone had lied to me about my real birthplace, as if the stock screwed up. [...] I straddle this hemisphere, longing for home – an exile in the land of my birth, a stranger in my native country.⁷¹³

As a reaction to the white-dominated and stereotypically framed definition of Canadianness, Hernandez-Ramdwar engages in what Salman Rushdie called giving "the lie to official facts"⁷¹⁴ and provides a counter-definition of Canadianness – which strategically employs cultural stereotypes to expose the narrow-minded construction of national identity in Canada:

A Canadian is someone who likes hockey, likes the winter, likes whiteness. A Canadian is someone who spends every summer going to 'the lake' ('a pool of stagnant water' my father used to call it.) A Canadian is someone who thinks this is the greatest country on earth. Someone who wants to perpetuate the status-quo, someone who travels to the Third World and hangs out with other (white) Canadians, Australians, Brits and occasionally Americans, someone who thinks of Third World

⁷¹² *ibid.*

⁷¹³ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997, pp. 94-95.

⁷¹⁴ Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." *Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991. pp. 9-21. p. 14.

women as 'an exotic experience'. Someone who is ignorant of world history, geography, and is profoundly culturally ignorant. All black people are 'Jamaicans' or 'from Africa'. All South Asian people are 'Pakis'. East Asians are invariably 'Chinese'. First Nations people are drunks, or militant troublemakers [...] But I digress. It's obvious to me that a Canadian is not a person of color, nor an aboriginal person. A Canadian is white – one of the 'two founding nations' or one of the following stream of later immigrants – Jewish, Ukrainian, German, Italian, Portuguese, etc.⁷¹⁵

Experiences of (un)disguised racism and sexism and repeated attempts at making her 'fit in' according to whatever prominent political or economic interests have prompted her to answer back boldly. She defiantly confronts the impertinent questions of those "with a good conscious" who try to make her a "scapegoat", a "new member", or even a "specimen"⁷¹⁶ and exclaims:

Do you know who I am? I'm the one you can't leave alone. The one who puzzles you, intrigues you. I am the original definition of 'exotic'. Acceptable in many ways, the café au lait of life, more palatable because I am diluted. Not as offensive, not as threatening – you think. Certainly not as obvious. But hard to ignore. They call me white, they call me black – they call me everything in-between.⁷¹⁷

Apparently, the dominant public discourse in Canada has racialized, objectified and 'Othered' her multiracial female body and ascribed an ever-lasting ambiguity to it. The 'exotic' body of the racially mixed woman is both to be desired and feared. As a result of that exoticization, she begins to dislike (or even refute from or repel) the whiteness genetically incorporated in her body:

⁷¹⁵ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 4.

⁷¹⁶ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 2.

⁷¹⁷ *ibid.*

White Canadians are my nemesis [...] I am, after all, half-White, a child of an interracial relationship. As a mixed-race, Caribbean-Canadian woman, I have been forced to live in the white world. I have had white friends, loved (or tried to love) enough white men, sat through enough racist comments and jokes and excused enough White people for their ignorance. Now, I want to retreat, to have minimal contact and, above all, not to trust.⁷¹⁸

In "Ms. Edge Innate," an autobiographical piece printed in Carol Camper's anthology *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* (1994), Hernandez-Ramdwar recalls the way she was brought up in her white mother's culture in Winnipeg without having access to a black cultural community, without finding positive references to African-Canadian culture or any images of racially mixed people to find her own physical reflection. As a child, she felt "culturally malnourished"⁷¹⁹ because she was the 'colored' spot in a sea of white faces, lacking an environment that "matched her color."⁷²⁰ In the most recent of her autobiographical essays, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar describes the predominantly white middle-class prairie environment of the city she grew up in as a place "where [she] was an anomaly, [...] a space, in which [she] felt unwelcome and unbelonging."⁷²¹ The memories of her childhood in Winnipeg are framed by a perception of a "suffocating and engulfing whiteness."⁷²²

In "The Blood is Strong (A Bi-dialectical Existence)", an essay included in Hazelle Palmer's anthology *...But Where Are You Really From* (1997), she explores her "double life, [her] bi-dialectical existence,"⁷²³ between the racist

⁷¹⁸ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997, p. 95.

⁷¹⁹ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 3

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*

⁷²¹ Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille. "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not be Me." *Talking About Identity: Encounters in Race, Ethnicity and Language*. eds. Carl E. James and Adrienne Shadd. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001. pp. 115-121; p. 115.

⁷²² *ibid.*

⁷²³ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997, p. 94.

coldness of Canada and her spiritual home Trinidad. She illustrates how her frequent travels to Trinidad allow her to recapture her true self. Hernandez-Ramdwar is inclined to return to the Caribbean where she hopes to feel her paternal ancestors' pull and where she can find the necessary strength to go "through minus-thirty degree weather, through seas of White and sometimes hostile faces, through racial straightjackets and police shootings, through the blood of [her] brothers and sisters that is spilled through White fear and anger."⁷²⁴

"The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not by Me," published in Adrienne Shadd's and Carl E. James's collection *Talking About Identity: Encounters in Race, Ethnicity, and Language* (2001), compares Hernandez-Ramdwar's encounters with cultural isolation and social marginalization as a racially mixed woman in the almost exclusively white Canadian suburbs of the prairie provinces to her likewise agonizing experiences of rejection by people of color in Toronto's multiracial and multiethnic metropolitan area. In Winnipeg, repeated peer questions about her white-constructed difference had forced Hernandez-Ramdwar to "elaborate explanations" in order to "shield [herself] from the invasiveness [of penetrating questions]."⁷²⁵ Feelings of isolation, exclusion and exoticization increased when she was asked where she had learnt to dance with rhythmic perfection, when people inquired if she had been adopted and why her father was "dark" or when her peer school boys were so fascinated with her 'exotic look' to call her a "sex maniac"⁷²⁶ as early as in grade one. The image of the "oversexed mama, the hot tamale, hot Latin blood, ball-busting black woman who could fuck you in half"⁷²⁷ painfully shaped her reality during adolescence.

Looking for acceptance and wholeness and "longing to live in a place where [she] could blend in the landscape"⁷²⁸, the author had made up her mind

⁷²⁴ *ibid.*

⁷²⁵ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 116.

⁷²⁶ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 5.

⁷²⁷ *ibid.*

⁷²⁸ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 117.

by the age of twelve to leave the Canadian prairies. When she eventually arrives in Toronto years later, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar relates how Winnipeg's polarity melted into a "kaleidoscope of racial identity,"⁷²⁹ which, however, was not free of racist prejudice either. "Communities are fragmenting," the author mourns, "destabilized, eating themselves from within under an oppressive political regime. We outsiders seek sanctuary, seek safety in a variety of places, but we are often invisible."⁷³⁰ Even in face of the visible heterogeneity of an international metropolis like Toronto she feels mainstream and inner-communal pressures of "carving out niches."⁷³¹ Her mixed-race identity is by far not accepted, but repeatedly scrutinized and questioned in terms of its authenticity.

The experience of being continually rejected by people of color proves especially painful to her because the community of color renders the closest kind of community available to racially mixed people. Due to historically internalized self-hatred and the colonialist legacy of colorism racial mixing is regarded a threat to black solidarity and group integrity.⁷³² Therefore the biracial subject remains a suspect and outsider. The racially mixed person remains displaced, not only within the white-supremacist construction of the Canadian nation-state but likewise within the African-Canadian community. Mixed identities are pushed to the periphery of the black community that those "in-between" selected in hope of support and political solidarity. Such inner-communal discrepancies will only strengthen those already in power. The predictable results are internal segregation, hostility against the Other among the Others and a fortification of racist thought.⁷³³ In "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not by Me," Hernandez-Ramdwar thus sadly but determinedly enunciates:

⁷²⁹ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 118.

⁷³⁰ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 121.

⁷³¹ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 118.

⁷³² Cf. Clarke, George Elliott. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. pp. 211-237.

⁷³³ Cf. Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, pp. 118-119.

We become typographed and policed again, this time not by the colonizing gaze of the plantocracy, but by ourselves. Your hair too straight? Nose long, broad, straight, flat? Eyes round or otherwise? And colour? Can you pass? Have you? do you change colour seasonally? Are you dangerous, suspect? Are you pure? Can you pass for pure Other? How many racial slurs have you been subject to in your life? Where were you born? Are you whitewashed? Half-white? Near-white? White-identified? Do you sleep with white people? Have white children? A different kind of segregation. a different kind of hostility. More closed doors ... To survive as an Other (because the Option is to be white-identified, to seek solace in a community and comfort in the very society that sets the rules against you) you realize you must choose an identity, a racialized community, a moniker to get you through some door, even if you're not entirely welcome in the world it opens into.⁷³⁴

To her, an affirmative biracial identity remains as predicted in the essay's title "elusive and illusionary". In Canada, she is incessantly constructed as Other because neither blackness nor racial mixture are easily accepted as constitutive parts of the mainstream definition of Canadianness.

Most importantly, Hernandez-Ramdwar mourns that her parents failed to understand the specific conditions of her growing up in such a Canadian context. Her skin color and the treatment she received on account of it seemed largely oblivious to her parents, who deliberately refrained from critically addressing issues of racism and sexism in their multiracial family. Silence was created around the implications of racial mixing. She was informed that she was Spanish and Indian and Ukrainian, but most importantly, she was taught what she was not: "[She] was not Negro!"⁷³⁵

In "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not by Me," for instance, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar recalls a particular incident in her

⁷³⁴ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 118.

⁷³⁵ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 116.

childhood that has critically shaped her political consciousness as a woman of color and her awareness of the differences between constructed concepts like 'race' and ethnicity. Having been called a 'Negro' at school, her father sent her back to the schoolyard "to teach those (white, though he would never say that) kids a lesson in genealogy and racial typography."⁷³⁶ The behavior of the children, however, proved to be deeply rooted in racist epistemologies and was influenced by the distorted images of blacks in popular culture. They were unable to differentiate or to move beyond their stereotypically framed way of perception. Hernandez-Ramdwar remembers that "lesson" as follows:

'Nigger!'

'I am not Negro. I am Spanish and Indian and Ukrainian.'

'So? You're still a nigger!'

End of lesson.⁷³⁷

Hernandez-Ramdwar concludes that her father must have been unable to understand or simply denied that

... in Canada we were all niggers. If you were dark, you were Black. If you were dark-skinned but didn't have a dot in your forehead, wear a turban, speak English with a strong accent (and my father's accent was 90 percent British colonial subject and 10 percent Trinidadian), you were Black. If you were brown-skinned but didn't wear feathers in your hair, drink rubbing alcohol or Lysol, live in the North End, or frequent the welfare office (all the negative and stifling perceptions of Aboriginal identity to white Winnipeggers), then you were Black.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ *ibid.*

⁷³⁷ *ibid.*

⁷³⁸ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 116

Musing on the sense or non-sense of blaming her parents for her distressing encounters with racism and sexism, her conclusions are strongly redolent of Frantz Fanon's notion of 'lactification' in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952).⁷³⁹ In both "Ms. Edge Innate" and "The Elusive and Illusionary: Identifying of Me, Not by Me" Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar wonders about her parents' motivations for entering an interracial relationship and enquires if her white mother had mainly desired an "'exotic' experience" or if her father had simply been on what Fanon called a "quest for white flesh" to seek "admittance to the white sanctuary"⁷⁴⁰ by ⁷⁴¹"coveting a white woman",⁷⁴² or if he considered his marriage to a white woman a means of personal racial enhancement and social improvement. Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar realizes that her parents had assumed that their daughter would become acculturated to such an extent that skin color and hair texture would not matter anymore. She was expected to fully assimilate into Canadian mainstream society, maybe even "marry white, continue the dilution of [the family's] blood, whiten the grandchildren."⁷⁴³

Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar refused to succumb to her parents' expectations. Due to countless experiences of rejection and stereotypic deformation the author is "gravitated towards thinking black."⁷⁴⁴ Motivated by the desire to feel whole, she wants to move beyond objectification, exoticization and the pressure to assimilate. She is motivated by the desire to feel whole. She leaves "icicle stares and snow-capped schooling, literally and figuratively, in order to see [herself] in [her] natural habitat"⁷⁴⁵ and engages upon a journey of self-discovery to engender her own understanding of her cultural roots in the Caribbean. Hernandez-Ramdwar discovers not only personal strength but also

⁷³⁹ For more details on the concept of 'lactification' see the chapters "The Woman of color and The White Man" and "The Man of Color and The White Woman" in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967).

⁷⁴⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markam. New York: Pluto Press, 1967. p. 51

⁷⁴¹ Fanon 1967, p. 81

⁷⁴² Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 3; Cf. also Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 117

⁷⁴³ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 3.

⁷⁴⁴ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 5.

⁷⁴⁵ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 7

un-earthed the creative energies of her ancestors' voices. Self-determinedly and proud of her Caribbean roots, she selects a black and diasporic identity. "I became black," she remembers, "I understood that, after years of failed explanations, I had no choice. Become black, or become invisible."⁷⁴⁶

Identifying as black, however, was also a personal escape into a different kind of self-ascribed cultural isolation. It appears to be the only available yet far from perfect alternative to her. She is aware that she is partly "passing" for black by neglecting the other strains of her cultural ancestry. "I became a negation," Hernandez-Ramdwar states mournfully when recalling her parents' efforts to coerce her into everything but a non-black identity, "This has stayed with me – the feeling of being in limbo, of not belonging anywhere; the feeling that I am 'passing' as black if I claim that identity. Know that I am not white (seen as or desiring to be), although that is half of my ancestry."⁷⁴⁷

Her father, a Trinidadian of mixed Indian and Spanish descent, felt offended and indignant because of his daughter's decision to identify as black. His Caribbean notion of racial mixedness, "a context in which hair texture and shade of skin and proximity to whiteness meant points,"⁷⁴⁸ mirrored his conviction that racially mixed people were 'genetically' superior to darker-skinned blacks and that a voluntary identification as black meant degradation and social decline to his family.⁷⁴⁹

In spite of her political and spiritual identity as a black woman, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar does assert a mixed identity in terms of her genealogical origins. On the one hand, she stresses that her secluded reality as a racially mixed woman of color is shaped differently from those realities of women who grew up within a supportive black community or at least without constant

⁷⁴⁶ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 117.

⁷⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁴⁸ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 116.

⁷⁴⁹ Cf. Hernandez-Ramdwar, Camille (1997). "Multiracial Identities in Trinidad and Guyana: Exaltation and Ambiguity." *Latin American Issues*. [online] 13.4: 32 pars. 5 Accessed on Jan 5th, 2005.

<http://webpub.Allegheny.edu/group/LAS/LatinAmIssues/Articles/Vol13/LAI_vol_13_section_VI.html>.

doubts of their belonging. Blackness, on the other hand, continues to be the preference of identification when it comes to taking sides in the political struggle against racism and sexism. In her autobiographical essays, Hernandez-Ramdwar therefore deconstructs blackness as a racialized category and transformed it into a personally defined and overtly political category, a category of resistance and a category self-proclaimed belonging:

So we (multiracial people) become Black, South Asian, Asian, Aboriginal, and then make attempts to inject our multiplicity into areas where purity and loyalty and allegiance demand clear-cut and defined boundaries. In the event that we are allowed to name ourselves as 'mixed-race' we must append a further definer to fit within the representative festival, history month, panel, conference, course, workshop. Therefore, one becomes Black mixed-race or Asian mixed-race or Caribbean mixed-race or a Mixed-Race Woman – something plus mixedness. As if the mix itself weren't enough [...] We are not interested in celebrating or investing in some idea of a utopian rainbow identity and the ensuing global wave of coffee-coloured children that will, in some magical, fairy-tale way, eradicate racism. This has not been our experience, this is not our vision.⁷⁵⁰

Hernandez-Ramdwar determinedly underscores that the experience of being mixed-race is clearly and above all political. Her understanding of mixed-race identities does not aim at creating a universal notion of an overall global mixture that will eventually result in overcoming racism.⁷⁵¹ To her, mixed identities must rather be understood in a diasporic context; they must be recognized as a heterogeneity deriving from centuries of colonial oppression, the sexual exploitation of women of color and a silenced legacy of interracial violence.

⁷⁵⁰ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, pp. 118-119.

⁷⁵¹ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 119.

Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar insists on her own definition of her hitherto displaced self. "I truly had a hard time feeling whole," she maintains, "but now I know who I am and where I fit in the scheme of things. Other people may have a problem defining me, but that's their problem. I know where I stand."⁷⁵² In the final lines of "Ms. Edge Innate", Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar claims the "edge" as a metaphor for the intricacies of her mixed-race existence and her choice of self-defined representation. Anzaldúa's contradictory yet fertile borderlands territory, once more, becomes the creative space to express herself. Hernandez-Ramdwar's Canadian borderlands will remain uncomfortable since they continue to be racialized and framed with distorted conceptions of gender and sexuality. They may also never transform into 'home', but they are a reality. Accordingly, Hernandez-Ramdwar concludes:

And they call me Ms. Edge innate, precipice girl, riding on the wave of something wholly internal, a calling I can't explain save to say it is in my soul. Innate: i.e. inborn, not acquired. I had to revert to myself. I had to struggle to claim what was already mine. something that explains myself to me, something that makes sense. [...] I am tired of choosing. I long to be whole. The mirror lies, it confuses – appearances are so deceptive and so subjective. My inner voice tells me the truth. Ms. Edge Innate – here I am, on the periphery of *your* world, but knowing that what is mine wholly and souilly.⁷⁵³

To put it in a nutshell, Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar acknowledges her complex racially and ethnically mixed ancestry while spiritually and politically clearly identifying as a black woman. Yet in many ways, "the path of isolation" will have to be her companion for the time being since the struggle between "self-preservation and longing for community" continues.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵² Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 6.

⁷⁵³ Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994, p. 7.

⁷⁵⁴ Hernandez-Ramdwar 2001, p. 121.

4.5. Anti-Mulatto Rhetoric in Haitian and Haitian-Canadian History, Literature, and Culture

Trois feuilles

trois racines oh

jeté, blié

*ranmassé, songé.*⁷⁵⁵

(Haitian folk song)

*Baton ki bat chen nwa se li ki bat chen blanc.*⁷⁵⁶

(Haitian proverb)

Colonialist Bequest: 'Race', Class, Sexuality

In his study "The Fact of Blackness" (1952) Frantz Fanon writes: "The Black Man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other [...] In the Antilles there was also that little gulf that exists among the almost-white, the mulatto, and the nigger."⁷⁵⁷ Fanon underlines the significance of 'racial' visibility in developing a discourse of prejudice and difference by drawing attention to the defining psychological effects of this on black people's self-conceptualizations. Half a century later Fanon is yet borne out in his assumption by Charles Arthur, coordinator of the London-based Haiti Support Group. In his introduction to *Libète: A Haiti Anthology* (1999) Arthur indicates: "Rigidly hierarchical and claustrophobic, [Haitian] society was obsessed with race, sexual liaison and the

⁷⁵⁵ "Three leaves / three roots oh / he who throws them away forgets / he who gathers them up, remembers." (Créole Haitian folk song); qtd. in Lafférière, Dany. *Down Among The Dead Men*. transl. by David Homel. Vancouver, Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. n.p. Transl. of *Pays sans Chapeau*. Montréal: Lanctôt Éiteur, 1996.

⁷⁵⁶ "The stick that beats the black dog also beats the white dog." (Créole Haitian proverb); qtd. in Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley et al: University of California Press, 1995. n.p.

⁷⁵⁷ Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness" [1952]. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 323-326. p.323.

most subtle gradations of colour which emerged from them."⁷⁵⁸ Evidently, the politics of color have shaped Haiti's historical development more than anything else and continue to be informed by Haiti's socio-political, cultural and literary frameworks until today.

In their descriptions of the socio-historical peculiarities of Caribbean 'race' relations, both Fanon and Arthur denounce the bondage of colonialism and point to the cumulative impact of 'race', class and sexuality on the development of the Caribbean islands. Availing itself of racist ideologies and clinging to the promises of the Enlightenment's empirical methodology, 18th- and 19th-century colonialism authorized and rationalized the suppression, exploitation and abuse of the colonized *Other*. Grounded on what Sartre describes as the Western Manichean delirium (of good versus bad, white versus black) in his introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)⁷⁵⁹, dominative systems of knowledge were established which led to racialized conceptualizations of ethnicity, class and sexual relationships. Color stereotypes and rigid class barriers as well as distorted notions of Haitian masculinity and femininity were to follow. Such ideas permeated the mind of the colonized to result in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the "ideological acceptance of error as truth"⁷⁶⁰ – the internalization of racism.

In 1789, more than half a million Haitian blacks were under subjugation by only 30,000 whites.⁷⁶¹ There were also approximately 24,000 free

⁷⁵⁸ Arthur, Charles. "Colonialism and Revolution." *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*. eds. Charles Arthur and Michael Dash. London et al: Latin America Bureau, 1999. pp. 17-20. p. 19.

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. Sartre, Jean Paul. "Vorwort". *Die Verdammten dieser Erde*. Frantz Fanon. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966. pp. 7-25.

⁷⁶⁰ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. 1987. p. 109. (For an interesting exploration of the internalisation of racist ideologies in the Caribbean read Nigel Bolland's *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977. p. 56)

⁷⁶¹ The treatment of slaves on French sugar cane plantations was so harsh that many slaves committed suicide "as a symbolic form of migration back to Africa." (Cf. Heuman, Gad. "The social Structure of the Slave Societies in the Caribbean." *General History of the Caribbean*. Vol. III. ed. Franklin W. Knight. London & Basingstoke: UNESCO Publ. & Macmillan Education Ltd., 1997. pp. 138-168).

'mulattoes'.⁷⁶² As a consequence of the internalization of racism an obsession with racial pigmentocracy evolved to justify relations of dominance and subjugation. In his extensive socio-historical survey of Saint-Domingue, *Description de la partie française de l'isle de Saint-Domingue* (1797), 18th-century French colonist Moreau de Saint-Méry proffers a macabre record of the absurdity of 'racial' categorization in Haiti. He identifies ten categories into which non-whites were shoved on the basis of their genetic composition, tracing back seven generations of racial ancestry:

the black	0-7 parts white	/ 128-121 parts black
the sacatra	8-16 parts white	/ 120-112 parts black
the griffon	24-32 parts white	/ 104-96 parts black
the marabou	40-48 parts white	/ 88-80 parts black
the mulatto	56-70 parts white	/ 58-72 parts black
the quadroon	71-96 parts white	/ 57-32 parts black
the métif	104-112 parts white	/ 24-16 parts black
the mamelouc	116-120 parts white	/ 12-8 parts black
the quarteronne	122-124 parts white	/ 6-4 parts black
the sang-mêlé	125-127 parts white	/ 3-1 parts black ⁷⁶³

The absurdity of this extraordinarily specified "calculus of color", to borrow a phrase from Werner Sollors, is most obvious.⁷⁶⁴ However, it served to conflate

⁷⁶² Cf. James James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. [1938]. New York: Vintage, 1963. p. 207.

⁷⁶³ Saint-Méry, Moreau de. *Description de la partie française de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue*. [1797] in *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*. eds. Charles Arthur and Michael Dash. London et al: Latin America Bureau, 1999. p. 35 (translation by Charles Arthur). For similar socio-historical explorations of the calculus of colour compare Lawrence Hill's landmark publication *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being black and white in Canada*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2001 and Werner Sollors's comprehensive and excellently researched studies *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997) and *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (Oxford et al: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷⁶⁴ Cf. Sollors 1997.

the multiple concerns about property, class distinctions, power structures, race, gender and sexuality into one term – (anti)-miscegenation.

Historically, the light-skinned 'by-products' of the sexual exploitation of black Haitian women by white plantation masters were often manumitted and began to constitute an ever more important and influential in-between 'caste' in the colony's highly stratified society.⁷⁶⁵ The *gens de couleur* subsequently emerged as "a third party in a system built for two", as Arnold Sio remarks in his cultural-historical study of Caribbean slave societies.⁷⁶⁶ After the revolution, Haitian 'mulattoes' ⁷⁶⁷ established themselves – although always contested – as the economic and social elite of the country. At that time, 95 per cent of its population was black, only 5 per cent were of mixed descent. Yet, more than half of the country's social elite was composed of 'mulattoes'.⁷⁶⁸ Their almost-white physiognomy and the belief in their mental, physical and moral superiority of racially mixed people granted them certain material and civil privileges and enabled them to acquire an elevated social position. Some 'mulattoes' took advantage of these privileges and acquired monetary wealth by becoming slave and plantation owners themselves. As David Patrick Geggus states, the *gens de couleur* owned 25 per cent of the colony's slaves and about 35 per cent of the island's productive land.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁵ The term 'caste' is used in this context does not refer to the permanent social, religious and economic hierarchies associated with certain ethnic groupings in India. Rather, in a Caribbean context the term denotes highly differentiated racialized segments of a society, which, nevertheless, allow for limited exchange between them. (Cf. Heuman 1997, p. 139; Cf. Nicholas B. Dirks. *Castes of Mind*; Cf. Sharma, U. Searle-Chatterjee, M. *Contextualising Caste*. Blackwell Publishers, 1994.)

⁷⁶⁶ Sio, Arnold A. "Marginality and the Free Colored Identity in Caribbean Slave Society." *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Comparative Studies*. 8 (Sept. 1987): p. 166.

⁷⁶⁷ The term 'mulatto' is relevant within the socio-historical context of Haiti. This racialized term was applied to underline class distinctions in Haitian colonial society and to stress racial superiority. Nevertheless, I will continue to use the term in single quotation marks to stress the constructed nature of the word 'mulatto' and its derogatory semantic connotation of inherent inferiority. Whenever the term is applied in this context, it is used to stress racially prejudiced and stereotypical notions of mixed-race identity.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. Davis 1991, p. 87

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. Geggus, David Patrick. *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of St. Domingue, 1793-1798*. Oxford: Caredon Press, 1982. p. 28.

As a consequence, the material, emotional and psychological gulf between blacks and 'mulattoes' widened. Haitian 'mulattoes' adopted a strong Negrophobe attitude and resolutely refrained from calling themselves black. In his discussion of the shifting definitions of blackness in *Who is black? One Nation's Definition* (1991), U.S. American sociologist James Davis accordingly observes on the status of racially mixed Haitians as follows:

The Haitian mulattoes monopolized wealth and power as long as possible, requiring of themselves elite standards of education, aesthetic taste, and use of leisure time. They have maintained close kinship ties among mulatto families, preventing intermarriage with both whites and African blacks. They look down on unmixed blacks and despise the small white population.⁷⁷⁰

Similarly, Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James in his acclaimed account of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) remarks:

The advantages of being white were so obvious that race prejudice against the Negroes permeated the minds of the Mulattoes who so bitterly resented the same thing from the Whites. Black slaves and Mulattoes hated each other [...] The free blacks [...] were not many, and so despised was the black skin that even a Mulatto slave himself felt superior to the free black man. The Mulatto, rather than be slave to a black, would have killed himself. [...] Even white in words and, by their success in life, in many of their actions, Mulattoes demonstrated the falseness of the white claim to inherit superiority, yet the man of colour who was nearly white despised the man of colour who was only half-

⁷⁷⁰ Davis, F. James. *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 88

white, who in turn despised the man of colour who was only a quarter white, and so on through all the shades.⁷⁷¹

However, the dynamics of 'whitening' in Haitian society, no matter how vivid and visible, did not automatically ensure social equality. The public anti-miscegenation discourse was powerful and kept invoking negative sentiment about the transgression of racial lines. 'Mulattoes' were never equated with whites in terms of political power and social status. For example, racially mixed Haitians were not allowed to vote, to hold public offices or to serve on juries. Segregation in public institutions and social circles was common practice. Moreover, economic restrictions occurred, for 'mulattoes' were banned from certain occupational realms.⁷⁷²

Infused with racialized notions of identity, light-skinned Haitians projected their self-hatred onto darker-skinned blacks and regarded themselves 'racially' superior. They openly disassociated themselves from blackness by rejecting Haiti's African roots. Following their elitist convictions, they aspired to assimilate and emulate white culture as far as permitted by the established social color line and accentuated their cultural bonds with the values of the French aristocracy, the French language and the Catholic faith.⁷⁷³ The same oppressive patterns and procedures directed at them by whites were re-employed by Haiti's *gens de couleur* to subjugate darker-skinned blacks.

Black Haitians, in turn, have developed an abiding hatred against the class elitism and 'racial' superiority proclaimed by prosperous 'mulatto' families. On the one hand, the mixed-race Haitian has been seen as the epitome of success and whitened privilege, but, on the other hand, the intrinsic "doubling" of the 'mulatto' also has rendered him a suspect and a threat. Haitian 'mulattoes' thus have often been branded as "pernicious aristocrats-in-a-hurry and as devious, Kerenskyite, reactionary defenders of the slaveholding status

⁷⁷¹ James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. [1938]. New York: Vintage, 1963. p. 43.

⁷⁷² Cf. Heuman 1997, pp. 145-146.

⁷⁷³ Cf. Davis 1991, p. 36.

quo."⁷⁷⁴ The image of the racially mixed person as a 'race' traitor of the black masses prevails in Haiti's cultural and literary discourse.⁷⁷⁵

The lingering anti-mulatto rhetoric reached a new peak under the violent totalitarian regime of François Duvalier – the leader of a group of black middle-class intellectuals known as the *noiristes* – who had been elected president in 1957. Adhering to black nationalist credentials, Duvalier pushed for an emphasis of Haiti's ancestral links with Africa and celebrated an essentialized notion of blackness. His governmental policy worked towards the downfall of the country's 'mulatto' hegemony. In consequence, several massacres of 'mulatto' families took place, political opponents were arrested, and sources of opposition were generally suppressed. Many Haitians, especially members of Haiti's intelligentsia, were tortured, killed or driven into exile.

The anti-mulatto policy propagated by François Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude made Haiti one of the socially most starkly polarized countries in the world. Spurred by colonialist and imperialist U.S. American and European struggles for dominance over the economically valuable island, the continuing rivalries among the various social 'castes' have left Haiti scarred by political, social and military restlessness. As one of the consequences, Haitian culture has been frequently abused as a combat zone for struggles over economic power,⁷⁷⁶ and racism must be understood as a manner of scape-goating that has authorized superiority – whether black or white or 'mulatto'.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁴ Clarke, George Elliott. "Treason of the Black Intellectuals?" *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. ed. George Elliott Clarke. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. pp. 182-210. p.183.

⁷⁷⁵ Negative constructions of biraciality can be found not only in Haiti but all over the Caribbean. In his novel *Slammin' Tar* (1998), Barbadian-born novelist Cecil Foster, for instance, features a trickster-like narrator, Brer Anancy, who echoes a strong anti-mulatto sentiment. In his discussion of Marcus Garvey's philosophy of 'racial' loyalty, Foster's narrator blames those "paughy mulattoes" for the defeat of Garvey's idea of territorial separation of white and Black America. Biracial people are denounced as "perjohnnies" and "white integrationists in half-black skins" (Foster 1998, p. 102).

⁷⁷⁶ In his essay, "Haitian Culture: Basis for Haiti's Development." (*Roots* 1.4, Winter 1996/97) Haitian writer Jean-Claude Martineau illustrates this link between culture and politics/economics. He refers to the countless political endeavours to annihilate Haitians' African legacy, for example, by the promotion of anti-voodoo movements (Cf. also Arthur 1999, pp. 244-245).

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. Fanon, Frantz. *Les Damnés de la terre*. 1961 (*The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, 1968)

Colonialism and racism furthermore initiated a *politique de doublure* in Haiti, which has become an integral part of Haitians' socio-political, cultural, religious, psychological and also literary frameworks. Originally the term referred to the fact that Haiti's *gens de couleur* have endured a black presidency in the course of history while economically controlling the country.⁷⁷⁸ In a broader context, however, Haiti's "politics of doubling" must be understood as a mode of implicit resistance.⁷⁷⁹ Nothing is as it appears on the surface. Resistance is acted out in disguise. Objects, words and names usually carry a deeper, hidden meaning, and masks are created in a carnivalesque manner to ensure survival. It is the "double", the improved self that can stand up to the imperializing normative categories of racial, gender, and class politics. The "double" helps to recognize and strike back at the colonizing miscegenation discourse, which has pathologized the Haitian body and mind for centuries. The "double" is able to disturb the repetitive impulse of this discourse by pointing to its conventional patterns, its language and its historical embeddedness and by transforming the strict formulations of identity.

The notion of "doubling" also elicits an understanding of the interrelation of 'race' and class with constructions of gender roles and conceptualizations of sexuality. The colonialist legacy promoted warped interpretations of femininity and masculinity and added a bitter taste to cross-racial sexual encounters. Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) in his mid-19th-century treatise of the West Indies observed that "racial and color stereotypes ... broke down over sexual relations."⁷⁸⁰ Although interracial marriages were illegal in the French Antilles and interracial sexual contacts were certainly considered to be

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Arthur 1999, p. 47.

⁷⁷⁹ In voodoo religion, for example, Haitians created a Catholic double for each *Lwa* spirit secretly worshipped. In novelist Gerard Etienne's *La Pacotille*, for example, the idea of "doubling" reflects not only Haiti's socio-political and socio-economic reality of the 1960s, but is furthermore transferred to a psychological and emotional level, mirroring the constraints of his protagonist's tortured state-of-mind.

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. Trollope, Anthony. *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*. 2nd ed. London: Chapman & Hall, 1860. (new with an introduction by Fred D'Aguiar. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999.) pp. 81-82.

"out of the usual convention,"⁷⁸¹ relationships between white men and black or racially mixed women were not a new or singular phenomenon.

While in general a negative rhetoric against 'mulattoes' continued, images of racially mixed women in Haiti remained ambiguous. The mystique wrapped around the 'mulatto' woman supported the belief in her 'racial' enhancement and simultaneously envisioned her non-white body as emblematic of debauchery to justify sexual abuse and exploitation. The 'mulatto' woman was overtly mystified and construed as "the concrete signifier for lust that could be portrayed as 'love'," scholar Joan Dayan argues. "If, in the perverse ethics of the planter, the spiritualized, refined images of white women developed on the violation of black women," she continues, "the bleached out sable venus accommodated both extremes."⁷⁸²

Constructs of black women's libido as degenerated, immoral, licentious and unbridled served as the necessary Manichean opposition to uphold the idea of white women's purity, chastity and elegance. Racially mixed women were regarded the more agreeable, less threatening epitome of white men's sexual delight. Not surprisingly then, colonist Moreau de Saint-Méry reinforced the myth of the 'tragic mulatto woman' by claiming that "the entire being of a Mulâtresse is given up to pleasure, the fire of this goddess burns in her heart only to be extinguished with her life. This cult is her law, her every wish, her every happiness."⁷⁸³

It is often argued that black and racially mixed women welcomed and encouraged the sexual attentions of white men and saw interracial unions as a means of improving their social and economic ranking.⁷⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that as long as colonialist and patriarchal systems allow men, on grounds of their economic assets or social influence, to have unhindered access

⁷⁸¹ Heuman 1997, p. 149.

⁷⁸² Dayan 1995, p. 56-57.

⁷⁸³ Saint-Méry, Moreau de. *Description de la partie française*. Vol 1, p. 86. (qtd. in Dayan, 56)

⁷⁸⁴ Cf. Clarke 2002, "Biraciality"; Arthur 1999; Heuman 1997;

to women's bodies, (post-)colonial interracial relationships must be seen as exemplified relations of domination and subjugation.⁷⁸⁵

Hence, bondage, servitude, property and terror are words to be associated with relationships between men and women in Haiti, too.⁷⁸⁶ As an example the voodoo *Lwa* (spirit) Erzulie shall be named. Although manifold in aspect and representation, Erzulie is very often embodied as a breathtakingly beautiful racially mixed Caribbean woman. She represents a symbol of the collective remembrance of Haitian women's suffering. Erzulie is a spirit that originated in the experience of domination, a spirit that was born on ancient Haitian soil.⁷⁸⁷ Her scars function as icons of the physical, psychological and emotional wounds that black women of all skin shades have sustained. She is the voiceless mother that will turn into a woman warrior to defend her people.

Haitian-Canadian Writers: Between Ex-isle and Diaspora

"Francophone culture is that all-embracing reality in which questions of language, economics, politics, gender, religion, and the consequences of the moral relativism and false ethnography of the colonial project are intertwined. What it means to be white or black, to be colonizer or the colonized, to be a man or a woman – and, ultimately, what it means to be human – constitutes an intricate slipknot of relations," Keith Walker acknowledges in his study of contemporary francophone culture and literature of the Caribbean, Canada and elsewhere.⁷⁸⁸ Certainly, the "intricate slipknot of relations" that Walker refers to is very much present in Haitian and Haitian-Canadian literature as well. Categories like 'race', gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity must therefore be considered and situated within a wider postcolonial context and within Haiti's

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Davis, Angela "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood." *Women, Race and Class*. Vintage, 1981. pp. 3-29.

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. McCarthy Brown, Karen. *Tracing the Spirit: Ethnographic Essays on Haitian Art*. Davenport, Iowa: Davenport Museum of Art, 1995. p. 32

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. Dayan 1995, p. 56.

⁷⁸⁸ Walker 1999, p. 2.

historical and cultural peculiarities in order to elicit the conceptual, or even emotional, framework of Haitian-Canadian writers.

The Africans deported to Haiti as slaves carried with them a vast heterogeneity in religious credos, cultural traditions, languages and social customs. Colonialism and the experience of slavery led to the surfacing of shared sets of principles and practices. Most importantly, the Creole language and voodoo beliefs emerged as linguistic and religious amalgamations of West African influences, the French colonizer's impact, and indigenous Haitian legends and customs. Notably, both Creole and voodoo transformed into more than cultural valuables; they signify outspoken acts of resistance and powerful tools of self-expression.

In spite of its historical, political and cultural specificities, the scope of Haitian-Canadian literature is in general very much comparable to that of other postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Derek Walcott or Patrick Chamoiseau. Sharing a history of subjugation and discrimination, recurrent themes include explorations of expatriation and exile experiences, the quest of the colonized subject for self-assertion, the desire for re-inventing notions of identity and culture, nostalgia for the lost home, the denunciation of totalitarian political regimes, a critique of imperialism and (neo-)colonialism as well as issues of feminist re-positioning or the re-articulation of the postcolonial self.

The liberation of the Haitian self represents one of the most important topoi in Haitian-Canadian writing. "Pendant des générations, les Haïtiens ont été forcés d'être soit Européens, soit Africains, puisque le contexte mondial dominateur exigeait, pour une reconnaissance de valeur, qu'on appartienne à l'un ou à l'autre camp," Anne Marty delineates in her personal encounter with Haitian history and culture. "Ce qui explique que, pendant longtemps, face à ces contraintes extérieures, les Haïtiens ont du mal à savoir qui ils étaient, à le reconnaître, à l'accepter et à le formuler," she continues and comes to the

conclusion that "la littérature haïtienne est l'histoire de cette quête progressive d'identité, de libération de soi, de prise de conscience de soi."⁷⁸⁹

Haitian-Canadian literature often focuses on aspects like remembering, suffering and searching. Both the writers and their displaced and unstable narrators seem caught within the *double space*, the geographical, emotional and psychological chasm that opens between Canada and the lost homeland.⁷⁹⁰ Max Dorsinville in his remarkable speech at the 1980 Dakar-conference of *L'Association des Écrivains du Sénégal* claimed: "L'image d'écrivain antillais, africains et québécois qui s'en dégagé par conséquent est celle d'un être soucieux de donner, former, d'exprimer ou d'intentionner un pays natal. D'ou le souci majeur de ces littératures: la recherche d'un lieu, d'un espace que soit sien, la pratique d'une écriture mariant le 'je' et le 'nous' [...]."⁷⁹¹

Apparently, the diaspora has become the space that many Haitian writers speak from nowadays. Duvalierism has forced many writers into expatriation since the 1960s, and thus Haitian intellectual and literary life has been taking place outside of Haiti to a large extent.⁷⁹² Some writers, like Dany Lafférière, Émile Ollivier or Gérard Étienne, have settled in Canada, mostly in Montréal or the Maritimes, or in the United States, sometimes dividing their time with other locations. Removed from their *pays natal*, their native land, many Haitian-Canadian writers set out on re-defining the meaning of place and home. Authors often focus on the experiences of the poorest and displaced, the traumatized ones who are wavering between moments of sanity and loss of

⁷⁸⁹ Marty 2000, p. 9.

⁷⁹⁰ Marty 2000, p. 103.

⁷⁹¹ Dorsinville, Max. "Préface." *Le pays natal, éditions africaines*, 1983 (qtd. in Marty 2000, p. 105)

⁷⁹² Haitian-Canadian writers can be distinguished formally and thematically. The first generation of writers would then embrace writers such as Gérard Étienne, Émile Ollivier, Anthony Phelps, Lilian Dehoux and others whose chief concerns have been questions of exile and displacement, who have expressed a strong nostalgia for the lost land of their births. These Haitian-Canadian artists often saw Haiti "as a dichotomy of victims and victimizers" and presented an image of Haiti that is one of "relentless degradation unrelieved by the light of survival" (Cf. Dorsinville, Max "Black Canadian Writers in French" *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History: The Black Experience in the Americas*. McGill, 2003.) The second generation of Haitian-Canadian writers includes critically acclaimed novelist Dany Laferrière, but also Stanley Péan, Joel DesRosiers, Marie Clié Agnant and Georges Anglade. Their works have been informed by stylistic and thematic eclecticism. They move beyond the conventionally established Caribbean narrative modes of realism or surrealism.

control.⁷⁹³ They contest restrictive notions of *négritude*⁷⁹⁴ by criticizing the blind parochialism of cultural authenticity propagated under the Duvaliers and work towards a more open-minded definition of Haitianness.⁷⁹⁵

Gérard Étienne's *La Pacotille* (1991) and Max Dorsinville's *Erzulie Loves Shango* (1998)

In the following, two Haitian-Canadian novels will be explored which at first glance do not seem to have a lot in common. However, what is characteristic of Gérard Étienne's *La Pacotille* (1991) and Max Dorsinville's *Erzulie Loves Shango* (1998) alike is their efforts to join disparate worlds, to bridge distances in time and space, in short, to create unison. Although much different in setting and thematic scope, both writers present fictional characters that give the impression to be eternally itinerant while having to struggle with hostile and prejudiced environments, both find creative inspiration and strength in Haitian voodoo religion, both reflect and vehemently denounce the lingering anti-mulatto rhetoric prevalent in the Haitian and Haitian-Canadian literary frameworks.

Étienne's and Dorsinville's protagonists are acutely aware of their geographical and cultural displacement. They feel uprooted from their native land, lost, alienated and alone. Their true emotions and thoughts are hidden behind masks – masks, which deny access to their innermost, vulnerable selves,

⁷⁹³ For further, more detailed discussions of themes and subjects in Haitian-Canadian and Francophone Canadian literature Cf. Arthur 1999; Cf. Marty, Anne. *Haiti en littérature*. Maisonneuve & Larose: La Flèche du temps, 2000.; Cf. Dorsinville, Max. *Caliban without Prospero: Essays on Quebec and Black Literature*. Erin, ON: Press Porcépic, 1974.

⁷⁹⁴ For further details on the notion of *negritude*, its modifications in literary theory and criticism and its interrelations within the West African and Caribbean traditions consult Lewis, Shireen K. *Race, culture and identity in Francophone West African and Caribbean literature and theory: from negritude to créolité*. New York: Lang, 2001; Arnold, Albert J. *Modernism and negritude: the poetry and poetics of Aimé Césaire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998; Senghor, Leopold Sedar. "Negritude: a humanism of the twentieth century." *Perspectives on Africa* (1997): 629-636; Pausch, Marion. *Rückbesinnung – Selbsterfahrung – Inbesitznahme: antillantische Identität im Spannungsfeld von Negritude, Antillanté und Créolité*. Frankfurt/Main: IKO Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1996; Jack, Belinda E. *Negritude and literary criticism: the history and theory of "Negro-African" literature in French*. Westport, Conn. et al: Greenwood Press, 1996.

⁷⁹⁵ Cf. Marty 2000; Cf. Arthur 1999

but which simultaneously, open a prospect for survival, at least temporarily. They bear their people's psychological and physical scars as if they had been indelibly imprinted on their souls, bodies and minds. However, disguised by postmodern narrative entanglements Étienne's and Dorsinville's main characters undergo gradual changes. Significantly, it is the confrontation with their pasts and the painful act of facing their imaginary doubles that has them re-think and shift their positionality in order to resist, to reconstruct and to re-evaluate the formulations of identity. Moreover, it is the idea of love – personal and universal – that permits them to move towards the creation and acceptance of an alternative code of ethics that is able to grant them liberation, wholeness and peace of mind.

Étienne and Dorsinville bring together elements of West Indian, African and francophone culture. Differences are probed, questioned, overcast or, at times, overcome. Notably, the novels demonstrate a close affinity to the narrative form of the carnivalesque. "During carnival, all the elements of the Creole universe (all the races, ages, social classes and sexualities) intermingle in a *masquerade* of differences," writes Thomas Spear in his essay "Carnavalesque Jouissance: Representations of Sexuality in the Francophone West Indian Novel".⁷⁹⁶ Edouard Glissant talks about the reversal of roles when he explains the existence of the "burlesque marriages of carnival."⁷⁹⁷ The carnival hence symbolizes a collective probing of Caribbean society.

"The camouflaged escape of the carnival," Glissant continues, "constitutes a desperate way out of the confining world..."⁷⁹⁸ To him, the fundamental nature of carnival is its manifestation of a cross-cultural poetics. Étienne's and Dorsinville's fictional characters have to agonizingly realize the confining

⁷⁹⁶ Spear, Thomas C. "Carnavalesque Jouissance: Representations of Sexuality in the Francophone West Indian Novel." transl. by Richard D. Reitsma. *Jouvert: Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. Vol 2. 1 (1998). ><http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i1/spear.htm>< (orig. published in French in Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (eds.) *Penser la créolité*. Paris: Karthala. 1995. pp. 135-152)

⁷⁹⁷ Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. transl. by Micheal Dash. University Press of Virginia, 1989. p. 299.

⁷⁹⁸ Dash, Michael. "Introduction." *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Edouard Glissant.. University Press of Virginia, 1989. p. xli.

constrictions of their worlds. They feel paralyzed by rigid class conventions as well as by dominant notions of ethnicity and gender, which all outline their identities. The changes Étienne's and Dorsinville's protagonists undergo resemble the narratives' shifts from aesthetics of pain and bitterness towards a content declaration of relativity and a consciousness of mutual cross-cultural enrichment and exchange.

Edouard Glissant's ideas strongly overlap with those of the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin. To speak with Bakhtin, the carnival stands for occasions in which the authority of both the state and the church are overturned, at least for a while, and swapped with anarchic and liberating forms of living.⁷⁹⁹ In the novels of Max Dorsinville and Gérard Étienne, the carnivalesque narrative shape and the allusions to Haitian mythology express a form of social manifestation which is capable of subverting official ideologies, reversing established hierarchies and mixing up opposites. Their characters question the rigid class barriers of both Haitian and Quebecois society, deconstruct the category of 'race' and move beyond traditional social expectations with regard to their choices of partners and their individual ways of living. As Bakhtin argues, carnivalesque literature has the potential to set free the human spirit by breaking apart moldy forms of thought.⁸⁰⁰ Étienne and Dorsinville help to clear the path for the imagination, for new ideas to enter into public Haitian and Quebecois discourses and for the never-ending project of human emancipation.

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Cambridge, Mass. M.I.T. Press, 1968.

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid.*

4.5.1. *Unmasking the Carnival: Max Dorsinville's Erzulie Loves Shango (1998)*

In her prologue to *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1995) Joan Dayan calls her homeland Haiti "a land of conversion", "transformation and miraculous identity shifts".⁸⁰¹ To her, Haiti remains a marvelous yet ambiguous place of infinitive complexities. Correspondingly, Haitian-Canadian artists appear to cherish concepts of the instable, the erratic and the inconsistent. Montréal-based novelist Max Dorsinville, for instance, concocts an intricate narrative that resembles a vibrant masquerade of ever-transforming and transcending identities in his novel *Erzulie Loves Shango* (1998). Set in Quebec and Senegal at different time levels, multiple narrative layers unfold while intertextual allusions to Haitian mythology forge a powerful link between past, present and future in order to point out the shared transcontinental (his)stories of African-descended communities.

Against the backdrop of the social turmoil of the 1970s, *Erzulie loves Shango* presents a Francophone province "kept paralyzed for centuries under the combined rule of the Church and the elite sold out to Anglo-Saxon capital"⁸⁰² and a Canada that cannot uphold its image of moral superiority in comparison to its American neighbor south of the 49th parallel. Dorsinville wrote *Erzulie loves Shango* in the masked form of the carnival. In Dorsinville's novel the carnival resembles a transhistorical generic principle. Scraps of realistic depiction, which hint at promising yet fake notions of cultural or racial authenticity, are blurred with vivid, almost magical imaginations to expose social constructions like 'race', culture and gender as predicaments of hierarchical thinking. Expectations will be modified and disappointed in the

⁸⁰¹ Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley et al: University of California Press, 1995. p. xi.

⁸⁰² Dorsinville, Max. *Erzulie Loves Shango*. Montreal: Les Éditions du CIDIHCA, 1998. p. 84 (The initial French version of this novel appeared under the title *James Wait et les lunettes noires: Roman* and was issued by CIDIHCA in 1995. In the following, all quotations and references will be based on Dorsinville's translated and revised edition of the novel published in 1998.)

course of reading. "Nothing is what it appears; nothing stays the same," is what the back cover of Dorsinville's book promises. Indeed, the reader finds itself entangled in a web of stories, histories, re-evoked myths and is sucked into a vortex of disguised voices and their seemingly unrelated secrets.

The novel is divided into two parts, two "seasons" of life, a fact that holds out the prospect of a tale of personal development and progress from a state of innocence or denial towards one of increasing awareness. The first part, "Fall and Winter", focuses on the lives of Denise Dupuis and her husband Jacques Dansereau in Dakar (Senegal) 20 years after their emigration from Coolbrook, Canada. Jacques works as a professor at the *Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, his wife Denise is busy as an independent artist and their son, Mathieu, attends the International School in Dakar. The family keeps a deliberate distance to the other members of the Canadian expatriate community in Senegal because both Denise and Jacques have grown more socially and politically conscious over the years and consider the Canadian community in Africa as pervaded by racism and elitist classism. Life seems to be in superficial order and harmony until letters from earlier acquaintances and recollections of mutual friends trigger memories of a past almost faded.

The second part of the novel, entitled "Spring and Summer", centers on Jacques and Denise as young adults struggling to find their own selves in spite of family expectations, suburban conventionalities or the class restrictions in Quebec. Jacques grew up as the son of an upper class and thus socially influential and well-respected family. He is a law school graduate, fulfilling his father's high expectations and teaching at Coolbrook University. His appearance often stuns people – and himself. It is Jacques's facial mask that intrigues people and himself. His mask is something he does not wish to talk about. He even enjoys participating in this carnival of hidden truths and purposely keeps his "little secrets":

For instance, I never told her [his wife Denise] about my interest in Africa, how it started when I looked at myself in the mirror one summer day. I saw my curly hair, hazel eyes and deep tan. I said to myself if people here did not know me as Jacques Dansereau and his socially prominent wife, who regularly wintered in the Caribbean, I could be mistaken for a colored guy.⁸⁰³

Jacques recalls frequent incidents when he notices people stare at him in amazement, trying to make out if he was "colored" or simply had a deep tan. His family's reputation and social status seem to protect him from open suspicions about his racial origin.

Denise's parents, in comparison, are middle-class and very image-conscious. They are willing to do everything – from acquiring material wealth to forging useful connections with influential Quebecois families – to rise socially. In the beginning they are clearly stunned by Jacques's deep tan when Denise introduces him as her new boyfriend, but as soon as they realize that it is Judge Dansereau's son, their faces end up "glowing with pride".⁸⁰⁴ The parents of Denise and Jacques meet at a party in the Country Club. While Mrs. Dupuis is trying hard to impress Mrs. Dansereau by bragging about her frequent travels to the Caribbean, Mrs. Dansereau's memories slip away to "one hot evening when she tiptoed out of their rented beach house, the Judge fast asleep after a little dancing and too much rum".⁸⁰⁵ For a flickering moment only, she surrenders to the remembrance of this particular night in the Caribbean. Dorsinville clearly implies adultery: Jacques, the youngest child of the well-respected Dansereau family, is likely to be mixed-race.

⁸⁰³ Dorsinville 1998, p. 41.

⁸⁰⁴ Dorsinville 1998, p. 95.

⁸⁰⁵ Dorsinville 1998, p. 177.

Erzulie and Shango: Modes of Doubling and Splitting – or, Memory, Love and Resistance

The superficial impression of the novel's orderly, even if chronologically reversed, storyline is deceiving. Dorsinville makes use of the mythological figures of Erzulie and Shango – the Haitian Voodoo deities of love and fire – to provide both a frame and a timeless, unbound mirror-image to the present-time love story of Jacques Dansereau and Denise Dupuis. "Tell the truth ...," one of the narrators later on insists, "Provide a mirror image for the world".⁸⁰⁶

*Opening her eyes, she saw him transformed, aglow, gazing at her. He locked her in his gaze and she gradually understood, sensing what he meant. She murmured her consent. Boldly arching her body, she called him Shango! She clung to him, he wrapped her more tightly in his arms. He called her, Erzulie! Nestled in their embrace, their passion burned, lasted and prolonged itself amid their calls. They took off their masks and shared the truth they disbelieved. Tenderness was these long kisses. Love ..., this magnificent moment uniting them forever. Truth ..., this moment of sharing freed of clumsiness and false note.*⁸⁰⁷

*They no longer knew who and where they were.*⁸⁰⁸

Dorsinville not only includes spiritual references to Erzulie and Shango as a sign of worship of the Haitian ancestral culture, but likewise as an implicit strategy of resistance and an expression of proud spite. In "The Social History of Haitian Voodoo" (1995), Sidney Mintz and Michel-Rolph Trouillot explain the fascination that voodoo has exercised on anthropologists, sensation-seekers, writers and scholars alike. Mintz and Trouillot argue that most Westernized conceptions of voodoo as primitive, rearward, mysterious, 'dark' and spell-

⁸⁰⁶ Dorsinville 1998, p. 88.

⁸⁰⁷ Dorsinville 1998, Prologue p. 9.

⁸⁰⁸ Dorsinville 1998, p. 11.

bindingly dangerous are pejorative and therefore lack sophisticated knowledge about the role and function of voodoo practices as inspirational and strength-providing sources for cultural, physical and spiritual survival and as a means of defense and resistance. It is essential to recognize that such notions foster at best a romanticized if not utterly racist and white-supremacist image of black Haitian society that serves as a counter-pole to European concepts of civilization and modernity.⁸⁰⁹

To give a unisonous definition of voodoo as a religion and cultural practice is both impossible and undesirable. Voodoo beliefs are flexible and dynamic, submitted orally from generation to generation and varying to great degree depending on individual interpretation and situational context.⁸¹⁰ The Haitian voodoo pantheon comprises hundreds of *lwa* – ancestral African and indigenous Haitian spirits who are conceptualized in terms of their behavioral patterns, their spheres of influence, colors, symbols and foods. Neither all positive nor all negative in their characteristics, they exhibit the same variety of personality traits as human beings, the same weaknesses, strengths and desires.⁸¹¹ Furthermore, Catholic iconography has been incorporated into the voodoo belief to disguise the worship of voodoo spirits; therefore synchronous counterparts for most spirits can be found in Catholic saints. The Haitian *lwa*, i.e. spirits, have thus been subject to modes of splitting and doubling. There are no sharp lines to distinguish between the various aspects of them. Everything is in fluctuation.

In the Haitian Voodoo pantheon, Erzulie is the goddess of love and elemental forces. Her ancestral roots can be traced back to West Africa. She represents beauty and sensuality. This *lwa* was also split into different aspects.

⁸⁰⁹ Mintz, Sindney and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. "The Social History of Haitian Vodou." *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. ed. Donald J. Consentino. UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. Los Angeles, 1995. pp. 123-24; Cf. also Arthur, Charles. *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*. eds. Charles Arthur and Michael Dash. London et al: Latin America Bureau, 1999. pp. 256-8.

⁸¹⁰ Cf. Läennec Hurbon. *Voodoo: Truth and Fantasy*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995. (Läennec Hurbon gives a noteworthy account of the African roots of the *lwa* spirits and their transferral to the Caribbean context.)

⁸¹¹ Cf. Arthur, Charles. *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*. eds. Charles Arthur and Michael Dash. London et al: Latin America Bureau, 1999. p. 255-256.

As Erzulie Danto, on the one hand, she resembles a revolutionary warrior woman and a symbol of Haitian liberty. As Erzulie Freda she stands for the patriarchal vision of submissive womanhood and sexual fulfillment.⁸¹² As *La Siren* she eventually becomes the personification of the ocean and the goddess of motherhood. In her hands, she usually holds a fan from Osogbo, Nigeria, that once belonged to a priestess of Oshun. This priestess was considered to be the mediator between two worlds, the divine and the world of people.⁸¹³ Joan Dayan sees in Erzulie a figure of "collective physical remembrance", "a spirit that originated in an experience of domination."⁸¹⁴ Erzulie subverts the roles assigned to her. In her many aspects, she reveals a sexual ambiguity and a pronounced convertibility of class.

Shango, on the other hand, is worshipped in Haitian Voodoo as the deity whose powers are associated with thunder and lightning. In Yoruba mythology, he is given magical powers as the king of the West African kingdom of Oyo.⁸¹⁵ He burst from his mother Yemaja's body after her son, Orungan, has repeatedly raped her. Born out of pain, anger and irritation, Shango represents a major symbol of African resistance against enslavement and subjugation.⁸¹⁶ Many of his aspects are just as ambivalent as those of Erzulie and he, too, is dreaded as much as he is joyfully anticipated.⁸¹⁷ When in his tyrannical manner he unintentionally kills many of his wives and children with a thunderstorm, he is exiled from his kingdom and eventually, after a long

⁸¹² Cf. Arthur 1999, p. 256-257; Cf. also Karen McCarthy Brown. *Tracing the Spirit: Ethnographic Essays on Haitian Art*. Davenport Museum of Art. Davenport, Iowa, 1995. p. 32;

⁸¹³ Cf. Arthur 1999, p. 256-57.

⁸¹⁴ Dayan 1995, p. 56.

⁸¹⁵ The Oyo kingdom was sacked and pillaged. Its residents were brought in chains as slaves to the Caribbean and Brazil. For further information on the Shango cult in the African-Caribbean diaspora and its origins in Yoruba mythology the following readings can be helpful: Palmié, S. *Das Exil der Götter: Vorstellungskraft einer afrokubanischen Religion*. Frankfurt/Main, 1991; Elder, J. "The Orisha Religion (Shango) as Resistance and Social Protest." *Ay Bobo – Afrokaribische Kulte. Von kultureller Kreativität, Identität und Widerstand*. Wien, 1990; Barnes, S.T. *Africa's Ogun: Old world and New*. Bloomington, 1989. For literary explorations of the Shango cult Derek Walcott's poetry might offer a powerful Caribbean interpretation of this deity. Read, for example, *In a Green Night*, published in London in 1962.

⁸¹⁶ Cf. Simpson, G.E. *Religious Cults in the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti*. Caribbean Monograph Series 15, Puerto Rico, 1980.

⁸¹⁷ Cf. Edwards, G. and J. Mason. *Black Gods – Orisa Studies in the New World*. Brooklyn, 1985.

time of wandering, he wants to hang himself in repentance. The legend around his death opens another channel for interpretation: Apparently, the rope broke and Shango went straight down into the earth. Out of his grave two golden chains grew upon which he climbed up into the sky. For this reason, Shango is believed to be a master of transformations, the one who can bridge the gap between the world of men and the world of gods, the one who can overcome differences in time and space.⁸¹⁸

After his death, his enemies' houses were burnt down and people believe that Shango had become immortal and now sought revenge by sending fire down to earth. Shango turned into the much-feared avenger of his people. As a personification of two most vigorous forces of nature, Shango becomes a metaphysical manifestation of power, strength and energy. The lightning is his tongue, so Shango is said to have the ability to reveal the truth as his lightening can brighten the darkness. The thunder is his capability to make the earth shake and tremble and can be associated with the skill to convince and encourage people with words. Hence, Shango is a word warrior. He carefully examines problematic issues from every angle and will strategically attack them at their weakest point. Shango's powers are his will to resist, his strength of mind and his determination to promote the survival of the African diaspora. Finally, Shango's everlasting energy has at times been equated with the libidinal drive and the general experience of human sexuality. Certainly, this interpretation of the Shango deity must be seen critically as a dangerous reinforcement of the racialized stereotype of black male sexual prowess.⁸¹⁹

In Dorsinville's novel, the legacy of Erzulie and Shango holds a sway on the developments of Jacques and Denise, their stories are equal and yet apart, doubled and yet split. The powerful omnipresence of Erzulie and Shango also repeatedly disrupts the storyline along with a variety of narrative voices – most

⁸¹⁸ Cf. Kremser, Manfred. "Shango is a powerful fellow!" Repräsentation spiritueller Macht in afrokaribischen Kulturen." *Kultur, Identität und Macht: Ethnologische Beiträge zu einem Dialog der Kulturen der Welt*. ed. Thomas Fillitz et al. Frankfurt/Main: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993. p. 205-217.

⁸¹⁹ Cf. Kremser 1993

of them unreliable, highly subjective and temporarily locked in camouflage. These voices forcefully break through, smash illusions, disappoint expectations and shatter hopes in order to make room for powerful counter-stories, incongruent memories and alternative points of view: "Trust the story, not the storyteller,"⁸²⁰ Dorsinville's narrator demands. Modes of splitting and doubling gradually turn the novel into a patchwork of postcolonial voices and a celebration of transforming identities and truths. Reading transforms into an active process of confrontation that aims at unraveling Canada's and Haiti's disguised, silenced or unspeakable histories.

The novel's tension between moments of concealment and revelation goes hand in hand with Dorsinville's treatment of history and his emphasis on memory. In his novel, Erzulie and Shango are displaced from their homeland as they have been uprooted from their ancestral place of origin – Africa. Their re-emergence in Canada resembles the birth of the Haitian as well as that of other diasporas. Dorsinville embraces the long lost roots of ancestral Haitian culture and establishes firm bonds between the various parts of the black (African) diaspora. Erzulie and Shango become symbols of black memory and de-racialized love. It is memory that becomes the precondition to transformation. It is love that becomes the key to development.

Similarly, Toronto-based Trinidadian-Canadian novelist Dionne Brand expounds the significance of memory in her poetic collection *Bread out of Stone* (1998):

All black people here have a memory, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, whether they remember it or not, and in that memory are such words as land, sea, whip, work, rape, coffle, sing, sweat, release, days ... without ... this ... pain ... coming ... We know ...

⁸²⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 56.

have a sense ... hold a look in our eyes ... about it ... have to fight every day for our humanity ... redeem it every day.⁸²¹

Like Brand, Dorsinville posits love as the one unifying element above racialized difference throughout the novel. Dorsinville speaks against the "life in oblivion"⁸²² in the Caribbean as well as in Canada. Memory and love turn out to be signifiers of unity; they are capable of uniting disparate worlds.

The Gay Paree: Masks, Identities and the Seal of Belonging

Before Dorsinville's protagonists Jacques and Denise find to themselves and to each other, they undergo different journeys in their memories. Jacques recalls his sexual relationship with Barbara, a student and activist at Coolbrook University, who was raised in Kenya by her missionary parents and grew aware of the advantages of being white in Africa. Barbara not only sharpens Jacques political awareness by turning his critical look from African to the racism in Canada, but also acquaints him with the Montréal night life at the Gay Paree. Life at the Gay Paree, just as life in Coolbrook and Montreal in general, is likened to a carnival where people wear masks in daylight, and take them down at night.⁸²³ Whereas at this small and colorful space people keep slipping in and out of set images, things in Coolbrook "were either white or black; nothing in between," at least superficially.⁸²⁴ At the Gay Paree anything was possible. In both places, however, everything was about pretence, camouflage and keeping up appearances.

Evoking the decadent atmosphere of Dany Laferrière's *How to make love to a Negro* (1987)⁸²⁵ in the scenes at the Gay Paree, Dorsinville has Jacques meet

⁸²¹ Brand, Dionne. *Bread Out of Stone*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1998. p. 22.

⁸²² Cf. Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. transl. by Micheal Dash. Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1989.

⁸²³ Cf. Dorsinville 1998, p. 162.

⁸²⁴ Dorsinville 1998, p. 141

⁸²⁵ *How to make love to a Negro*, Laferrière's first book, relies on humor to undermine interracial taboos. Laferrière investigates the role that race and class play in sex. The book takes the shape of a semi-autobiographical novel about the sexual and professional career of an aspiring young

Bonbon (whose real name is Franz Bonilla), a light-skinned Haitian refugee and musician, who was "well known as a ladies' man or a sex maniac" and "a certified psychotic".⁸²⁶ In his depiction of Bonbon, Dorsinville brings to mind the stereotypical image of the Haitian male and his overflowing sexuality, while at the same time challenging it and raising awareness about the lasting legacy of the devastating colonial system.⁸²⁷

Bonbon originates from a prominent and wealthy Haitian family and graduated in social sciences. Bored with academic research, he "developed a taste for the feminine anatomy" and "replaced abstract paradigms with the concrete fields of research of live anatomy".⁸²⁸ He prefers a career as a musician, following his motto "down with the stiff-necks, up with the skirts." Bonbon is selling himself, succumbing to white stereotypes and racist expectations. At the Gay Paree women "paid [him] with their bodies for [his] folkloric ways":⁸²⁹ "All you need", he once told Jacques, "is a guitar, a straw hat, a couple of colourful shirts ... never mind the language you sing in, you're a hit. If you can keep a wide grin while you sing, you're turned into a fetish ...".⁸³⁰ Bonbon has internalized racialized stereotyping and the subtleties of racial categorization. He is convinced that

black writer in Montréal. Regarding the hypocrisy around race and sex in the late 1980s, the novel scandalized blacks and whites alike. Relying on the shocking effect of racial and sexual stereotypes about black males, Laferrière's poor Haitian immigrant protagonist and his friend Bouba practice their passions for cruising Montréal bars and seducing girls – pretty, upper-class and white. They seek both refuge and revenge from white-induced racism and colonial exploitation. He takes advantage of rich white women to make them pay for the wickedness of their slave holding ancestors: "I want to fuck her identity. Pursue the racial question to the heart of her being" (Laferrière, Dany. *How to Make Love to a Negro: A Novel*. Trans. David Homel. Toronto: Coach House, 1987. pp. 60-61. Originally, the novel was published in French under the title *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer: Roman* and issued in Montréal by VLB in 1987). Laferrière's protagonist glamorizes white women's bodies: "My sex celebrates your golden hair, your pink clitoris, your forbidden vagina, your white belly, your bowed neck, your Anglo-Saxon mouth" (Laferrière 1987, p. 61). In Montréal's cruising bar scene, race and class barriers are easily transgressed.

⁸²⁶ Dorsinville 1998, p. 51.

⁸²⁷ For an intelligent and illuminating exploration of stereotypes in Francophone cultures, consult Mireille Rosello's *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in Contemporary French Culture*. Dartmouth: UP of New England, 1998.

⁸²⁸ Dorsinville 1998, p. 59.

⁸²⁹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 103.

⁸³⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 59.

All blacks were not the same. There were visible ones like the student. And there were so-called ones like him who, in fact, did not look black, therefore he was not black ... You could call him a white Cuban! He could pass for any white man with a deep tan, couldn't he? The girls, he'd conclude, had to understand real Haitians looked like him, not blacks.⁸³¹

Being infused with color prejudice, he hates American blacks who in his view were "responsible for racism by their very existence. They kept Haitians back. They were 'niggers ...' They straightened their hair. They yearned to look like ..., like Haitian mulattoes, there!"⁸³²

Bonbon's experience in 'racial deciphering' allows him to detect Jacques's biraciality, although Jacques himself never arrives at fully acknowledging it. When a white woman approaches Jacques, seeing in him an exotic mixed-race man, he feels disgusted when she announces that "you guys know how to dance ... You guys got it in you; it's in your blood"⁸³³ "Guys like Bonbon and I were their tickets for one night of make-believe, like going to the movies," Jacques concludes, feeling strongly uncomfortable with the idea of being "mistaken" for a mixed-race person.⁸³⁴

Like Bonbon, numerous other exiled Haitians gather at the Gay Paree to nurse their nostalgia for home. The section's heterodiegetic narrator, nonetheless, dismantles the frolic at the nightclub and comments that "their pleasure-seeking was just a mask for their insecurity."⁸³⁵ Moreover, the narrative voice of an unidentified Haitian-Canadian student at Coolbrook University (who had spend most of his life at Mount Orford, a Quebec boarding school) describes Haitians and Haitian-Canadians as "extremely sensitive about

⁸³¹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 162.

⁸³² Dorsinville 1998, pp. 162-3.

⁸³³ Dorsinville 1998, p. 61.

⁸³⁴ *ibid.*

⁸³⁵ Dorsinville 1998, p. 103.

the slightest change of skin color, they were wracked with anxiety at the thought that 'foreigners' did not see eye to eye with them on that issue" (104).⁸³⁶ They fear whites would lump them together "as 'niggers', they with their abundant variety of skin shades;" they even cultivate a detectable French accent when they speak English so they would not be "mistaken for ordinary 'niggers'".⁸³⁷ The student bemoans:

They were Haitians, 'goddamn it!' they shouted. It was the white man's idea to divide them up, defining them according to schemes alien to a culture where race mixing gave one the right to be proud of not having kinky hair, a flat nose or thick lips. For the 'betterment' of the race, a light-skinned spouse was the desired catch for any fine young man or woman. [...] They were Haitians, all right, with their ways of confounding the world, smiling. Taught the history of their nation where race explained the slavery of their forefathers, they came up with a well-known refrain celebrating hatred for whites. Born in a culture where the accidents of race determined social structure – where those who called themselves Haitians could do so on the back of the ignorance and the animal state the majority of their nameless brethren were kept in – they boldly proclaimed their cultural uniqueness and their elite status to the world's face.⁸³⁸

Sadly, the Haitian-Quebecois student acknowledges that his whole life at a Canadian boarding school has been "falsely stamped with the seal of belonging," it "gave him an early taste of what being different meant."⁸³⁹ Nevertheless, the student "dreamily yearned to belong."⁸⁴⁰ The narrator

⁸³⁶ Dorsinville 1998, p. 104.

⁸³⁷ *ibid.*

⁸³⁸ Dorsinville 1998, pp. 104-5.

⁸³⁹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 109.

⁸⁴⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 86.

consequently comments on Canadian identity politics and the meaning of exclusion as follows:

Little by little he found out he was no more a token Haitian than a French Canadian. He could understand how each one felt secure with a fixed identity, but, for himself, he would go with the flow and let life decide who he was. He would be what others saw in him. Deep down inside, he sensed that some time, somehow, the opposites of a Haitian child and a Canadian teen would merge into an adult conscious of being born black. He would be what others meant him to be until he found the right form to express the carnivalesque shape of his life.⁸⁴¹

Significantly, Dorsinville has the student cite from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: "When I am loved I am told it is in spite of my color, and when I am hated I am told it is because of my color"; Fanon "made him feel good".⁸⁴² The unnamed voice is determined that one day, "he too would tell the story of his cultural mix. Like 'Fanon, he believed there was neither a white nor a black man and woman ..., only stories of human beings. Everything was part of flux."⁸⁴³

Canada: 'Mulatto Tragedies', Racism and the Question of Superiority

Meanwhile, Denise enters a relationship with James Wait, an African-American baseball player from Brooklyn, under contract in Canada. Wait arrives with the bus and is given hassles at the Canadian border because "you never know with

⁸⁴¹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 112.

⁸⁴² Dorsinville 1998, p. 88; Apart from Fanon, Dorsinville also alludes to the theories of Memmi and Berque as well as to the writings of Baldwin and Ellison. (Cf. pp. 83-84).

⁸⁴³ *ibid.* Dorsinville further alludes to another crucial moment in Frantz Fanon, when he constructs a scene in which Denise's mother and her classy friend Madelaine encounter James Wait, a "black man, a creature of the night [...] something that did not belong" (147). In stupid amazement, Madelaine calls out to Gilberte, "Oh, look at the black man!" (154). (Cf. Frantz Fanon. "The Fact of Blackness" Transl. Charles Lam Markmann. *Theories of Race and Racism*. ed. by Les black and Jolen Solomos. London:Routledge, 2000. pp. 257-266.)

these niggers".⁸⁴⁴ Wait is warned that he has been admitted to Canada "as a guest"⁸⁴⁵ and although "we like you people here", he was to "stay [...] in his place, [p]lay ball and everything will just be fine".⁸⁴⁶ He had served in the Army, having spent two years in France and having completed "his tour of duty in Vietnam".⁸⁴⁷ Upon his honorable discharge (at the age of 22), he notices that neither his high school degree nor his skin color would assist him in finding employment. Wait tried hard to complete a mechanics degree at the Brooklyn Institute yearning for a better life while having to care for his drug-addicted 15-year-old brother and his pregnant 13-year-old sister. He harbored the strong desire to escape the ever-present circle of being "black and poor" and eventually becomes aware that the happy and joyful people he has encountered in *Ebony* could only afford their happiness and joyfulness because of money.⁸⁴⁸

Dorsinville includes with Wait a character that exhibits a deep anti-mulatto stance. At the Gay Paree, Wait watches Bonbon and detests his craving for the sexual attention of white women. Having grown up with racism and colorism as an everyday experience in the United States, he redirects a racist attitude against people with light skin color. His hatred against 'mulattoes' is deeply engrained:

Mulattoes, high Yellows, whether they were Haitian or American, Jamaican or Martiniquean, were all bastards, literally. They didn't know who they were and hated with passion the visible part of themselves they didn't know when they saw it around them. Their hatred for blacks was worse than that of most redneck among 'crackers.' [...] These 'tragic mulattoes' ended up either in an insane asylum or they killed themselves. Not much of a difference. [...] Whatever trick they were up to, they would never get what they craved for: a lily white skin. Nothing

⁸⁴⁴ Dorsinville 1998, p. 76.

⁸⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁶ Dorsinville 1998, p. 76.

⁸⁴⁷ Dorsinville 1998, p. 150.

⁸⁴⁸ Dorsinville 1998, p. 129.

more tragic than a nigger who is told he is either not black enough; or a nigger who is told he is either too white or too black. [...] 'Tragic mulattoes' were in a rut; they had to choose to get out of it by themselves. Find out on their own who they were and stop asking others for their say and approval ... Whites, in particular, who had a field day toying with them.⁸⁴⁹

Wait criticizes the mulattoes' performed desire for possessing the bodies of white women as a means of (or rather an illusion of) enhancing their social status. He "had seen too many blacks with their throat slit or a bullet in the brain once they came out of some white woman's vagina, thinking they were supermen."⁸⁵⁰

At one particular night James Wait, Jacques Dansereau and Bonbon, as well as the student are present at the Gay Paree – without being aware of each other. The scene is described from various narrative angles. A blond woman, who considers him "black like sin," approaches Wait and after some hesitation he agrees to dance with her.⁸⁵¹ His thoughts, however, linger on the interrelatedness of categories like gender, race and sexuality (not without trying to justify sexual contacts with white women). "Sex, whether stirred up by skin shade or eye color, is located in one main difference: man *and* woman. That's a fact; the only one that matters when you're in bed with a woman, having sex," he states.⁸⁵² Wait recalls the existing stereotype of the "black man with a gigantic prick and a constant hard-on, the preferred stud in the phantasms of long-legged and long-haired bitches ..." and wonders about the motivations at the heart of interracial sexual relations: "the one having her phantasms fulfilled, bedded by a nigger, equals the other's who measures his virility by scoring with white women".⁸⁵³ "Does a man or a woman carried away, having sex and

⁸⁴⁹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 164.

⁸⁵⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 165.

⁸⁵¹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 167.

⁸⁵² Dorsinville 1998, p. 168.

⁸⁵³ *ibid.*

reaching orgasm *think* one is black and the other white; or yellow, red, etc.? Is skin shade something you *feel*?"⁸⁵⁴ Wait is detested and leaves. He feels far removed from and superior to these "white niggers."⁸⁵⁵

Denise's interest in Wait is first roused when she accidentally mistakes him for Jacques. To her the images of Jacques and James merge at first glance. Wait's proud bearing, his almost arrogant look, impresses her. But mostly, she feels intrigued by his "strangeness": "His color mesmerized her, left her dumb-struck. His blackness radiated in the sun. The glare blinded her. It sharply contrasted with the whiteness of the people she was accustomed to; it wrapped him in mystery."⁸⁵⁶ Denise approaches him to offer him a ride. The interracial couple quickly raises the attention of passers-by. By his side, Denise feels visible and she is comfortable with this feeling - "the will to shock, to disturb, was gaining on her and she sensed her transformation into someone else."⁸⁵⁷ Wait, however, is well aware of her motivation and answers her back sharply to let her know she was nothing but an "uppity bitch ... an obviously rich kid who thinks she can parade him like a toy."⁸⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Denise begins an affair with the dark-skinned African-American. Rumors quickly spread and her parents are unable to hide their racist conviction. Their daughter, however, undergoes a transformation in the course of her acquaintance with James Wait. She invites him a second time and they enter into a heated conversation about race, racism and interracial love. James argues, "I've had to face discrimination. I know what it is [...] I'm black ... Understand? Liking me or hating me because of my race is one and the same thing as far as I'm concerned. There is no good or bad racism. Racism *is*, period."⁸⁵⁹

Their conversation then shifts towards a discussion of existentialism and its meaning. Denise is convinced that society can have no impact on "what's

⁸⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁵ Dorsinville 1998, p. 169.

⁸⁵⁶ Dorsinville 1998, pp. 77-78.

⁸⁵⁷ Dorsinville 1998, p. 79.

⁸⁵⁸ Dorsinville 1998, p. 81.

⁸⁵⁹ Dorsinville 1998, pp. 122-3.

inside of [her]."⁸⁶⁰ Wait confronts her naiveté with the reality of 'race' and class divisions that truly exist and that inform people's everyday struggles for survival. He reminds her of the *éclat* that will take place when her parents and others should find out about their relationship and predicts that she is going to get hurt. "Existentialism isn't just about 'facts', my friend. The freedom to choose is more important. To choose is to be," Denise replies.⁸⁶¹

In the course of their debate, James realizes that Denise does not live in a perfect, carefree world either and that she has to struggle with the constraints of class. He concludes, "the one in control of the composition was this girl he would never again think of as a 'bitch' or a 'brat'. She was for real. He had a lot to learn from her."⁸⁶² Unexpectedly, this twenty-year old, "freckle-faced French Canadian, dark-haired coed" had "blown open his mind."⁸⁶³ Denise's arguments tumble over everything he had held true in the beginning. He is unable "to reconcile the clashing external and internal images."⁸⁶⁴ Her argument leaves him speechless and forces upon him "the need to go beyond the shallowness of surfaces." "The image was nothing. The person was," Denise finally declares.⁸⁶⁵ Masks will be torn down.

Both Denise and James have transformed. When Denise meets Wait again, she "noticed the carnival had ended."⁸⁶⁶

She wanted to be friends with this man beyond his skin color, this individual whose life meant something [...] She wanted to know him. She would unveil the mystery draped in color⁸⁶⁷.

⁸⁶⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 127.

⁸⁶¹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 126.

⁸⁶² Dorsinville 1998, p. 128.

⁸⁶³ *ibid.*

⁸⁶⁴ Dorsinville 1998, p. 129.

⁸⁶⁵ Dorsinville 1998, p. 130.

⁸⁶⁶ Dorsinville 1998, p. 186.

⁸⁶⁷ *ibid.*

Taking Wait on a ride to the river (where she bathed before)⁸⁶⁸, she knew "things would no longer be the same, ever. Everything was in flux, like the river here, flowing and changing course ...".⁸⁶⁹ Jacques, however, is converted into her token boyfriend – into "her double and her partner, the one who calmed down her mother and made sure her friends stayed on her side."⁸⁷⁰

Towards the end of the novel Denise is pictured together with her boyfriend at the Clairefontaine pool. The reader is not sure whether it's James or Jacques at first. His body consumes Denise. She feels that she has created it, that this "body was painted by her", that, in fact, "it was her; without it she was incomplete."⁸⁷¹ It was love that bridged any existing gaps. Love had made her into a creator:

She knew no other body done with such perfection in composition, flawless lines, balanced shape and proper use of color. Loving him as a perfectly shaped art form, she said to herself, made her an artist. [...] Their love was art. She knew she had become an artist. She had set aside the flightiness of routine and touched the permanent [...] Love enhanced her perceptions.⁸⁷²

At the pool the sun has taken possession of people (and skins) and racial divisions have become impossible to distinguish, if not even obsolete. The bathers have simply turned into "a mass of human flesh."⁸⁷³ Spectators notice the man's "deep tan" but "couldn't tell if he was black or white."⁸⁷⁴ "The sun had

⁸⁶⁸ Not unlike the female protagonists of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) or Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925), Denise finds freedom and selfhood in nature, amidst "huge, eroded, rock formations", "wild grass" and pine trees. She takes a bath, naked, at a waterfall and the water cleansed and purified her: "Imagining the moment, she was the brook. She had to make it so, re-create herself. [...] She felt free, her mind empty of constraints, her whole self no longer fragmented: she was one" (91-92).

⁸⁶⁹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 194.

⁸⁷⁰ Dorsinville 1998, p. 204.

⁸⁷¹ Dorsinville 1998, p. 208.

⁸⁷² Dorsinville 1998, p. 209.

⁸⁷³ Dorsinville 1998, p. 210.

⁸⁷⁴ Dorsinville 1998, p. 211.

gotten hold of him, like the rest. Who cares, black or white? ... Wasn't it the same?"⁸⁷⁵ The man "might be anything, black or white, could be anybody; like all of them on this day, ruled by the sun."⁸⁷⁶ The images of Jacques Dansereau and James Wait merge again – but this time beyond the realm of color.

In the epilogue, Denise dreams about the summer she shared with James, remembers moments of transcendence and oneness, already anticipating the end of their relationship. The reader learns that although Denise is truly in love with James, he will reject her love and leave her.

He left. She saw the parade of memories, of nights like this one, summer nights at the end of the season. What was left? Vague images of noisy get-togethers, shouts, surprises, yearnings, laughter soon forgotten – amounting to one thing: the passing of time.⁸⁷⁷

In majuscule and bold letters, the novel ends with some kind of re-birth, or at least with an affirmation selfhood and oneness: "So, there I am."⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁷ Dorsinville 1998, p. 228.

⁸⁷⁸ *ibid.*

4.5.2. *Torment, Memory and Desire: Gérard Étienne's La Pacotille (1991)*

In his book *Counter-modernism and Francophone Literary Culture: The Game of the Slipknot* (1999), scholar Keith Louis Walker argues that francophone literary culture attempts to face, challenge, and counter the dehumanizing excesses and legacies of colonial domination.⁸⁷⁹ The oeuvre of Haiti-born writer Gérard Étienne provides a compelling testimony to the brutality of the totalitarian regimes under the Duvaliers and condemns the exploitation and oppression of the Haitian masses while simultaneously fostering the dream of a free, democratic Haiti.

Following the denunciatory tradition established by Caribbean writers such as Aimé Césaire or René Maran, Étienne's novels offer profound portrayals of Haitian 'race' relations and engage with themes like exile and alienation, memory and history. His narratives appear soaked with aesthetics of pain, but concurrently Étienne concocts a powerful and insightful poetics of projection and doubling.⁸⁸⁰ This poetics is strongly informed by binary concepts such as desire and rejection, silence and voice, submission and resistance, hatred and love. Étienne's characters lead liminal existences between a past rendered to oblivion and the fading vision of a democratic future. Bearing the psychological scars of social marginalization and colonialist oppression, they waver between images of *l'autre* and their own deformed mirror reflections. In their mental restlessness – somewhere between reality, delirium, daydream, frenzy or insanity – Étienne's protagonists have to deconstruct their selves into doubles in order to survive. Mourning what is lost, they desperately try to liberate their split selves and to negotiate an affirmative identity.

Notably, Étienne's portrayal of male and female characters is quite divergent. While his male protagonists persistently suffer from the lasting impact of the "étranglement ininterrompu de la cellule" [unending constrictions

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. Walker, Keith. *Countermodernism and Francophone Literary Culture: The Game of the Slipknot*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

⁸⁸⁰ Cf. Walker 1999.

of the prison cell],⁸⁸¹ his female characters rise to become the liberators of their people. Feeling trapped in the prevailing predications of a fixed racialized social system and responsive to the existing negative representations of black masculinity, Étiennian men remain immobilized by shame and self-hatred.⁸⁸² Their selves are sadly wedged in the pain of the unspeakable. Surrounded by powerful demons from past and present, they must repeatedly approach images of the *Other*. They must cross, expand and dissolve boundaries – personal, geographical and national ones – without knowing where or even if they will arrive, always terrified of failure, abandonment and collapse.

In her survey of Haitian literature, Anne Marty confirms the alienation, pain and shame that are sustained by Étiennian men. Marty sees their psychological scars mostly grounded in Haiti's colonialist past, in an *othered* definition of the Haitian self. Marty concludes that Étienne's characters represent "une métaphore de tous ceux qui baissent la tête et qui se résignent devant l'inacceptable."⁸⁸³

One of these Étiennian men is Ben Chalom, the black-skinned protagonist of *La Pacotille* (1991). Chalom is a young Haitian who was forced to choose political exile in Montreal. He struggles hard to subsist under his disturbing memories of "la bête" ["the beast"]⁸⁸⁴ and lives through the political

⁸⁸¹ Étienne, Gérard. *La Pacotille*. L'Hexagone. Montréal, 1991. p. 183; (translation in Étienne, Gérard. "La Pacotille." *Fiery Spirits: Canadian Writers of African Descent*. ed. Ayanna Black. Translation by Keith Walker. Toronto: HarperPerennial, 1994. pp. 100-124; p. 100.)

⁸⁸² In his exploration of the relationship between Self and Other, Jean-Paul Sartre also elaborates on the question of shame. He notes: "Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me. [...] Now, shame ... is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object." (Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. pp. 222, 260).

⁸⁸³ Marty 2000. p. 152.

⁸⁸⁴ Étienne, Gérard. *La Pacotille*. L'Hexagone. Montréal, 1991. p. 183; (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 100).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon laments that sometimes the legacy of colonialism leads to a betrayal of the newly elected leaders of the people, who impose a despotic, dehumanized dictatorship instead of working towards a democracy in the interest of their people. The old structures of colonialism are transformed into a new intra-racial and intra-cultural colonization. In *La Pacotille*, "La bête" is a polysemantic metaphor for the leaders or authorities that abuse their political power to subjugate the Othered. In the novel, "la bête" mostly refers to Papa Doc Duvalier, the "authentic son of the people who [was] not going to allow his toes to be stepped on [...] who was going to give a new dimension to history" (Étienne

and cultural turmoil of the 1960s. In his homeland, he witnessed the immiseration of Haiti's people and experienced imprisonment and torture firsthand. Similar to Étienne's male hero in *Le Nègre Crucifié, récit* (1974), Chalom epitomizes the metaphorically crucified black man whose body and mind have been shattered by physical and psychological pain and whose hope for deliverance has vanished. In the novel, he is significantly described as one of the men "nés pour payer la cochonnerie des autres" [born to pay for the wickedness of others].⁸⁸⁵

La Pacotille is told by a highly subjective, autodiegetic narrator and utterly drenched with concepts of dislocation and fragmentation. The novel's stream-of-consciousness-like, incoherent narrative structure signals the fractured self of the protagonist as well as his geographical and cultural displacement. Étienne reproduces the central character's psychological and emotional disorder and provides a mirror image of his mental anguish through his language. Léon-Francois Hoffmann, a critic and curator of Haitian literature, remarks that "Gérard Étienne disloque la syntaxe pour la recréer selon une nouvelle logique, désarticule le tempest, à coups d'images inusitées, se forge une langue personnelle." [Gérard Étienne dislocates syntax in order to recreate it according to a new logic, disarticulates time and tenses and with strokes of unusual imagery, forges himself a personal language].⁸⁸⁶ This language harbors not only a broken syntax and incomplete sentences, but is spiced with a touch of orality. The temporal disorder of events leaves narrative gaps. Countless flashbacks and repeated shifts in setting add to the novel's unintelligibility. A

1994, 101). Yet it also represents the ton-tons Macoutes, American or French-Canadian immigration officers or, on a more abstract level, the patriarchal and racist cores of Haitian and Canadian society. "La bête" transforms into the self-destructive shadow that often dwells in the mind of the oppressed. "Quoique je fasse," Étienne's narrator states, "je demeure un zombi de la bête. Où que je sois, la bête est sur mes traces." [Whatever I do, I remain a zombie of the beast. Whatever I am, the beast is on my trail.] (Étienne 1991, p. 224; translation in Walker 1999, p. 222).

⁸⁸⁵ Étienne 1991, p. 184 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 102).

⁸⁸⁶ Hoffman, Léon-Francois. *Le Roman Haïtien: Idéologie et Structure*. Sherbrooke, Quebec: Editions Namaan, 1982. (qtd. in Walker 1999, p. 235).

flood of seemingly disarrayed references to names, events and places repudiates any narrative transparency and conveys the impression of a schizophrenic narrator.

Indeed, it is schizophrenia that has had a lasting impact on Ben Chalom's life. Disillusioned by the recurring treachery and disloyalty of Haiti's political leaders, he looks full of bitterness at the once hopeful promise of democracy and freedom in Haiti.⁸⁸⁷ To him, political and cultural life in Haiti bears a resemblance to schizophrenia just as his current life in Quebec. Caught in his traumatic memories of a brutal past and always sensing the danger of slipping into insanity, Ben Chalom's battle continues in exile.⁸⁸⁸ In Quebec, he feels alienated and uprooted from his ancestral motherland. Étienne's protagonist desperately tries to exorcise his past in order to integrate into Quebecois society. Yet he acknowledges the compulsive need to hold on to his memories, to report what has happened to him and to Haiti's people in order to keep his fragmented self somehow cohesive. His narrative is a testimony born out of unspeakable pain. It bears witness to the emotions, thoughts and moral

⁸⁸⁷ As the first black republic, Haiti (Saint-Domingue) successfully claimed its independence from France in 1804. The revolutionary years from the 1780s to the 1830s were evidently a by-product of the French Revolution. Being in the center of the 18th-century Transatlantic slave trade, the subjugated Haitian laborers brought about the most triumphant slave revolt in the Americas. Spain, England and France separately tried to suppress the revolution, but failed. The intricate inter-racial politics on the island, however, sadly succeeded in reversing the young republic's fortune. Racialized and economically motivated disputes between free blacks and slaves, rich and poor whites (*grands blancs* and *petit blancs*), and people of mixed 'racial' descent (both free and enslaved) accompanied the political transformations and contributed to years of mutually destructive slaughter, murder, and devastation. This racialized war led to exile for all whites, and the continued colonialist dependence resulted in the gradual impoverishment of Haiti. Several attempts to move forward democratically ultimately failed. In 1957 military-controlled elections led to victory for Dr. François Duvalier, who in 1964 declared himself "President-for-Life". "Papa-Doc" formed the ill-famed paramilitary *Tonton Makout* and the following years of dictatorship brought about tens of thousands tortured, killed or exiled. For further information on Haitian history and politics of 'race' consult Nichols, David. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*. 3rd ed. London, Basingstoke: MacMillan Caribbean, 1996.

⁸⁸⁸ Michael Seidel has come up with an interesting study on the theme of exile and its influence on the literary imagination. It offers deep insights into the position of both the exiled writer and the exiled literary subject. Cf. Seidel, Michael. *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986.

dilemmas of a tortured body and mind.⁸⁸⁹ Ben is unable to escape the painful memories of "la bête". On the contrary, he must even nurture the pain in order to remember, in order to feel and stay alive.

In *La Pacotille*, the narrator refuses to recognize the omnipotence of "la bête". His rejection of a man's "pulverization of the mind"⁸⁹⁰ by torture and cultural dislocation culminates in Chalom's almost neurotic obsession with "rememory" – to borrow a term created by Toni Morrison.⁸⁹¹ To "rememory" every ghastly detail of his sufferings allows him to survive and to keep in touch with reality. He must "consigner les gestes de la bête dans la mémoire ... les traits du visage de la bête dans la caboche" [record the gestures of the beast in

⁸⁸⁹ In 2004 a collection of essays was published by Stanford Levinson, in which various moral, legal and ethical aspects of torture are discussed. Levinson's introduction to the collection, "Contemplating Torture" allows a comprehensive look at the nature of torture. Elaine Scarry proffers with *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* an elaborate study of torture and its function under repressive regimes. For a deeper understanding of torture and its impact on the human mind in a postcolonial context it might also be enlightening to read into Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, esp. pp. 280-289. (Cf. Levinson, Stanford (ed.) *Torture: a collection*. Oxford et al: Oxford University Press, 2004; Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.) Another fictional account of torture experiences in the context of Haitian history is presented by Edwidge Danticat. In her deeply moving novel *The Dew Breaker* (2004), the author moves smoothly between the Haiti of the 1960s and contemporary New York City. She explores the world of a husband and father who hides a past full of violence and cruelty. As a "dew breaker", a torturer, he left behind a life of brutal crimes in the land of his birth. A terrifying scar on his face marks him eternally and becomes a constant reminder of his concealed past. Danticat enables the reader to encounter the mind of the torturer as well as those of his victims, family members, neighbors or customers until his powerful meeting with a woman who will make him feel remorse or even redemption. (Cf. Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker*. New York: Knopf, 2004).

⁸⁹⁰ Étienne 1994, p. 51

⁸⁹¹ Toni Morrison coined the term "rememory" in her novel *Beloved* (1987). Instead of using the words "remember" and "forget," Morrison's main character Sethe uses the words "rememory" (both a noun and a verb here) and "disremember." To Sethe, the past is alive in the present and her mind is "loaded with the past" (Morrison 1988, p. 70) and "busy with the things she could forget" (191). Sethe wants to forget her past because "remembering seems unwise" (274), but to "rememory" her past sufferings becomes the only way not to lose touch with her self. Morrison substitutes the word "remember" with the more organic "rememory," reminding us that everything is held in memory and "nothing ever dies" (36). To "rememory" is to survive. To "rememory" is to give testimony of black women's oppression while pointing towards a way into creativity, freedom and love. Similarly, the word "forget" lacks the conscious effort that the characters must employ to commit such an act. Thus, they "disremember" things – with the implication that they force them to the back of their minds. (Cf. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Knopf, 1987. For further reading on the relation between memory, history and identity consult Nicola King's *Memory, Narrative, Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000; or Petar Ramadanovic's *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity*. Lahham, Md. et al: Lexington Books, 2001.)

his memory ... the features of the face of beast in his head ...];⁸⁹² he must "raconter ... même dans un long cauchemar" [He must recount all of this ... even in a long nightmare].⁸⁹³ The process of documenting his personal and black Haitians' agony becomes a "triple victory over shame, personal and collective amnesia, and the intimidation tactics of torture and human rights abuse."⁸⁹⁴ Étienne's *La Pacotille* develops into a testament of black survival.

In his testimony, the narrator also communicates the intricacies and complexities of love relationships in racist environments. The characters of *La Pacotille* find themselves locked in a socio-cultural context in which class conventions, racialized beliefs, myths, stereotypes, rigidly constructed gender roles and distorted phantasms of sexuality intersect. "L'amour est impossible ... L'amour est une faiblesse en Haïti" [Love is impossible ... Love is a weakness in Haiti], writes Étienne in *Le Nègre Crucifié* (1974).⁸⁹⁵

Ben Chalom enters into an ambiguous love relationship with a racially mixed, middle-class woman, Guilène Roy. In the novel, Guilène learns of her grandfather's assassination and the death threat against her family. She quits her university studies in Washington, D.C., leaves behind the remains of her family and friends in the name of the revolution and becomes a member in the fight against "la bête". Guilène joins the black revolutionaries in their struggle for independence and soon becomes part of their political core organization. She openly declares to identify with the "peuple, d'être le peuple, de parler en son nom [...] parce qu'elle était de la lignée des mulâtres aguerris qui pensent nègre" [with the people, to be the people, to speak in their name ... because she was of the line of seasoned mulattoes who think black].⁸⁹⁶

⁸⁹² Étienne 1991, p. 184 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 102).

⁸⁹³ Étienne 1991, p. 21; (translation in Walker 1999, p. 230).

⁸⁹⁴ Walker 1999, p. 229.

⁸⁹⁵ Étienne, Gérard. *Le nègre crucifié*. Montréal: Editions francophones du Canada, 1974. p. 111; (translation in Walker 1999, p. 252).

⁸⁹⁶ Étienne 1991. p. 190; (translation by Keith Louis Walker in Étienne, Gérard. "La Pacotille." *Fiery Spirits: Canadian Writers of African Descent*. ed. Ayanna Black. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 1994. pp.100-124; p. 110.).

Guilène is presented as a complex being with many varying, at times contradicting personality traits. She has got her strengths and her flaws and is as much desired as she is feared. In his depiction of Guilène, Étienne aims at a feminist re-vision of racialized representations of the Haitian woman by revoking the "binary fantasmatisation"⁸⁹⁷ constructed around her. In his essay "La Femme noire dans le discours littéraire haïtien" (1979), Etienne analyzes representations of Haitian women in literature and argues that their portrayal is based on the binary opposition between the dark-skinned black woman and the light-skinned 'mulatto' woman. This antagonism is followed by a set of ascribed symbolic values, which foster a stereotypical, romanticized, and racist image of both the black and the racially mixed woman in literature.⁸⁹⁸ Keith Walker observes that

the character portrayals of the Black and Mulatto women systematically oppose Black and White, the savage and the civilized, the peasant and the bourgeois, the servant and the lady, night and day, filth and cleanliness, impropriety and propriety, voodoo and rationality, excess and moderation, consumption and veneration, secrecy and openness, dishonesty and honesty.⁸⁹⁹

The existential worth of the Haitian woman, whether dark-skinned or light-skinned, and her contributions to Haitian history and culture are diminished along such antithetical constructions. The Haitian woman remains deprived of her beauty and humanity.⁹⁰⁰ Étienne underlines that such constructions perpetuate racist and romanticized images and keep Haitian women trapped in

⁸⁹⁷ Walker 1999, p. 251.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. Étienne, Gérard. "La Femme noire dans les discours littéraire haïtien". *Présence francophone* 18 (Spring 1979): 109-126.

⁸⁹⁹ Walker 1999, p. 251.

⁹⁰⁰ For a long time, dark-skinned Haitian women have followed the practice of bleaching their skins with aggressive chemicals in order "whiten" their value as women – not without disastrous physical and psychological consequences.

unproductive spaces that strongly adhere to the colonialist imagination.⁹⁰¹ Étienne determinedly breaks with the prevailing myths and stereotypes about the Haitian woman in general and the mixed-race woman in particular.

Significantly, it is a racially mixed woman in *La Pacotille* that transforms into the collectively much anticipated female savior of the Haitian people, the voodoo goddess of love and beauty Erzulie;⁹⁰² she becomes a liberating Esther figure⁹⁰³ – the one that will ultimately free Haiti from colonialist and racist bondage:

On viole l'histoire. Ton histoire de nègre poupon, de nègre de fruits sauvage. Sans racines depuis plus d'un siècle. On rêve d'une Esther libératrice issue des matrices de la mer qui volerait par-dessus des masses d'air s'ouvrant aux plaintes des vieillards, qui parfumerait les cases des villes, rien qu'avec sa queue de comète, son souffle puissant, sa beauté étincelante. Cette femme-lumière, bardée de lumière à ses flancs, ferait pousser des arbres là où la fertilité de la terre a été violée. On la verrait s'élever dans le ciel, plus haut que chars de feu venus de l'autre monde, baignée de fraîches ondées, de myosotis, de citronnelle.

[One violates history. Your history of a wretched Black man, of the Black man of wild fruits. Without roots for more than a century, one dreams of a liberating Esther risen from the matrixes of the sea who would fly above the masses of air opening herself to the pleas of the old, who would perfume the shacks in the city ghettos, with nothing more than the sweep of her comet train, her powerful breath, her sparkling beauty. This woman of light, clad in light at her flanks would make trees grow

⁹⁰¹ Cf. Étienne, Gérard. "La femme noire dans le discours littéraire haïtien." *Présence francophone*. 18 (Spring 1979): 109-126.

⁹⁰² The 'mulatto woman' Guilène stands for one of the manifold, at times contradictory aspects that Erzulie exhibits.

⁹⁰³ Esther was a Jewish queen who protected her people in the Persian diaspora from being slaughtered to death and rescued them from a pogrom. (Cf. Bellinger, Gerhard J. *Lexikon der Mythologie*. Augsburg: Bechermünz Verlag, 1997.).

there where the fertility of the land had been raped. She would be seen rising in the sky, higher than the chariots of fire, from another world, bathed in cool mists, forget-me-nots, and citronella.]⁹⁰⁴

Metaphors of fertility, plant life, the sea and the air imply Guilène's role as the lost and much desired Mother. She has risen from the native earth, she is nature, and she is the land. She is expected to be the growing tree that can revive the strong cultural roots of Haiti's past, that can protect the Haitian people and guide them into a democratic future. Representing Erzulie, Esther or Mother, the character of Guilène stands as a symbol of "collective physical remembrance", "a spirit that originated in the experience of domination".⁹⁰⁵ She bears the burden of history and is the long aspired sign of the revolution. Guilène is the one who knows, who acts, and who guides:

Nous l'attendons, depuis cinq siècles, cette femme libératrice. Plutôt non. Une marée noire. L'unique signe d'une révolution souterraine, mugissante, bruissant de forces incontrôlables. Nous la voulons pour notre délivrance. Pour montrer au monde notre beauté, notre laideur, la vie qui nous échappe tous les jours, faute d'un arbre qui s'approprierait tout l'oxygène de l'univers afin de protéger nos enfants contre l'étouffement.

[We have been waiting for her, for five centuries, this liberating woman. Rather not. A black tide. The unique sign of an underground revolution, roaring, rumbling with uncontrollable forces. We want her for our deliverance. In order to show to the world our beauty, our ugliness, the life that slips through our fingers every day, for want of a tree that would

⁹⁰⁴ Étienne 1991, p. 79; (translation in Walker 1999, p. 264).

⁹⁰⁵ Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History and the Gods*. Berkeley et al: University of California Press, 1995. p. 56.

take in all the oxygen of the universe in order to release it to protect our children from that which suffocates them.]⁹⁰⁶

Étienne's portrayal of the Haitian woman is revisionist and feminist. Like other female characters in his oeuvre – Gladys, Nounoune, Josette, Evelyn, Deborah, Natania, Michaëlla – the figure of Guilène personifies an all-embracing, utopian vision of a liberal Haitian society.⁹⁰⁷ The Étiennian woman, Keith Walker contends, is "the being in whom all the contradictions of the soul and the unconscious seem resolved."⁹⁰⁸

However, in a context of violence, pain and endless wandering, Étiennian women remain unreachable, dream-like appearances that are constructed in opposition to the weaknesses of the patriarchal Haitian male.⁹⁰⁹ Guilène, whether as Erzulie or Esther, is first of all an object of desire, unseizable, out of reach, even surreal at times. Providing a counterbalance to the Haitian man's "wounded self,"⁹¹⁰ she is the epitome of female strength and power. The female liberator, envisioned in what Étienne called an "espace ... entre le songe et la matière"⁹¹¹ [a space ... between reverie and materiality], is shaped as the male protagonist's angel, his idealized, empowered double. She is able to do what he cannot achieve. He has swallowed his inferiority and therefore places his "double dans l'illusion" [double in illusion], angel-like, "sur les étages d'une vision qui prend aujourd'hui la forme d'un monde recrée" [the plateaus of a vision that takes the shape today of a world re-created] to await that "l'unisson des lèvres blasées fera germer l'humain de l'or" [the song in unison of indifferent lips will germinate a golden humanity].⁹¹² She becomes a reflection of his unconscious, the mirror of his potential, the embodiment of his

⁹⁰⁶ Étienne 1991, p. 79; (translation in Walker 1999, p. 265).

⁹⁰⁷ Cf. Walker 1999.

⁹⁰⁸ Walker 1999, p. 254.

⁹⁰⁹ Cf. Walker 1999, p. 259.

⁹¹⁰ Walker 1999, p. 254.

⁹¹¹ Étienne, Gérard. *Gladys*. Port-au-Prince: Editions Panorama, 1963. (qtd. in Walker 1999, p. 257).

⁹¹² *ibid.* pp. 255-256).

emotional needs and psychological torments; she is his guide to self-understanding and love, the hope for a truly free Haiti.⁹¹³

Étienne is quite revisionist, feminist and counter-colonial in his portrayal of Haitian women. His poetics of doubling likewise negates the *Othering* of the black Haitian male. Ben Chalom considers himself a "mâle tragique" [tragic male].⁹¹⁴ "Je me sentais vraiment mal à l'aise en compagnie d'une mulâtresse" [I really felt uncomfortable in the company of a mulatto woman], Ben admits.⁹¹⁵ He grew up at a time when 'mulatto' women were considered exotic, status-enhancing treasures, whereas dark-skinned male Haitians were regarded a constant threat to the purity and virginity of middle and upper class women. Black masculinity was therefore a hazard to be guarded against.

The perpetuated colonialism of the ruling elite degraded Chalom into Guilène's *pacotille*; he is reduced to one of Fanon's "wretched of the earth".⁹¹⁶ Having internalized the racist belief in the inferiority of blacks, he succumbs to the prevailing biased notions of black manhood and black male sexuality. Ben is torn between his physical attraction towards Guilène, "quelle beauté dans la colère" [a beauty in a state of rage]⁹¹⁷ and his racist bias against 'mulattoes'. He feels subordinate to Guilène, even de-masculated and aims at asserting his paterno-centric superiority.

Similar to other Étiennian novels, metaphors of eating and devouring permeate the narrator's language to express his urge to dominate, his desire to be her double: ⁹¹⁸

⁹¹³ Cf. Walker 1999, p. 254.

⁹¹⁴ Étienne 1991, p. 196; (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 117).

⁹¹⁵ Étienne 1991, p. 190; (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 110).

⁹¹⁶ Cf. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

⁹¹⁷ Étienne 1991, p. 192 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 112).

⁹¹⁸ For an interesting exploration of the relationship between women and eating consult Isabelle Gros's essay "La femme et la nourriture dans l'œuvre de Gérard Étienne." *Mots Pluriels*. No. 15 (September 2000) <<http://www.arts.uwa.deu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1500ig.html>> Accessed on Feb. 02, 2005.

J'étais donc la chose de Guilène. Le petit nègre qui mangerait son infériorité devant la mulâtresse, le portrait type de l'esprit au fond des entrailles qu'on doit épouser avant de mettre la bague au doigt d'une négresse. J'étais la *pacotille* de Guilène. [...] J'enviais Guilène. Je la mangeais du soleil levant au soleil couchant. Je lui donnais les formes, toutes les formes d'une vierge inaccessible, objet d'un amour tyrannique. D'une passion dévastatrice. Je la mangeais, ma sainte amie, ma camarade de tous les temps, avec une joie constamment mêlée de tristesse. Avec cette flamme qui vous brûle, qui prépare votre chute.⁹¹⁹

[I was therefore Guilène's little creature. The little nigger who would eat his inferiority in front of the mulatto woman, the exact portrait of the spirit deep in one's guts that one must marry before placing a ring on the finger of a black woman. I was Guilène's *pacotille*. [...] I used to envy Guilène. I ate, slept and drank her from the moment the sun rose until the sun set. I gave her shapes, all the forms of an inaccessible virgin, an object of a tyrannical love, of destructive passion. I utterly consumed her, my saintly friend, my comrade for all times, with a joy always tinged with sadness. With this flame that burns you, that prepares your fall.]

Remarkably, the word *la pacotille* denotes an object of poor quality, something worthless, rubbish – a nothing. Thus it is already the novel's title that plays on "la question du préjugé de couleur" [the question of colour prejudice].⁹²⁰ In his essay "Le fait d'être nègre dans les Amériques", Ivy W. James explains that the term *la pacotille* was employed with a racialized meaning in highly mixed colonial societies like, for instance in Brazil (*pacotilha*), to denote 'mulattoes' or blacks who would do their utmost to be regarded white.⁹²¹ Chalom's yearning for 'racial' *lactification* and the shame about this very wish trigger his urge to

⁹¹⁹ Étienne 1991, p. 195; (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 116-117).

⁹²⁰ Étienne 1991, p. 192 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 113).

⁹²¹ Ivy, James W. "Le fait d'être nègre dans les Amériques." *Présence Africaine* No. 24-25. (1959) n.p.

dominate and control the body of the mixed-race, middle-class woman. Therefore images of violence, rape and death dominate Ben's memories of his relationship to Guilène in Cap Haïtien. Ben's desire for Guilène merges with reflections of violence, for example, they blend into the memory of his mother's rape:

J'avais peur. Au moment où j'allais partir, Guilène me retenait tout en priant de coucher près d'elle. Alors je déshabillais Guilène. La bourgeoise. La mulâtresse. Elle frissonnait sous mes doigts qui tremblaient de la même manière que la pucelle enfin sur la couche de son beau chevalier. Alors je sentais monter en moi la chaleur de la bête que j'avais tant combattue par mes prières, le souvenir du viol de ma mère, des souffrances de ma sœur Ruth. Je bavais à la vue d'un corps que je n'avais pas même espéré toucher de ma vie, un corps que je dévorais, que j'allais enfin posséder. [...] À mon tour d'être le seul maître de Guilène. J'allais la prendre. Oui. La bien prendre. Ne rien laisser aux mulâtres de sa caste. Quelle victoire sur une société qui avait flanqué ma mère dans la crasse. [...] Quel triomphe. Ce sera aussi la victoire du peuple. Des nègres sales ségrégés par des mulâtres sales. Qui font savoir au monde civilisé qu'un nègre ne peut pas monter à cheval sur le ventre d'une mulâtresse. Je l'ai fait.

[I was afraid. Just when I was about to leave, Guilène held me back, begging me to lie down next to her. And so I undressed Guilène. The middle-class lady. The mulatto woman. She shuddered under the touch of my trembling fingers just like the virgin on the bed of her handsome knight. And then I could feel riding in me the heat of the beast I had fought against so hard through my prayers, the memory of the rape of

my mother, the sufferings of my sister Ruth. I was drooling at the sight of a body that I had not even hoped to touch in my life, a body I was devouring, that I was finally going to possess. [...] My turn to be the only master of Guilène. I was going to take her. Yes, really take her. Leave nothing for the mulattoes of her caste. What a victory over a society that had thrown my mother into the filth. [...] It would also be a victory for the people. Dirty Negroes segregated by dirty mulattoes. Who make it known to the civilized world that a Negro can straddle the belly of a mulatto woman. I have done it.]⁹²²

His vision of raping Guilène is only stopped at the sight of her menstrual blood. The power of her reproductive capacity, "l'engendrement de vies nouvelles" [engendering new lives],⁹²³ dissolves his macho rapist impulse. It is Guliène's/Erzulie's power to transcend the bond of violence by fostering infinite love: "J'aurais escamoté ma morale de révolutionnaire si j'avais souillé le corps de Guliène. Un corps qui appartenait d'abord à son peuple. ... C'était ça. Elle allait m'aimer. Pour de vrai. Plus qu'un camarade de combat, je devenais son double" [I would have conjured away my revolutionary morality if I had sullied Guilène's body. A body which first of all belonged to her people ... She was going to love me. For real. More than a comrade in arms. I was becoming her double.]⁹²⁴

Étienne openly criticizes the hatred held against 'mulattoes' in Haiti: "Bien sûr, les mulâtres ne sont pas responsables de la saleté de l'écurie" [Of course, mulattoes are not responsible for the filth of the pigsty].⁹²⁵ From his exiled position as a writer, Étienne expresses his conviction that 'race' and color distinctions are nothing but constructed ideologies to re-implant shame, weakness, and impotence into the hearts and minds of the Haitian people. The belief in 'race' was advocated to transform proud Haitians into inferior *pacotilles*

⁹²² Étienne 1991, p. 199 (translation in Étienne 1994, pp. 121-122).

⁹²³ Étienne 1991, p. 201 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 124).

⁹²⁴ Étienne 1991, p. 201 (translation in Étienne 1994, p.124).

⁹²⁵ Étienne 1991, p. 191 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 112).

and disguise the Haitian leaders' greed for personal economic wealth and political power. 'Racial castes' foster nothing but hierarchical class structures and dependence. Étienne reveals that it was the betrayal "des nègres sans honneur qui apportent de l'eau au Moulin des Blancs racistes" [of the blacks without honor who bring grist for the mill of white racism]⁹²⁶ that led to the reinforcement of colonialist societal structures, color prejudice and economic rivalries in post-independent Haiti.

In *La Pacotille*, Ben Chalom eventually realizes "le mal qu'on nous fait en faisant porter à la caste de Guilène le poids de notre malediction" [the wrong done to us in attributing to Guilène's caste the responsibility for our accursed condition.]⁹²⁷ It was "une forme de racisme à l'endroit des mulâtres" [a form of racism directed towards mulattoes],⁹²⁸ he concludes. Étienne's protagonist argues that it was time for the Haitian people to recognize this fact in order to avoid "un suicide collectif" [a collective suicide]⁹²⁹. "Il faut recommencer" [We must begin again].⁹³⁰

Etienne points to the intertwining of cultural variables such as language, class and historical experience and social constructs like ethnicity, gender, 'race', and sexuality in order to destabilize "the centrality of any one", to speak with Black feminist Valerie Smith.⁹³¹ Etienne de-masks binary constructions and renders them invalid. Like novelist Max Dorsinville, Gérard Etienne exhibits the will to bring together unequal worlds in harmony and liberty, so that the people occupying these realms can reach their full human potentials.

⁹²⁶ Étienne 1991, p. 191 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 111).

⁹²⁷ *ibid.*

⁹²⁸ *ibid.*

⁹²⁹ Étienne 1991, p. 186 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 105).

⁹³⁰ Étienne 1991, p. 189 (translation in Étienne 1994, p. 108).

⁹³¹ Smith, Valerie. "Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the 'Other'". *Changing Our Own Words*. ed. Cheryl Wall. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1989. p. 47.

4.6. 'In Pursuit of Wholeness': 'Race', Class and Black Masculinity in Kim Barry Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man* (2003)

One of the most precarious qualities a model can possess is the chameleonlike power to transform herself, seemingly at will, to suit the requirements of each and every job. This is not accomplished by merely changing makeup, clothes, or hairstyle. It requires the capacity to express and project a wide variety of attitudes and personalities.

(from *Modelling Made Easy*)⁹³²

Kim Barry Brunhuber's debut novel *Kameleon Man* (2003) invites its readers to participate in a young man's arduous, at times disturbing and yet mesmerizing journey of self-discovery into the world of fashion and modeling. In *Kameleon Man*, the author relates the story of Stacey Schmidt, a 21-year-old mixed-race model from Nepean, Ontario, whose exhaustion with the provinciality of his suburban home drives him into the vastness of Toronto's possibilities in hope of entering the fast lane to undying fame and financial achievement. Tying in with recent publications like Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* (1999) or Lee Tulloch's *Fabulous Nobodies* (1989), Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man* aims at demystifying the fashion industry by pointing out the bitter taste of failure that is so very closely connected with this business. Yet in comparison to his forerunners, Brunhuber moves way beyond the exposure of the superficialities of the modeling industry to enter contemporary discourses on racial identity, belonging, and the question of masculinity.

The protagonist's ambiguity is marked right from the start. The image of a muscled, bald and faceless black man on the book's cover provides a striking contrast to the revelation of the character's androgynous first name and his German-descended family name. The title of the novel also adds to the mystery created around Stacey: *Kameleon Man* alludes to the brand name of a soaring new jeans manufacturer from Germany and Stacey strives after becoming this

⁹³² qtd. in Brunhuber, Kim Barry. *Kameleon Man*. Vancouver: Beach Holme Publishing, 2003. p. 280.

company's new face for advertising in an international campaign. The demonstrated affinity to the color-changing animal 'chameleon' is, however, far from being unintentional. The author employs the chameleon as a metaphor for the fashion industry, which is presented to the reader as a vibrant jungle of ambiguities, uncertainties and make-believes.⁹³³ The author forcefully hits at issues of 'race', gender and sexuality and tackles the question of how to forge an affirmative (biracial) identity while struggling with the ambivalences ascribed to skin color in an environment whose key focus lies on external appearance and maximum visibility.

True Colors: 'Race' and Ambiguity

In his novel Brunhuber accentuates the chameleon-like qualities racially mixed supermodels must acquire in order to fulfill the expectations of the audience. He describes how Stacey's body is molded to represent the face of the 21st century – the century of hybridity, in which borders are blurred and origins remain concealed in uncertainty. The racially mixed body becomes a mystique guarding the secret of the future: cryptic and arcane, yet incorporating parts of the known and familiar. Brunhuber's protagonist looks through the superficialities of the modeling industry and is painfully conscious of his stereotyped role as the "coloured clown in [a] lunchtime cabaret."⁹³⁴

Being an autodiegetic narrator, Stacey describes the world around him with cinematic accuracy. Being a skeptical observer, he offers sharp comments on what he perceives and sprinkles his findings with poignant sarcasm. "Mulattos are a rare breed in Nepean", he reasons during the novel's introductory scene – a face contest at a small Nepean mall.⁹³⁵ Following the routine patterns of walks, turns and poses, Stacey senses the obtrusive look of

⁹³³ Cf. Gordon, Charles. "A deep look at superficiality: *Kameleon Man* by Kim Barry Brunhuber." [review]. *The Ottawa Citizen*.
<<http://www.kimbrunhuber.com/images/articles/charlesgordon.jpg>> Accessed on Feb. 28th, 2007.

⁹³⁴ Brunhuber 2003, p. 8.

⁹³⁵ Brunhuber 2003, p. 6.

the audience and begins to feel uncomfortable in his skin. "All staring back at me," he muses,

What do they see, anyway? They're not looking at Stacey – he doesn't exist anymore. Fashionable metallurgists have broken me down, melted me, moulded me, sculpted me, into a model. A representation of an object. Perfectly to scale, proportioned in all dimensions. Worthy of imitation - Exemplary. Designed to be followed.⁹³⁶

The racial gaze directed at his commodified body has a direct bearing on Stacey's self-image. In spite of his sensitive awareness Stacey is overwhelmed by the dominance of mostly clichéd and negative representations of blackness. Caught in external assumptions, he feels isolated, alienated and inferior. Lacking confidence in his own abilities and being a far cry from accepting the uniqueness of his body, Stacey is about to lose touch with his self and dissolves in "a whirlwind of stockings, nubile limbs, [and] breasts of all kinds."⁹³⁷

The setting of the introductory scene reflects Stacey's fears. The illusion of ultimate perfection created on the catwalk is juxtaposed with the unspoken tension, rivalry and agitation among the models backstage. Clothes that appear elegant and beautiful on the outside are kept in place with adhesive tape. Rumors, half-truth and lies fly around. Not even the backstage mirrors allow for a glimpse of reality because oversized accessories persistently block the view on the models' true selves.⁹³⁸ Stacey's identity remains obscure like the face of the bald black model on the cover picture of the novel. The difference between reality and illusion opens up to Stacey like a deep chasm and threatens to pull him down. He looks at himself from a distance, like an object that is exhibited for the pleasure of others and that will be substituted or even

⁹³⁶ Brunhuber 2003, p. 7.

⁹³⁷ Brunhuber 2003, p. 1.

⁹³⁸ Cf. Brunhuber 2003, pp. 1-9.

discarded once it has fulfilled its purpose. His life is based on pretension. "I'm a chameleon," Stacey concludes matter-of-factly, "a mimic, like a stick insect, like those yellow-and-black-striped flies that pretend to be bees."⁹³⁹ Showing one's true colors (literally and figuratively) must cautiously be avoided in Stacey's world.

On the one hand, Brunhuber utilizes the chameleon metaphor to reveal how his main character responds to the conditions set up by mainstream culture and economic interests. Stacey has learnt to mechanically react to external prompts. Trying to please the taste of the audience, the biracial model must bend to the rules of the business. He is left struggling with society's diverse expectations that continue to exploit racialized stereotypes ranging from demonic devil to erotic angel.⁹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Brunhuber carefully approaches the issue of racial authenticity. His protagonist feels untrue and sees himself as a meager and deficient shadow of society's understanding of blackness. Suffering from the absence of his black father and having been raised in an exclusively white environment, Stacey dreads to discover what lies hidden at his heart – or beneath his skin. Whiteness threatens him and his desire to identify as black. Significantly, Brunhuber elucidates right from the beginning of Stacey's quest for identity that any attempt to define racial authenticity must be subject to failure.

Utterly lonely, Stacey longs to "slough off [his] old life like a snake skin" and follows the half-hearted invitation of a Feyenoord model scout to

⁹³⁹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 7.

Clemens Zerling and Wolfgang Bauer point out an interesting antagonism between interpretations of the chameleon in Christian-European and African contexts. While the chameleon is capable of adjusting to the conditions set by its environment, it is also seen as a paragon of malice in Christian interpretations. In African mythologies, however, the chameleon is considered a symbol of life, growth and fertility. It represents the cycles of light and darkness, of birth and death and is read as a sign of immortality (Cf. Zerling, Clemens and Wolfgang Bauer. Eds. *Lexikon der Tiersymbolik: Mythologie, Religion, Psychologie*. München: Kosel, 2003. p. 52). „Verändere dich, Chamäleon, die Welt dreht sich im Kreis!“, Jan Knappert aptly quotes from a Swahili proverb. Knappert underlines the constitutive creative power inherent to the badger in African stories (Cf. Knappert, Jan (ed.) *Lexikon der afrikanischen Mythologie: Mythen, Sagen und Legenden von A-Z*. Weyarn: Seehamer, 1997. pp. 79).

⁹⁴⁰ Cf. Brunhuber 2003, p. 11.

Toronto.⁹⁴¹ Having not even fully arrived yet, Stacey is already swaying "perilously close to the pit" of urban dangers.⁹⁴² Several signs foreshadow that his hopes will be disappointed: His presence at the model agency is neither anticipated nor enthusiastically welcomed. He is bluntly told that the agency already has "a couple of guys with the same look".⁹⁴³ Even Toronto, Canada's epitome of unlimited opportunity, seems unwilling to have a share in leading Stacey onto the road of success. The name of the city on the white placard in the entrance hall appears tacked on as if it was merely "an afterthought".⁹⁴⁴ Toronto remains invisible and insignificant next to trend-setting cities of fashion like New York, Paris or Milan. Similarly, the question of what outlines Canadian identity is rendered uncertain, if not unnecessary in the novel. In spite of the daunting augury, Stacey accepts a no-guarantees-contract by Feyenoord. He is aware of becoming nothing but another "chocolate chip in a bowl of ice-cream"⁹⁴⁵ - a unique hue added to the agency's hotchpotch of visibly different models.

'Race', Gender and Representation

The diversity of the males in *Kameleon Man* postulates that 'being a man' can mean different things in different cultures. Unsettling the view of manhood as homogenous, Brunhuber has created a microcosm of diverse masculinities in *Kameleon Man* and underlines the fact that some of these masculinities are considered dominant while others remain subordinate or even marginalized. He implies that constructions of masculinity stand in relation to power, mainly due to the fact that white manhood continues to be viewed as normative and monolithic. The perpetuation of this illusion in Canadian society renders other notions or performances of masculinity mere deviations from the norm. It is gay

⁹⁴¹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 16.

⁹⁴² Brunhuber 2003, p. 15.

⁹⁴³ Brunhuber 2003, p. 12.

⁹⁴⁴ Brunhuber 2003, p. 11.

⁹⁴⁵ Brunhuber 2003, p. 14.

males or women who at times inhabit the most influential positions in the social hierarchy of Brunhuber's world of modeling. The traditional hegemony of white heterosexual men appears dysfunctional. Yet the author leaves no doubt about the necessity of acknowledging whiteness as a racialized and gendered category because the various forms of masculinity performed in the novel have been shaped in contrast to whiteness.

Stacey Schmidt is awaiting his big chance while he stays penned up with an eccentric coterie of other male models in a shabby apartment. These vivid minor characters bear him company on his way: The Irish-descended, blue-eyed Breffni from Buffalo, who regularly harvests brown mushrooms from the carpet behind the toilet bowl, the black and bald Crispen with a toothpick in his mouth as a trade mark and the big-chested hand model Augustus, who exhibits strong nymphomaniac tendencies. They have lived through similar ups and downs in their modeling careers, but their preferences in life appear quite distinct compared to Stacey's intellectual perceptiveness and diffidence.⁹⁴⁶ His new roommates are exhibitionist and express unbounded confidence in their appearances. They have embraced the rapidity of urban life and follow its fast pace without considering yesterday or tomorrow. Thus Stacey's first encounter with his fun-loving housemates results in a night full of drug consumption,

⁹⁴⁶ Brunhuber's strategy of naming remains profound. Just like the name of his protagonist, the names of the minor characters in the novel bear significance and allow for further allusions to history and culture. Whereas the name Breffni hints at the character's Irish descent, the names Crispen and Augustus even offer further historical and literary allusions. The name Crispen brings to mind the famous speech delivered in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In this speech the drama's eponymous hero tries to mobilize his troops before going into battle at Agincourt. Facing possible defeat, the king assembles his men in a "band of brothers". As in Brunhuber's novel, the men are united by a common goal, are scared of what they will have to face and might even be "marked to die". Yet they will also fight "to covet honor" till the very end. (Cf. Shakespeare, William. *King Henry V*. eds. Marilyn Bell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Act IV, Scene 3). Similarly, Crispin Augustus insinuates the memory of the Roman consul Octavian. The name derives from the Latin word *augere*, meaning *to increase*, and symbolizes unquestioned authority. Brunhuber's Augustus increases body-wise and is thus forced to work as a hand model. His growing muscles have become too huge to fit the clothes of fashion designers. Notwithstanding countless rejection, Augustus stays truthful to his own ideals and does not conform to mainstream expectations. (Cf. Hanks, Patrick ed. *The Oxford Names Companion*. Oxford et al: Oxford University Press, 2002; Cf. Raaflaub, Kurt A. and Mark Toher (eds). *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*. University of California Press: Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1993.)

alcohol abuse and sexual overtures. His critical commentaries, however, cannot hide Stacey's grave insecurity. They even expose some alarming self-destructive leanings.⁹⁴⁷

To "leave [himself]" has been his chief motivation for moving to Toronto.⁹⁴⁸ Garnering for acceptance, Stacey Schmidt is aware of his awkward position as a merely "mediocre model" whose success in modeling seems bound to his "fair mulatto skin, fine features, a ski-jump nose, full lips [and] Barbie-doll eyelashes."⁹⁴⁹ Self-consciously, Stacey compares himself to the "ebony princes with strong noses" and the "bald Negroes with chiselled features" who smile at him from Canadian high gloss magazines or TV ads.⁹⁵⁰ While Augustus and Crispen confidently assert their black manhood, Stacey feels insecure and believes to be incapable of fulfilling the popular expectations of black masculinity. His two black friends present themselves bald and extremely muscled. In addition, they exhibit superb qualities as ball players and dancers. Stacey himself fails dreadfully at basketball and other racialized activities in which Augustus and Crispen outrival him "like certified Master Negroes".⁹⁵¹ Stacey prefers watching the learning network channel on television, and displays a strong interest in psychology and photography, but would never openly admit these facts. He feels pressured to excel in "black things".

Brunhuber's protagonist feels trapped in society's perception of his person as (almost) black while he is internally struggling with his biraciality. Surrounded by what he considers to be prime examples of black masculinity on the one hand and encircled by the "California blondes" and "all-Canadian quarterbacks"⁹⁵² of Toronto's catwalks on the other hand, his biracial disposition appears to be a flaw Stacey is unable to cover up. He thinks of himself as "a badger" – a plague striped in black and white and unwelcome wherever he

⁹⁴⁷ Cf. Wiersema, Robert. "Kameleon Man: A Review." *Quill and Quire*.

< www.kimbrunhuber.com/images/articles/quill.bmp > Accessed on February 28th, 2007.

⁹⁴⁸ Cf. Brunhuber 2003, p. 16.

⁹⁴⁹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 8.

⁹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁹⁵¹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 24.

⁹⁵² Brunhuber 2003, p. 8.

comes into view.⁹⁵³ Stacey is afraid that people will eventually find out what he thinks he really is: a white man in a black shell: "I always felt naked [...], as if they knew I didn't belong, as if I had no right to be here in the first place."⁹⁵⁴ This fear of being detected as not belonging to the 'race' results in a permanent denial of his true self – including his love of riding horses, his admiration for the Beach Boys and his preference of tennis to basketball. He feels as "an embarrassment to the race".⁹⁵⁵

In one aspect, however, Stacey is able to compete with Augustus and Crispin. All of them feel bound to fulfill the racist fantasy of being highly sexualized beasts in search of white women. Augustus and Crispin chase after white women because they consider it a right given to them by history: "Nothing wrong with white women," Crispin defends his actions. "Our ancestors died for the right to screw them. Are we supposed to stand by and let all they fought for go for naughty? Not only is it our right, it's our duty."⁹⁵⁶ Both Augustus and Crispin have internalized racial prejudice. In fact, the racism they have been exposed to in both Canada and the United States in their pasts has caused feelings of shame and inferiority and in spite of their performed physical strength and alleged mental stability; Brunhuber's characters lack personal integrity and a healthy self-esteem.

Along this line, bell hooks highlights in two of her recent publications on black cultural criticism, *We real: Black Men and Masculinity* (2003) and *Rock my Soul: Black people and Self-Esteem* (2003), that patriarchal thought and the history of black oppression have weakened black men's self-esteem. She argues that mainstream culture has been promoting the fear of the black man, whereas positive representations of black cultural achievement have been rare. Hooks

⁹⁵³ *ibid.*

In mythological, religious and psychological interpretations, the badger is often read as a symbol of the painful search for what remains concealed and suppressed in a creature. (Cf. Zerling, Clemens. *Lexikon der Tiersymbolik: Mythologie, Religion, Psychologie*. Ed. by Wolfgang Bauer. München: Kösel, 2003. pp. 55-56.)

⁹⁵⁴ Brunhuber 2003, p. 117.

⁹⁵⁵ Brunhuber 2003, p. 64.

⁹⁵⁶ Brunhuber 2003, p. 123.

explains that men of color have therefore developed a sense of inadequacy and inferiority in relation to their compulsory point of reference: white masculinity.⁹⁵⁷ In her view, this lack of self-esteem lies mainly rooted in the history of plantation patriarchy, the gender politics of slavery and white supremacist domination:

Although the gendered politics of slavery denied black men the freedom to act as 'men' within the definitions set by white norms, this notion of manhood did become a standard used to measure black male progress.⁹⁵⁸

Brunhuber's characters react to these conditions by calling upon history to legitimize their taking advantage of white women, sexually and financially. The author provides an unflinching gaze upon his characters' motivations and thus offers a valuable framework for discussing the interrelatedness of 'race', gender, sexuality and class: Dating white women serves to cover up the characters' economic dependence on a white majority society. Interracial sex thus serves as a way of self-solacing for them; it becomes a channel to ease mental and emotional aches. However, Brunhuber sharply points out that in their attempt to objectify white women, black males themselves emerge as instruments of racism and sexism. Their desire to emulate white men in terms of wielding power has them turn the tables on white women. Their own subjugation, based on historical injustice, manifests itself in the subjugation of white women, even if their moments of domination may be temporarily limited.⁹⁵⁹

Stacey has "always lusted after white girls," too.⁹⁶⁰ He frequently changes his partners, often without even remembering their names. Yet he also

⁹⁵⁷ Cf. hooks, bell. *Rock my Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem*. New York: Atria Books, 2003; Cf. hooks, bell. *We real cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York et al: Routledge, 2004.

⁹⁵⁸ hooks 2004. p. 3.

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. Branden, Nathaniel. *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. New York et al: Bantam, 1995.

In this book, Branden offers a definition of self-esteem as "the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life, [...] self-esteem is the confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life, and confidence in our right to be successful and happy." (qtd. in hooks 2003, p.5).

⁹⁶⁰ Brunhuber 2003, p. 10.

upholds an unsteady and for the most part sexual relationship with Melody, a white girl from his hometown. Melody tries hard to prove that white girls are okay and loves tragic scenarios. She sharply reminds Stacey of becoming "too black" whenever he behaves inappropriately in her eyes.⁹⁶¹ Stacey knows that what Melody admires most is the image he represents – the image of the attractive, mysterious almost-black man in whose company her own market value increases. It is Melody who profits from the relationship; Stacey is merely left with "suicidal affection."⁹⁶² While Melody denies the existence of racism in Canada, it has been a painful reality to Stacey. Due to this discrepancy in perception, Brunhuber leaves no doubt about the truth that the relationship of Stacey and Melody is doomed to fail.

Stacey grew up in an environment that most people experienced as a neatly outlined 'raceless' bubble. The realization of his biraciality was therefore even more sudden and distressing; the absence of positive representations of black men (especially that of the missing father) amplified his loneliness and strengthened his conviction of being 'nothing':

There was no black and white in my world until that day at camp when David Wiener asked me why I looked like poo. Since then I've realized that the world isn't shot in black and white. There are only different degrees of one or the other. We're black, or we're white. Or, like me, we're shades. Insubstantial images of something real. Reduced to almost nothing. The only thing worse than living in that black-and-white world is living in a grey one, in which race doesn't matter except to everyone else. In which nothing's black or white, and everything's both. The problem with living in grey is that one grows no natural defences. Growing up grey is like growing up weightless on the moon. To return to earth is to be crushed by the weight of one's own skin.⁹⁶³

⁹⁶¹ Cf. Brunhuber 2003, p. 95.

⁹⁶² Cf. Brunhuber 2003, p. 49.

⁹⁶³ *ibid.*

Stacey deems himself inwardly homeless and worthless. His biraciality feels like a painful curse thrown upon him and he remains unable to fight it, not knowing where to start or what to do first. As long as the black-or-white discourse continues and biracial individuals remain marginalized within the black and white dichotomy, there will be no easy solutions to Stacey's dilemma, as Brunhuber knows from personal experience.

It is therefore necessary to recognize cultures as racialized systems. "We [biracial individuals] are presumed to 'choose sides' every day," Brunhuber states in an interview with the *Bahiyah Magazine*. He explains:

My father is African; my mother is of German heritage. At a formal function, no-one would bat an eye-lid if I wore a dashiki or an agbada, but imagine the reaction if I showed up in a feathered hat and Lederhosen! Throughout our lives – especially in our formative years – we are explicitly told the racial roles we are allowed to play.⁹⁶⁴

In his depiction of Stacey and the minor male characters of his novel, Brunhuber touches upon many of the prevailing racialized (positive and negative) stereotypes about black and biracial men and exposes them as constructs. He manifests current representations of masculinity in Canadian popular culture as historically grounded in centuries of perpetuated racist thought. In order to defy these representations, the author deeply inquires into dominant cultural assumptions about gender and 'race'. Following the manner of a *bildungsroman*, his protagonist must thus embark upon a quest to challenge the status quo and to unlock the politics of representation "in pursuit

⁹⁶⁴ Brunhuber in Musoke-Nteyafas. "Kameleon Man deserves Praise: Author Brunhuber Shows his True Colours." *Bahiyah Magazine*. Toronto, Canada. September 10th, 2005. <<http://bwmmag.com/magazine/content/view/292/178/>> Accessed on April 10th, 2007.

of wholeness".⁹⁶⁵ Brunhuber leaves no doubt about Stacey's undertaking being anything but easy.

Race, Class and Belonging: 'Passing' in the 21st century

Racialized power does not only hold a sway on constructions of gender but likewise strongly intertwines with issues of class. Both aspects have a strong influence on an individual's sense of belonging. "The message to black men from patriarchy is to 'be a man'," American philosopher Kenneth Clatterbaugh claims. However, he continues, "the message from capitalism is 'no chance'".⁹⁶⁶ In Brunhuber's novel the male characters engage in an everyday struggle with this antagonism. The modeling industry expects them to conform to the images produced by popular culture, yet these cultural conditions also produce poverty and social alienation. Consequently, both racism and poverty shape the models' everyday efforts.

In his description of Stacey's development in particular, Brunhuber underscores the access to economic power as a key aspect in the formation of a personal identity. The minor characters and the protagonist are bound together by their urge to survive. The apartment in which they live is filthy, poorly furnished, peppered by vermin and carpeted with discarded clothes; the walls are bare and the only nourishment to be found in the refrigerator is leftover milk and an enormous bag of marijuana.⁹⁶⁷ Although the models continue to hanker after fame and monetary independence, Stacey's acquaintances have experienced too few moments of success to know that it would be a waste of time to cherish blissful feelings about temporary success. Moments of failure and refusal have sufficiently disillusioned them with regard to their careers – and their hopes. Joining their circle, Stacey is getting used to the cycle of

⁹⁶⁵ hooks, bell. *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. Routledge, 1994.

⁹⁶⁶ Clatterbaugh, Kenneth. *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society*. 2nd ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.* p. 17.

heading from one go-see to the next rejection while weakly existing on scarcely paying shooting jobs.

One day, however, the unlikely thing happens and Stacey is chosen as the new face of the *Kameleon Jeans* campaign. Evoking the idea of passing, the racial ambiguity of Brunhuber's protagonist is discovered as an economic asset that is capable of transgressing boundaries of culture, ethnicity, 'race' and class. In return, his origin, his past and his self must disappear:

'What exactly are you racewise?'

'Half white.'

'And?'

'Half black.'

'Who is who? You're parents, I mean.'

'My mother's white, my father was black.'

'See, when I look at you, it's kind of hard to tell what you are exactly. I mean, you could be part Indian, part Asian. You could pretty much pass for whatever, right?'

'I guess.'⁹⁶⁸

Brunhuber's protagonist is asked to pass in the name of globalization. Thus the author adds another alarming facet to the conundrum of mixing. In contrast to 19th- and early 20th-century modes of passing, the intention of 'globalized passing' is no longer to uphold fantasies of racial purity. It reaches out for economic profit and sells the idea of mutability to the supposedly open-minded and prejudice-free human being of the 21st-century. Reading Stacey's facial features, contemporary Canadian society hopes to have a glimpse of the globalized future.

Stacey's ambiguous appearance perfectly matches the product he is to sell. Since "jeans can make you into anything you want,"⁹⁶⁹ a model is needed

⁹⁶⁸ Brunhuber 2003, p. 203.

⁹⁶⁹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 201.

that can be molded into anything the audience wants and envisions. Bearing in mind the sexual and gendered dimensions of passing, Brunhuber emphasizes the economic objectives of passing and underscores their relevance within the discourse on hybridity. This passing strategy of the modeling industry implies that racial borderlines will disintegrate naturally. The illusion is cherished that even the concept of 'race' will become obsolete in the process of the hybridization of the modern world. Racial ambiguity carries this illusion and is (ab)used as a profit-enhancing marketing strategy for the sake of humanity's good:

Things are different. We're done with the idea of legitimacy, pureness. The essential African, the essential Asian. All of that's done. Our ideas about race are changing. Gradually the world is swallowing the idea that we're all the same. And I don't mean that we're all the same inside. One day we'll all be the same on the outside. If we stir the pot long enough, you're what's left at the bottom. Kameleon isn't just about jeans anymore, it's about us. It's about humanity. It's about the net result, and you're it.⁹⁷⁰

The modeling business presents itself as progressive by claiming to have overcome essentialist views on 'race' and identity. It seems in particular noteworthy that the world in Brunhuber's novel has abandoned the concept of the Canadian mosaic in favor of the Americanized melting pot model, in which cultural and ethnic differences eventually dissolve and a newly created hybrid 'race' will emerge. This new people will be united by common goals and shared sets of beliefs. In the eyes of the model scouts, Stacey represents the "net result" of the melting procedure.

Stacey is told to "go with the mystery."⁹⁷¹ As the future face of the Canadian melting pot, he is to float in the blurriness of his 'racial' past. He is

⁹⁷⁰ Brunhuber 2003, p. 204.

⁹⁷¹ *ibid.*

told to deny his black heritage in order to increase the mystery around his person. Stacey accepts the conditions of the contract and ignores the voices warning him against it. Simien, a dark-skinned model who has just left the agency although he had made it onto the road of success, advises him to remain true to himself and to resist the whiteheadian promises of a glamorous future:

Never let them create your image for you. I don't have to tell you what happens when they do. Why do you think black people are so messed up? Our image has been repackaged and sold off to the highest bidder. Soul is for sale. Our souls are disposable, like gloves.⁹⁷²

Simien has found inner peace and utter satisfaction by recognizing his African roots; he repudiates the norms set by white masculinity. Stacey is yet too absorbed in his wish to succeed to realize that he has to resist representation in order to set himself free.

Describing his protagonist's steps to failure, Brunhuber pinpoints the difficulty of living with the denial of one's past. He makes clear that the melting pot idea cannot overcome racism. On the contrary, it will reinforce essentialist ideas and force the individual into a rigid concept of identity that substitutes the dichotomy of black/white for a universal new 'race'. 'Race', however, cannot be simplified by resenting it as an old-fashioned belief; the past – national, communal and individual – cannot be denied. Stacey's efforts to meet the racialized expectations of the advertising campaign must therefore be in vain. He cannot be the chameleon he is supposed to be and Brunhuber leaves no doubt that Stacey's attempts to deny his past must end in failure.⁹⁷³ The novel's protagonist will have to learn the hard way: Drawn into a violent drug chase across Europe, Stacey Schmidt suffers defeat and loses everything: money, beauty, identity, dignity and hope. Exhausted and destitute he ends up in Spain.

⁹⁷² Brunhuber 2003, p. 135.

⁹⁷³ Brunhuber 2003, p. 280.

Close to death Stacey is found and saved by B, a black independent artist living in Spain, whose identity remains as obscure as her name. The novel's protagonist finds more than an intellectual companion in B, Stacey greets a soul mate - someone who is linked to his destiny by "the invisible nod, the acknowledgement of the past."⁹⁷⁴ What they share is their marked difference, their visibility, and their meridian existences far from home. B forces Stacey to look at himself and his past life; she guides him onto the path of recognition. When she asks him to spray a picture of himself onto her living room wall, the only image he can create is a creature in black and white without eyes, mouth and nose – a face that is only black on the outside and white inside, a creature lacking all of its senses.⁹⁷⁵ Unknowingly, Stacey has painted his distorted self. Like a mirror the creepy image on the wall shows what is left of him: an empty shell, senses lying ajar, unable to communicate with his surrounding, ghostlike, unrecognizable. When B asks for an explanation, he answers that it was "a character from a story [his] grandmother used to tell [him]."⁹⁷⁶ Although B feels distracted and troubled by the image, she tells him to leave it (or him) as it is.

B also discovers his love of photography and uses some of his shots in an exhibition of temporary art. Looking at the bits and pieces of his former life, Stacey painfully realizes that everything is in flux – but that the past cannot be wiped out. Everything in the exhibition changes, "from status to quo".⁹⁷⁷ Eventually, he recognizes his own image – fateful, tragic, and lonely.⁹⁷⁸ In the picture he is sadly sweeping a sandy beach with a broom, a futile undertaking resembling his current state of affairs. When his own gaze captures him, Stacey suddenly feels immobilized and crushed by the weight of his own

⁹⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 249.

⁹⁷⁵ Brunhuber 2003, p. p. 257.

⁹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷⁷ Brunhuber 2003, p. 270.

⁹⁷⁸ Cf. Brunhuber 2003, p. 271.

image. He flees into the sunlight, taking "a last look at [him]self through the broken window."⁹⁷⁹

Having lost track of time and space, Stacey engages in a three-hour mountain climb to cleanse his mind and purify his soul. Deliriously, he professes:

I'm tired of being a golem, pursued by the fashionable phantasms of fashion. [...] I'm tired of being black, Brazilian, Cuban, Indian, Mexican, Pakistani, Portuguese, Lebanese, depending on who's signing my voucher book. I know everyone has their cross to bear, but mine feels as if it's burning. My punishment is hereditary. I belong to a half-race of traitors. I've learnt my lesson. Being brown is exhausting."⁹⁸⁰

When he realizes his dream of becoming a successful model has come to an end, when he begins to see and to understand, Stacey loses consciousness under the hot mountain sun and is on the verge of parting with his life. It is almost as if both his body and his soul dissolve under the burning whiteness of the sunlight. Luckily, Stacey is rescued by some tourists and brought back to life by a native couple in the mountains. With the help of B's presence, he is slowly working his way to (physical and mental) consciousness. In the solitude of his refuge in the mountains, he experiences a decisive moment of truth: "All models are good chameleons, but I'm neither a good model nor a good chameleon."⁹⁸¹ He now knows that he has to define himself by his own standards in order to develop a sense of individuality and a feeling of wholeness. As a consequence of this acknowledgement of his self, Stacey turns his back on Canada and searches for an alternative life in Europe.

⁹⁷⁹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 271.

⁹⁸⁰ Brunhuber 2003, p. 274.

⁹⁸¹ Brunhuber 2003, p. 280.

In the final scene of the novel he is able to broaden the scope of his internal camera to a 360 degrees perspective – a perspective that, for the first time in his life, includes himself:

That's it. The first shot. I raise the loupe, hold the picture to the light, examine it from all angles. This single photograph almost makes up for everything that went into the taking. I close my eyes. For a beginning, it's not a bad start.⁹⁸²

In conclusion, one might emphasize that Brunhuber proclaims a life in pursuit of wholeness and advocates an understanding of identity as constantly in flux, as something that is shaped both by the inside world of the individual and the social circumstances of the outside. He criticizes the proclamation of a raceless future and refrains from presenting biracial people "as bridges connecting a racially divided world" as Maya Simpson rightfully states in a review of *Kameleon Man*.⁹⁸³ Comparable to bell hooks' suggestions in *We real cool*, Brunhuber's novel asks biracial men to replace the chronic emotional pain with a healthy self-esteem. In pursuit of wholeness, Brunhuber gives them the right to fail at basketball, to watch the learning network, to be interested in psychology and to play tennis – if they choose to. Biracial men must unlock the politics of representation by recognizing their pasts and by taking responsibility for their futures.⁹⁸⁴ Brunhuber's portrayal of masculinity is multilayered and complex. His concept is inclusive of biracial men and other performed or alternative forms of masculinity. Accordingly, he breaks with racialized social expectations and carves out a space that is shaped by individuality, creativity and even spirituality. In spite of the "angst of the new millennium"⁹⁸⁵ – the angst of having the old ways replaced by innovative postmodern approaches, the

⁹⁸² Brunhuber 2003. p. 282.

⁹⁸³ Simpson, Maya. "Ambiguous and Chic: Kim Barry Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man*." Review. *Canadian Literature*. 187 (2005). <<http://www.canlit.ca/reviews/187/6474_simpson.html>> Accessed on April 10th, 2007.

⁹⁸⁴ Cf. hooks 2004.

⁹⁸⁵ Brunhuber 2003, p. 266.

angst of loosing control – Brunhuber offers a vehement rejection of society's claim to categorize bi- and multiracial individuals in categories. He speaks against the oversimplification of 'racial' identity by revealing the subsistence of a racist discourse in Canadian society.⁹⁸⁶ In his view hybridity is neither a threat nor a promise to the future. Thus B explains to Stacey: "There is no difference between perception and reality. The world only exists as we see it."⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁶ Cf. Simpson 2005.

⁹⁸⁷ Brunhuber 2003, p. 265.

5. 'FROM SOLE TO WHOLE' - AFRICAN-CANADIAN MIXED-RACE POETICS

African-Canadian mixed-race literature reflects more than the vast diversity of black Canadian subjectivities and their various cultural and historical backgrounds. In fact, Canadian writers of mixed descent have created a mixed-race poetics that is able to challenge the established dichotomies of the literary establishment and calls attention to contexts, relationships, intersections and wholes instead. These writers create diverse bi- and multiracial protagonists who live on the cutting edges of cultures and explore the margins of racial, gendered and ethnic divides at Canada's societal periphery. Defying unproblematic classification, their works embody transcultural encounters and describe hitherto unrepresented interfaces between margin and center in Canadian society.⁹⁸⁸

Significantly, Canadian mixed-race writers' "zebra poetics" successfully counters the belief that the 'mulatto' is "poised in psychological uncertainty between two social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds."⁹⁸⁹ They refuse being reduced to a half-status and do not want to be made into a problem; they reject the feeling of uncertainty and defiantly claim the right to exercise their own choices for identification. Along this line, they underline that the emotional constraints experienced by bi- or multiracial people are indeed the result of racialized constructions of ethnicity and culture, intracaste color prejudice, homophobia, sexism and the perpetuation of an imperialist ideology including its adherence to a diametrical binary logic.

Consequently, it is not so much their in-between position as their claim to flexible and fluctuating identities that allows Canadian mixed-race writers a critique and redefinition of concepts like 'whiteness' and 'blackness'. They promote the introduction of new dimensions to the analysis of racialized

⁹⁸⁸ Cf. Mårald, Elisabeth. *In Transit: Aspects of Transculturalism in Janice Kulyk Keefer's Travels*. Umeå: Univ. of Umeå, 1996.

⁹⁸⁹ Stonequist 1937, p. 8.

identities and they are capable of casting a new light on identity formation as an everlasting and dynamic process. Most importantly, they emphasize the ambiguities of racial and ethnic identities and highlight the constructedness of such categories. Mixed-race writers thus create a fluid understanding of African-Canadian identities that refuses categorization in terms of mutually exclusive dichotomies like 'black' and 'white'.

By filling the interstitial space(s) between center and periphery with their unique and multiple voices, mixed-race writers not only contribute to a redefinition of the African-Canadian literary canon and call into question the national Canadian imaginary, but also likewise criticize any attempts at creating uniform, homogenous definitions of Canadian blackness. The answers to the question "Who is black?" is hence determined by the vast variety of subject positions, social experiences, cultural identities and historical contexts. An essentially 'black' or 'racially mixed' Canadian subject does not exist. Blackness must, once again, be regarded "a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantee in nature."⁹⁹⁰

In short, African-Canadian mixed-race literature and its poetics strive towards inclusiveness rather than cling to static, socially constructed categories. It represents a quilt: infinite, multilayered, fragmented and yet whole. Its various patches – or voices – tell different tales and enrich the Canadian story. African-Canadian mixed-race literature is capable of reminding the reader of the arbitrariness of borders of all kinds while simultaneously proving that boundaries can and must be transcended. As Kelley earlier argued in her analysis of the quilting metaphor in fiction, African-Canadian mixed-race writers are able to "make the world their own by taking [it] apart."⁹⁹¹ They

⁹⁹⁰ Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London, New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 223-227. p. 225

⁹⁹¹ Kelley, Margot Anne. "Sister's Choices: Quilting Aesthetics in Contemporary African American Women's Fiction." *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*. eds. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1994. pp. 49-67. p. 55

promote a holistic view of identity and reconceptualize the various senses of self and community in Canada. Consequently, the quilt created by African-Canadian mixed-race artists allows for integration, decentrality and non-hierarchical structures. It establishes "connections in the midst of fragmentation."⁹⁹² Most importantly, however, this strategy provides a significant means of self-empowerment and self-reclamation – making racially mixed African-Canadians 'whole' instead of 'sole.'⁹⁹³

⁹⁹² Kelley 1994, p. 55-56.

⁹⁹³ Cf. Elsley 1996, p. 4.

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APPENDIX I: BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON AUTHORS

Suzette Mayr lives and works in Calgary, Alberta. She graduated from the University of Calgary with an honor's degree in English and after completing her Master's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, she returned to Calgary, where she taught English, Creative Writing and Comparative Literatures at the Alberta College of Art and Design from 1993 to 2001. In 2002, Suzette Mayr was invited to teach as a Canadian Studies fellow at the University of Greifswald. After that, she worked as writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary to support young writers and to complete her third novel. Currently, Mayr teaches Creative Writing as an Assistant Professor at the University of Calgary. She is celebrated as a poet and novelist, the author of the acclaimed novels *Moon Honey* (Newest, 1995), a finalist for both the Georges Bugnet and Henry Kreisel First Novel Awards, *The Widows* (Newest, 1998), finalist for the Commonwealth Prize for Best Book in the Canadian-Caribbean Region, and most recently, *Venous Hum* (Arsenal Pulp, 2004). Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and in collaborations with visual artists. Her fiction, with its original voice, clipped, deadpan satirical style, is on this country's cutting edge of contemporary explorations into issues of race, sex and identity. Mayr is widely versed in contemporary 20th-century Canadian literature and particularly in representations of race and ethnicity. At the moment she is working on a new novel.

Mercedes Baines was born in 1964, graduated from the School of the Contemporary Arts (SFU) and lives and works as an independent artist in Vancouver. Next to her own creative work as a poet and writer, she is the artistic director of La Luna Productions, a Vancouver theatre company focusing on mixed-race issues and set on resolving boundaries between fixed constructs like 'race' and ethnicity. Baines has furthermore collaborated on many projects with BC youth. She initiated and participated in the Reclaiming Project – an elementary school program for telling family histories. Baines also teaches

acting to young adults throughout Vancouver, including Simon Fraser University and the Vancouver Youth Theatre. Mercedes Baines has co-written and performed in several plays, e.g. in *Peaches and Scream and White and Dark and Bittersweet*. She authored and acted in *L'Erotique* and in *Love Bites* – two one person shows about love and relationships set to Jazz music, published by Playwrights Union of Canada in 2003 and nominated for Best play at the 2000 Jessie Richardson Awards. She must be given credit for directing many plays: *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, *Afrocentric* and *Marking Time*. Baines's verse has appeared across country in various anthologies and periodicals, e.g. in *Miscegenation Blues* (ed. Carol Camper, 1994), *Poetry Nation*, *short fuse*, *North: New Directions in African Canadian Writing* (1997), Roy Miki's special West coast Line edition *Colour: an Issue* (1994) and in *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (ed. Wayde Compton, 2001). Recently, Mercedes Baines has completed a thoughtful comedy about love, sustainability and the environment, *June Bug and other Poetic Tales*. Currently, Baines is working on a new play, *Two Lip Tango*, a production of the Vancouver Art's Club Theatre.

Maxine Bailey was born in England and currently resides in Toronto. Yet she "yearns to be a resident of Barbados".⁹⁹⁴ Apart from being a dedicated mother, she writes, directs and produces theater in Toronto. Since January 2000 Bailey has been Director of Public Affairs for the Toronto International film Festival and has worked for Public Affairs TIFFG. **Sharon Lewis** is a television celebrity in Canada. She lives and works as an actress, author, filmmaker and TV host for CBC Television in Toronto. Moreover, she has written several screen plays and published two novels, *Mercury Retrograde* (1999) and *Plural Desires* (1995). Apart from the co-production of *Sistahs* (1994) with Maxine Bailey she has produced the play *girls night* (2000). Lewis proudly calls herself an activist.

⁹⁹⁴ "Maxine Bailey." *Testifyin': Contemporary African Canadian Drama*. Vol. 1. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2000. p. 278.

Although her mind and spirit frequently wander the streets of St. James, the beach at Macqueripe, and the Northern Range, **Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar** lives as a mother, writer and academic in Toronto where she teaches at the University of Toronto and at York University. She was born to a Ukrainian-Canadian mother and a racially mixed Trinidadian father whose genealogical roots can be traced to India and Venezuela. Her creative and critical writings focus on the construction of identities, particularly multiracial and diasporic ones. Her creative and critical work has appeared in several anthologies and essay collections. She has completed her M.A. thesis, *All o'we is me: Mixed-Race Identities in the Caribbean-Canadian Context* (1996), and is currently working on her Ph.D. with a project focusing on issues of mixed race identities and the relationship of 'race' and identity, too. Her work has been published in *Mercury Retrograde* (1999), ... *But where are you really from?* (1997) and in *Miscegenation Blues* (1994) as well as in *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root* (2000) and *Latin American Issues* (13.4 1997).

Having received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Sherbrooke University and having completed a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at The City University of New York, **Max Dorsinville** worked as a professor of English at McGill University from 1970 to 2006. In his academic work Dorsinville is appreciated as a specialist in Caribbean, Postcolonial and Modernist literature. Born into a literary family of Port-au-Prince (Haiti) in 1946, Dorsinville left the island in 1954 because his father had been appointed ambassador of Haiti in the United States. He is the author of several works of non-fiction and literary criticism. Besides, he published two novels.

Gérard Étienne is one of the most important and versatile voices of Black Canadian literature in Quebec. As a poet, novelist and essayist, he is best known for his work about la question de la negritude, for example, in his novels *Le négre crucifié: Récit* (Montreal, 1989) and *La Reine Soleil levee: Récit* (Montreal, 1987). Étienne was born in Cap-Haitien in 1936 and found himself catapulted to

the frontlines of Haitian cultural and literary movements when his first collections of poetry, *Au milieu des larmes* (Port-au-Prince, 1960), *Plus large qu'un rêve* (Port-au-Prince, 1960) and *La Raison et mon Amour* (Port-au-Prince, 1961) were successfully published. Imprisoned and tortured under the dictatorship of "Papa Doc" Duvalier, he had to choose exile in Canada in 1964. Étienne holds a B.A. from the University of Montreal and a Ph.D. from the University of Strasbourg in France. He has worked as a journalist and teacher at various Canadian universities and since 1971 he has been employed as a professor of Journalism and Linguistics at the University of Moncton in New Brunswick. Étienne is regarded as the founder of the Theatre de Matane and has authored more than 20 volumes of verse, fiction and literary criticism as well as on linguistics and semiology.

Kim Barry Brunhuber is a versatile artist and journalist who started his career at CBC radio before he moved on to become a reporter for CTV in Ottawa and Halifax. He now works as a national correspondent for the CBC in Calgary. Brunhuber was born in Montreal and received both a B.A. and M.A. in journalism from Carleton University. He feels rooted in Ottawa, but he has traveled the world as a filmmaker to produce reports and documentaries on various political and social issues of importance. Before focusing on journalism and writing, he successfully worked as a model for Ford in Toronto. However, he does not become tired of telling people that his first novel *Kameleon Man* (2003) is *not* an autobiographical novel. At the moment Brunhuber is working on his second novel, which is set in West Africa.

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW WITH SUZETTE MAYR (JULY 25TH, 2009)

Would you like to tell us a bit about you as a writer and your work? How do you see yourself?

At this point in my life, I have many doubts about this writing life. I put out my first book – the chapbook *Zebra Talk* – in 1991 so it's been almost twenty years now. I have to work hard to keep the material and my intentions pure, and not take to heart what people think. I still think it's too early to look back and sum up what I've done and try to categorize it.

Who or what has influenced you as a writer?

Young adult and adult books were a great escape and entertainment for me growing up, and reading and re-reading the Greco-Roman myths were an important part of my formation. Writing has been an essential way for me to connect with segments and parts of the world that I wouldn't otherwise know. And I was an indiscriminate reader – I still am, in some ways – there were many, many influences, but I particularly enjoyed and re-read work by writers such as children's and young adult fiction writers Louise Fitzhugh, E. Nesbit, and E. L. Konigsburg; adult fiction writers such as Faye Weldon, Angela Carter, Joyce Carol Oates, Salman Rushdie, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Margaret Atwood. Nowadays I also find just as much inspiration from television, movies, and visual art – filmmakers like David Cronenberg, David Lynch, Gus van Sant, Jim Jarmusch, Patricia Rozema, the Cohen brothers because of their unique vision and fearlessness around the ugly and/or the taboo; "freaks" photographer Diane Arbus; visual artists Michael Sowa, Jose Guadalupe Posada, and Jillian Tamaki; television writers Tina Fey and Joss Whedon. A lot of these artists create what looks ostensibly

like comic art or art in the horror vein, but with the exception of E. Nesbit perhaps, they are all keen critics of dominant culture in some way, or they make a point of shining their lights on the hidden or forbidden.

What would you consider significantly Canadian about your three novels Moon Honey (1995), The Widows (1998) and Venus Hum (2003)?

Defining Canadian literature or what makes a book Canadian is such an impossible task because of Canada's bizarre colonial history, and because so many books that are classified as part of the Canadian canon really have very little in common beyond geographical setting and/or the birthplace or adopted home of the author. I would say that my books are Canadian because their author is Canadian, and they are all set in Canada. But they are also Caribbean books, and German books. A wishy-washy answer, but it's all I'll commit to.

In your poetry and prose writings both gender, 'race' and sexual orientation play a significant role. You also refer to and question the existence of power relations like patriarchal domination and white supremacy. Could you somewhat explain these choices?

I think that 'race' and sexual orientation play a significant role in any writers' work, whether a writer chooses to acknowledge them or not. In a way, I think a book in which all of the characters are straight and Caucasian says a lot more about 'race' and sexual orientation than any one of my books does. When I write, I am writing to expose a truth – not *the* truth, but a truth. The truth that I know finds its origins in middle-class Alberta, Canada, from the point of view of a Canadian, biracial lesbian, a wife, a daughter, a writer and televisionaholic with several dying plants in her home.

How do questions of 'racially' hyphenated identities come in here?

I don't know.

I know this is a difficult question to ask, but do you feel that Canada's policy of multiculturalism has had an impact on the way 'racially' mixed Canadians are perceived?

No. People in the population at large still don't understand it. You either are something or you're not, and there's nothing in between or something that can fit into numerous categories. For a short while I was hoping that Barack Obama's biraciality would open the doors for a more public discussion, at least in North America, but that doesn't seem to have happened so far.

Do you think Canadian literature and its reception within and outside of Canadian borders have changed in the course of the last ten years? Where or what is Canadian literature heading for?

Oh, man. Canadian literature – at least the novels that are getting Canadian attention and awards nowadays – is overall really quite bad these days, and I blame in large part the Chapters/Indigo bookstore chain that has devastated the Canadian publishing industry. The publishing industry is in a terrible state, with publishers more afraid than ever to take risks on unusual writing or new authors, and small bookstores are shutting down all the time because of the impossible competition from Chapters. Because Chapters is only interested in books as a business (what sells versus what doesn't sell) and only certain kinds of books can guarantee the kinds of sales that would make the warehouse-sized Chapters/Indigo stores viable, and because Chapters orders so many books, they have hog-tied Canadian publishers into only

publishing work that they think can guarantee sales. So the writing has become very conservative, very unexperimental and not interesting or challenging. Well-known writers like Michael Ondaatje, Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood are currently writing material that is only watery imitation of their earlier, really good material, and the media and dominant Canadian literary establishment are sucking up these books like they're good, when really it's just because these writers are known quantities and so there's no such thing as taking a "risk" with an Ondaatje or Atwood novel, for example. In the past ten years or so, Canadian writing from what I can see has become hopelessly, overwhelmingly stuck in a hyper-realist, prosaic tradition that is not interesting at all. The only hope is the small publishers, but even they are afraid because fewer and fewer people are buying books, and the industry has been absolutely gutted by the Chapters/Indigo behemoth. I don't know what the future is especially now with e-books, and Google offering books for free online. We are entering a new age.

Discussions about 'race' or racism in Canadian literature and culture used to cause a major uproar way back in the 1980s. Since then Canada's literary landscape has changed in many ways. Do you think that 'race' and racism, exclusion and discrimination swaying along with them, have been addressed enough and it might be time to move beyond these concepts?

No, they haven't been addressed enough, and probably never will be.

In one of your emails that you wrote while I was working on my M.A. thesis you stated that it was issues of representation you were most concerned with in your writings. You talked about how writers tend to be categorized quickly and how some are selected to stand for the experiences of an entire group. Is this still a concern of your creative work?

It's even worse now with the publishing situation. I am having a very hard time having my next book published because it's too queer, and not in a comforting, Brokeback Mountain or Milk way (that is, one or both of the main gay characters dies at the end).

Where do you position yourself within Canada's literary landscape? Do you feel it distracting or unnecessary to be placed within certain categories? After all, it is very typical of your work to expose boundaries are artificially created.

I don't know where I fit. I don't fit anywhere right now. The categorizing is defeating me because my work doesn't fit into a category that literary agents or publishers can identify and target, audience-wise.

With the publication of your poetry chapbook Zebra Talk in 1991 you gave your literary debut. Looking back at this moment of your career as a writer and seeing your accomplishments of the day, how would you describe your development as an artist?

My development as a writer is very hard for me to determine because *Zebra Talk* is a collection of poetry, and I haven't really written much poetry since the publication of that chapbook in any kind of sustained way. I stopped poetry because it was too constraining for me, and I started writing fiction. Now I'm finding fiction to be less stimulating and satisfying so I am in a kind of limbo – maybe I will head into poetry-writing again, I don't know. In terms of the fiction – I think that I am learning as a writer to slow down more. *Moon Honey* is a very quick book – it reminds me of a comic book because it's written mostly as images in a sequence. The later material, *Venous Hum*, and this new manuscript, are a lot slower, a lot more reflective from my perspective. I am caring more about nuance and ambiguity with regards to content. With a book like *Moon Honey*, I was caring more about justice and vengeance.

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