

The Negotiation Of Hybridity:

**Kristjana Gunnars's *The Prowler*, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*,
and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here***

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**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master Of Arts**

**Department of English
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

July, 2003

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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BY

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One Slipping the Bonds of Identity: Kristjana Gunnars's <i>The Prowler</i>	12
Chapter Two The Reconstitution of a Hybrid Identity: Maria Campbell's <i>Halfbreed</i>	31
Chapter Three Inhabiting the Hybrid Space: Dionne Brand's <i>In Another Place, Not Here</i>	53
Conclusion	69
Works Cited	74

Abstract

Kristjana Gunnars, Maria Campbell, and Dionne Brand are Canadian writers who engage identity as a hybrid construction. My thesis examines the variance of responses to hybridity in Gunnars's *The Prowler*, Campbell's *Halfbreed*, and Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and demonstrates that hybridity is not useful as an all encompassing blanket term. These three narratives, written by a culturally diverse group, are found to be distinct in their negotiations of hybridity, both in relation to the construction of identity and as a literary form. Yet, their experiences are related in terms of the circumstance of an oppressive colonial history and highlight the scope of cultural and psychological determinants which continue to maintain colonial-based binary notions of previous centuries.

I contend that *The Prowler*, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place Not Here* similarly engage the dialogue surrounding binary opposition, most effectively, from the vantage point of their lived experiences. The challenges which Gunnars, Campbell, and Brand raise, in terms of constructed binary and hegemonic linguistic definitions, flow compellingly from their autobiographical accounts of difference and racialization. However, each author is shown to adopt hybridity as a postcolonial strategy in a different way. Gunnars seeks multiple hybridizations as an indication that she positively values her marginalization from both parental lineages. Her postmodern challenge to the demarcations of identity is found to be enmeshed with postcolonial concerns, issues that may be complicated by her position of privilege as white. Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* celebrates her hybridity by identifying herself as a member of a specific culture with a distinct

history. In doing so she makes manifest Robert Young's concept of "doubleness" which possibly allows for traces of re-circulated dominant ideologies. Finally, Brand's text functions as a representation of Bhabha's hybrid space. Yet her articulation of diasporic identity complexifies Bhabha's homogenizing notion of hybridity by maintaining an emphasis on gender, class, and race. The examination of these three distinct texts demonstrates the value in approaching postcolonial narratives with the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the complex range of experiences and strategies for cultural survival that the authors bear witness to. As a final outcome, it is hoped that this widening of the lens will put contemporary inequalities into focus.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to the University of Manitoba for a Graduate Fellowship and an UMSU Scholarship. I would like to thank my advisor Mark Libin for his encouragement, guidance, editing expertise, and for having faith in my idea. Thanks also to my committee members, Warren Cariou and Tina Chen, for their careful reading, insight, and counsel. A special thanks to Ruth Bagworth for her assistance and patience throughout my graduate studies.

Courses and conversations with Dr. Deborah Schnitzer, Dr. Robert Budde, and Dr. Laura Moss, both at the University of Winnipeg and here at The University of Manitoba, were instrumental in regards to laying the critical foundation necessary for the initial visualization of my thesis. A special thanks to Deborah for her enduring support and friendship.

I would like to gratefully and lovingly acknowledge my mother, Margaret Younka, for looking after my son, Niimin, for the many, seemingly endless, months that it took to complete this thesis. I also want to thank my mom for her constant support and encouragement. Love and thanks also to David for reading and listening to many drafts of this paper, his ideas and inspiration, and his invaluable sense of humor which lifted my spirits innumerable times. In addition, I must thank my family – Lisa, Barry, Amanda, Brooklyn, Trysten, Greg, Jean, and Samuel– for all their advice, encouragement, help with computer emergencies, playing with Niimin, many meals, and for always, always being there.

With love, I dedicate my thesis to my son, Davis Niimin.

Introduction

As Darwin discovered, the more varied the life forms in a given environment, the greater their chances of thriving. Hybrid configurations and diversified descendants of original species have the edge in the struggle for survival.

Françoise Lionnet

It is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.

Homi K. Bhabha

Kristjana Gunnars, Maria Campbell, and Dionne Brand are Canadian writers who discuss identity as a hybrid construction. Their experiences of marginalization in a racialized society form the backdrop for their narratives, which deal with the impositions of gender, class, and ethnicity, and, consequently, of racial discrimination. This paper examines the different ways in which Gunnars's *The Prowler*, Campbell's *Halfbreed*, and Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* negotiate hybridity, both in terms of the construction of identity and as a literary form. According to John McLeod, in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, hybridity is a significant field of analysis:

The concept of hybridity has proved very important for diasporic peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity. (219)

Gunnars's and Brand's semi-autobiographical texts, and Campbell's autobiographical narrative, all adopt different strategies for addressing the issue of identity formation. However, the writers' contrasting techniques similarly challenge the divisive and exclusionary colonial-based discourses of race which privilege the "pure" over the composite. The authors' narrative approaches to their examinations and negotiations of identity, as well as to their personal and collective histories of exclusion and difference, incorporate hybridity in terms of literary form. Gunnars's unabashedly self-reflexive text is a pastiche of folklore, fairytales, canonical literature, literary theory, personal family memories, and historical facts pertaining to the recurrent occupations of Iceland; Campbell's stark realism in *Halfbreed* blends the autobiographical with testimonial narrative; and Brand's novel embodies Homi Bhabha's "hybrid space" of articulation, circumventing the untenable self/other binary through the interpretive medium of a "third" site of enunciation.

In addition to the use of a range of writing strategies, the diverse backgrounds of the authors, in terms of geographic and cultural origins, provide a heterogeneous scope of experiences through which to engage the concept of hybridity. Diana Brydon supports the comparison of varying experiences of existence in the field of postcolonial discourse. In her essay "Introduction: Reading Postcoloniality, Reading Canada," Brydon states:

Postcolonial frames of interpretation are most enabling when they facilitate distinctions between different orders of colonial experience, rather than, on the one hand, conflating Third World and invader-settler societies as equally victimized or, on the other

hand, banishing settler colonies from the sphere of 'properly' post-colonial subject matter. (2)

It is crucial to acknowledge the distinct realities experienced and endured by both non-white and white colonized peoples to fully comprehend the lasting racialized effects of colonialism, or what Brydon terms "neocolonialism" (13). For this reason I have selected a heterogeneous group of texts, written by a diverse group of authors, for the focus of my study of hybridity. The narratives by Gunnars, Campbell, and Brand are striking in their distinct articulations of hybridity, yet are related by the circumstances of an oppressive colonial history.

In a series of vignettes, Gunnars's text *The Prowler* represents both her own, and her semi-autobiographical narrator's, hybrid identity as half "white Inuit" and half Dane – comprising both colonized and colonizer – in the context of Iceland's history of numerous occupations. Through the voice of her young narrator, Gunnars describes the experience of growing up with a hybrid subjectivity, both in Iceland and North America. Interestingly, Gunnars prefers marginalization over identification with either of her ancestries, and even aspires to further diversify her hybridity to prevent national classification of any kind. The postmodern form of her unconventional text aligns itself with the postcolonial desire to dismantle the confines of restrictive identities.

Gunnars's emphasis on the Icelanders as "white Inuit" – a group that she visually signifies as different, in terms of marked skin, from their oppressors – provides a problematic, yet engaging, challenge to conventional 'racial binaries.'

Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* is an unadorned autobiographical text which incorporates the social-political function of a testimonial into an explicitly personal narrative. The blended structure and purpose of the text – which strives to both reconstitute Campbell's identity as a

“Halfbreed” woman and educate white readers about the struggles that the Métis face in contemporary society – reflects Campbell’s personal oscillation between union and division as she redefines her damaged identity. The result of Campbell’s personal healing journey, the writing of *Halfbreed*, is considered groundbreaking as a social and political document. It addresses not only the systemic racism waged against “Halfbreed” people and the outcomes of poverty, marginalization, and the internalization of a negative self-image, but also effectively implicates the white Canadian reader as complacent due to the subtle indoctrination into a racist culture. Campbell’s exploration of her hybridity disturbs the colonial-based condemnation of her genealogy. However, the reality of skin colour as an enduring visual signifier of race complicates Campbell’s embrace and re-formation of her hybrid identity.

Dionne Brand’s writing occupies an “in-between” or “hybrid” position, characteristic of Homi Bhabha’s space “beyond” – beyond the

sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (Bhabha 37)

Through the intercession of this “beyond” or “Third Space,” Brand escapes “the politics of polarity” (39), and is “free to negotiate and translate” her “cultural identit[y] in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference” (38). Bhabha’s identification of a new space of “enunciation,” is significant to Brand’s writing, and her construction of Black diasporic identity, in that her task is to create presence where there is seemingly only absence.

Brand’s novel, *In Another Place, Not Here*, articulates the Caribbean diasporic experience, both in Caribbean and Canadian contexts, within the framework of a love story. The novel’s

sustained themes of flight and movement are enhanced by Brand's fluid and lyrical prose. Brand's consistent emphasis on movement throughout the text, in terms of writing technique as well as in reference to the imposed culture of migrancy and perpetual exile shared by her Caribbean characters – indicates its overall significance to her site of identity formation – the transitory hybrid space. Her writing style melds form and theme and reproduces Bhabha's "supplementary space of contingency" (185) as a textual locale to enunciate her existence.

The three texts summarized above approach the concept of hybridity in terms of identity formation, from different avenues and towards contrasting purposes. However, whether as a means to celebrate and reconstitute identity, refuse classification, or create a space within which to articulate identity, all of the authors enter the discourse with a painful awareness of the persistent psychological "fact" of skin colour. Due to this common concern, it seems appropriate to begin with Frantz Fanon's essay, "The Fact of Blackness," an excerpt from the influential *Black Skin, White Masks*, as a starting point from which to begin an appraisal of the development of hybridity as a postcolonial concept. Reviewing the development of the concept will also be useful in terms of positioning *The Prowler*, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place, Not Here*, which each offer a challenge to hegemonic racial definitions, within the larger discourse surrounding the concept of hybridity.

To Fanon, the psychological reality of Black skin, in terms of his own subjectivity, is most evident in the presence of whites. For example, with respect to variations in skin colour, Fanon states that he is "satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences," even though he knows that "little gulf[s] exist[ed]" (323). However, this sense of satisfaction is only self evident when Fanon is "among his own" – in other words, other Black people. If, however, he has

occasion to encounter a white man, Fanon's faith in "the equality of all [people] in the world"

(323) fails him, and a violent disturbance occurs in his psyche:

An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the [person] of colour encounters difficulties in the development of [their] bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (323)

Fanon's seminal cognizance of his "Black" self as a forcibly internalized "other," as expressed in "The Fact of Blackness," serves to articulate the terms of the racial binary in which Blacks are constructed as the embodiment of all characteristics opposed to those of the colonizer – in Fanon's circumstance, the 'civilized' French. McLeod observes that Fanon's racialized, marginalized subjectivity, the perception that he "was expected to behave like a black [person]" as opposed to a person, illustrates the danger of dismantling colonial constructs without first examining the "consequences of identity formation for the colonized subject" (20-21). Fanon's division of self, as described by McLeod, is:

An important, devastating part of the armoury of colonial domination, one that imprisons the mind as securely as chains imprison the body. For Fanon, the end of colonialism meant not just political and economic change, but psychological change too. Colonialism is destroyed only once this way of thinking about identity is successfully challenged. (21)

Campbell and Brand both discuss the significance of their skin colour as a visual signifier of identity, in both a psychological and physical sense, in their texts. Even Gunnars, who is white, creates a visual signifier of skin to reflect her articulation of her hybrid identity as part "white Inuit."

Although with similar intent, Edward Said represents the notion of "other" from a different

perspective than Fanon in his *Orientalism*. Said focuses squarely on the colonizer as the engineer of an all-encompassing social construct or of a “cultural and political fact,” rather than on the psychology of the colonized. The starting point for his investigation of Orientalism is that:

As much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. (132)

Said outlines, historically, the theories of degeneracy based on a racial binary model which “Orientalism” perpetuate. By the late-nineteenth century the binary was firmly in place and “Orientals” – Asian, North African and Middle Eastern peoples – were relegated to the inferior side of the binary:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was thus linked to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. (145)

The Prowler, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place, Not Here* each offer challenges to the dominant, divisive social perceptions of difference which continue to maintain binary notions of race. The fact of hybridity itself, as represented in the texts, contests a fixed racial binary. However, the hybrid identity is also constructed as degenerate, and relegated back to the binary model, revised to accommodate pure and composite classifications. Thus, the texts approach identity formation within the contexts of the reconciliation, or even circumvention, of the self and “other” split, the subversion of the power of language to create binary divisions, and the reconstitution of fractured and debased identities. For example, Campbell’s intent of educating a white readership and transforming the word “Halfbreed” from within acts as a challenge to the negative social construction of her people by whites, and Brand’s creation of a new hybrid space of articulation

attempts to avoid the self/other split.

Homi Bhabha brings the idea of hybridity into theoretical discourse with *The Location of Culture* and his concept of the space “beyond” – “beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” (Bhabha 1) – avoids the self/other split and allows for the possibility of identity formation in an “in-between” or hybrid space. As outlined by Nikos Papastergiadis in *The Turbulance of Migration*, in Bhabha’s writing,

the concept of hybridity is initially used to expose the conflicts in colonial discourse, then expanded to address both the heterogeneous array of signs in modern life and the various ways of living with difference. (192)

Although Bhabha has been criticized, particularly by Marxist theorists, for the homogenizing tendency of his theory – everyone is hybrid and lives with difference – his concept is significant as it points to the illusion of the racial binary and contends that identities are never fixed.

Accordingly, Papastergiadis characterizes the hybrid space as one in which “the status of representation is defined more by its limitations and distortions than by its ability to capture an ‘elusive’ spirit or hold the totality of presence” (193). This form of representation is particularly reflected, and effective, in terms of Brand’s diasporic identity formation in *In Another Place, Not Here*.

However, critics such as Arun Mukherjee are concerned with primarily analytical, generalizing theories, such as Bhabha’s. In *Postcolonialism: My Living*, Mukherjee asserts that she is,

Uneasy with the postcolonials’ erasure of it [race] in their attempt to create a postcolonial theory that can be applied to ‘all’ postcolonial writing...regardless of the differences of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. (216)

To Mukherjee, postcolonialism highlights a “painful” and “lived history” and not just a theoretical or literary tendency. Brand’s text, *In Another Place, Not Here*, articulates identity in Bhabha’s hybrid space, but goes beyond hybridity’s use as a blanket term due to her awareness of race, gender, and class as inextricably tied to identity. All of the texts demonstrate that their authors are cognizant of the fact that, as Mukherjee states: “‘Race’ has made a tremendous difference in how the empire treated us” (216).

Robert Young’s view of hybridity as tacitly adopting the dominant colonial-based discourse assumes the position that “race” may not have historically been as fixed a category as contemporary theorists presume. In his study of hybridity, *Colonial Desire*, Young wonders if the discourse is not:

still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed. The question is whether the old essentializing categories of cultural identity, or of race, were really so essentialized, or have been retrospectively constructed as more fixed than they were. When we look at the texts of racial theory, we find that they are in fact contradictory, disruptive and already deconstructed. Hybridity here is a key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism. If so, then in deconstructing such essentialist notions of race today we may rather be repeating the past than distancing ourselves from it or providing a critique of it. (27)

It is true that the re-circulation of dominant ideologies is a pressing concern in the field of postcolonial studies. However, the living pasts and present existences of Gunnars, Campbell, and Brand, articulated in their respective semi-autobiographical and autobiographical texts, are vital proof that the categories of race, despite Young’s suspicions to the contrary, remain fixed, as both internal and external constructs, and require further probing and dismantling.

Poet Fred Wah accounts for his own hybrid identity, in terms of racial definitions – “racial

genetically and culturally” – in his essay “Half-bred Poetics.” In contrast to Young’s supposition,

Wah presents his hybridity as a site, represented by the hyphen, in need of further disruption:

The hybrid writer must necessarily develop instruments of disturbance, dislocation, and displacement. The hyphen, even when it is noted, is often silent and transparent. I’d like to make the noise surrounding it more audible, the pigment of its skin more visible. (73)

In the above quote, an optimistic Wah clearly identifies race, in terms of skin colour as a visual signifier, as instrumental to “working at the ambivalences in hybridity.” In this capacity, Wah’s writing serves to individualize hybrid identity formation and deconstruct the actuality of his own racialized existence as part-Chinese, part-Scandinavian, as opposed to, for example, deconstructing nineteenth century racial discourse.

The Prowler, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place, Not Here* similarly engage the dialogue surrounding binary opposition, most effectively, from the vantage point of their lived experiences. The challenges which Gunnars, Campbell, and Brand raise, in terms of constructed binary and hegemonic linguistic definitions, flow compellingly from their autobiographical accounts of difference and racialization. However, each author adopts hybridity as a postcolonial concept in a different way. Gunnars seeks multiple hybridizations as an indication that she positively values her marginalization from both parental lineages. Her postmodern challenge to the demarcations of identity is found to be enmeshed with postcolonial concerns, issues that may be complicated by her position of privilege as white. Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* endorses and celebrates her hybridity by identifying herself as a member of a specific culture with a distinct history. In doing so she makes manifest Young’s concept of the “doubleness” of voice (Young 22) which possibly allows for traces of re-circulated dominant ideologies. Finally, Brand’s text functions as a

representation of Bhabha's hybrid space. Yet her articulation of diasporic existence develops Bhabha's homogenizing notion of hybridity by maintaining an emphasis on gender, class, and race.

The above theoretical positions foreground this comparative study of the variance in expressions of hybridity. The examination of these three distinct texts will demonstrate the value in approaching postcolonial narratives with the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the complex range of experiences and strategies for cultural survival that the authors bear witness to. As a final outcome, it is hoped that this widening of the lens will put contemporary inequalities into focus.

Chapter One

Slipping the Bonds of Identity: Kristjana Gunnars's *The Prowler*

**My father's people have always known that
potentially they do not exist.**

**My mother, who had been brought up in
Copenhagen, could not exactly resign herself to her new
home on a mountainous island in the North. She had
many reasons for taking her two daughters back to her
own city and did so frequently. I did not inquire what
the reasons were, but let myself be taken back and forth.
There was not much to choose between.**

Kristjana Gunnars, *The Prowler*

Introduction

In her semi-autobiographical text, *The Prowler*, Kristjana Gunnars establishes her/her girl narrator's hybridity based on mixed Danish-Icelandic parentage (this semi-autobiographical voice will be hereafter referred to as 'Gunnars's'). In terms of the history of Iceland as an occupied country, these hybrid origins also distinguish Gunnars as an embodiment of the synthesis of the colonizer and the colonized. Throughout the text she is identified with and identifies with both her Danish and Icelandic roots. However, in an overall sense, Gunnars clearly aligns herself with her Icelandic or "white Inuit" heritage and sympathizes with "the one who suffers" (*The Prowler*

142). This sympathetic function aside, Gunnars does not want to be labeled as either the oppressor or the oppressed, and so strives to further hybridize her identity to elude such classification. This paper will examine *The Prowler*'s depiction of the effects of Gunnars's hybrid parentage, as well as her strategy to embrace and multiply her hybridity in an effort to escape the hegemonic confines of absolute definitions of nationality. Gunnars's genre and writing techniques in *The Prowler* are instrumental to her thematic goal of slipping the boundaries of prescribed identification.

The Prowler is a text which links the postcolonial with the postmodern in its oppositional stance to genre, writing convention, and canonical literature. Linda Hutcheon argues, in "Circling the Downspout of Empire," that the dominant elements of postmodernism, "irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity," are also examples of the means that postcolonial literature "has at its disposal" to subvert "from within the dominant culture" (135). *The Prowler*'s postmodern form defies generic classification and abandons the traditional literary boundaries of chapters and page numbers [text references refer to section numbers]. Gunnars's openly acknowledges that

The text conspires in a form of truancy...

There is an admission that duties have been shirked. That the text has been prowling in the reader's domain. Telling itself and then interpreting itself. Incorporating that which does not belong to a story. Posing itself as a question: it may not be a story. Perhaps it is an essay. Or a poem.

The text is relieved that there are no borders in these matters. (*Prowler* 164)

The concept of boundaries, in general, collapses as the narrator, author, reader, and text prowl in

and around the margins of one another's tenuous jurisdictions. For example, the narrator evades responsibility for the text by infringing the reader's territory: "it is not my story. The author is unknown. I am the reader" (119).

The pervasive slipperiness of identities and boundaries in *The Prowler* is a thematically driven writing tactic. Comprising 167 sections, the metafiction illuminates Gunnars's rhysomatic thought and writing processes. In doing so, *The Prowler* obscures the demarcations between wartime Icelandic experiences which pre-date Gunnars's birth and her narrator's own experiences, both real and imagined, as a part Danish – part Icelander in both Europe and America: "It is a story where the boundary between that which is written and that which is lived remains unclear" (133). Similarly elusive are the consolations of national identity, blurred by Gunnars's self-constructed and multifaceted hybridity.

In light of this self-generated dismantling of borders, in terms of identity and the text itself, Diana Brydon makes a direct connection between the postmodern and postcolonial elements in *The Prowler*, in her essay "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy." This article refers to the text as "a post-modernist celebration of multiplicities" (Brydon 199). This "celebration" is tempered, however, by the text's appreciation for the corporeal aspects of Iceland's colonial politics of difference and scarcity. In other words, "those who eat best win" (Gunnars 155). Gunnars's writing strategies and the general themes of identity and oppression in *The Prowler*, have prompted Brydon's appraisal of the text as "post-modernist devices serving post-colonial ends" (Brydon 198). Similarly, in *Mapping Our Selves*, Helen Buss recognizes Gunnars as the perfect candidate to undertake self-construction in such a text:

She has lived through what culturally amounts to several centuries of change in a life of less than fifty years and has lived a life of such international proportions that the lives of many seemingly diverse others are intimate texts of her own living. Born in Iceland in 1948, when that country existed in almost Third World and very isolated conditions, in a culture whose history and its reasons for existence were tied to colonial conditions, Gunnars has experienced the full force of post-colonial change living in Denmark, the United States, Canada. (Buss 198)

Gunnars, who immigrated to Canada in 1969, further complicates the postcolonial discourse in that her text's perception of Icelandic existence, as well her own multifaceted identity formation, intertwines elements of gender, class, and social politics, including displacement, with considerations of "race" and hybridity. Language is also extremely significant to Gunnars as a determinant of difference, as well as a vehicle for identity construction. Her description of the hardships endured by the Icelandic "white Inuit," identifiable by their fair complexions and hair, will be shown to be a provocative reversal of the "racial binary." However, significantly, Gunnars complicates her own reversal by introducing her own visual signifier, that of skin marked by disease, with which to differentiate the colonizer from the colonized. Gunnars's insinuation of a parallel between Icelanders and the non-white Aboriginal group of the North further unsettles her binary inversion. The extreme deprivation and contagion suffered by her people, as "white Inuit" will be explored as a dominant theme of the novel. Diana Brydon's "The White Inuit Speaks," previously mentioned, with its analysis of the hybrid positioning of Icelanders – privilege of "race" complicated by the under-privilege of place – will be most useful to my examination of Gunnars's multiple points of hybridity in *The Prowler*.

The “White Inuit”

Gunnars invites a comparison of conditions between Icelanders and the non-white Inuit of the Canadian North in her text. The Inuit, as a visually signified colonized people, are a symbolic influence in terms of her representation of the “white Inuit.” In relation to Gunnars’s own hybridity and desire for an unfixed identity, her perception of the “white Inuit” as an oppressed people plays a significant role. Notably, Gunnars refers to the Icelandic people as the “white Inuit” twelve times in *The Prowler*. This name was given to the Icelanders by Danish colonizers. Ian Adam states, in his essay on *The Prowler*, that Iceland had “no indigenous population prior to European arrival” but that the “originally European settlers are in fact now identified as indigenous through the contemptuous term ‘white Inuit’” (2). The re-appropriation of the designation by Gunnars is a statement of self-naming in the language of the oppressor. For example, she names herself and her sister “two white Inuit girls” (56) when they visit their mother’s home in Denmark, the land of the former colonizer. Gunnars has “contrived a poetics of naming” as an act of survival, believing that “only that which is named is able to live in language” (52). This self-naming is a bold maneuver considering the colonial, patriarchal framework within which Gunnars is situated. She did not live in “a country where children were asked: what is your name? Instead we were asked: who owns you?” (94). Throughout *The Prowler*, Gunnars commandeers the colonizer’s name for her paternal lineage, both drawing attention to it as a “contemptuous” (Adams 2) and confining descriptor that she wants to escape, but also as a means to create a parallel between the Icelandic and Inuit as colonized peoples.

Gunnars presupposes Icelanders as an indigenous group in *The Prowler*. As opposed to Adam’s argument that the Icelanders were constructed as an indigenous group by the label “white

Inuit” itself, Gunnars’s initial reference to the name: “we are the white Inuit. We eat fish. And in summers we graze like sheep among the mountain grasses” (*Prowler* 7), acts as an invocation of the natural indigenusness of Icelanders. In *Speaking In Tongues: Contemporary Canadian Love Poetry By Women*, Méira Cook refers to this excerpt as a “trope” employed to

locate the home place [Iceland] as an Edenic pre-Lapsarian country whose inhabitants find themselves placed in its landscape by Divine right, as opposed to the more hospitably habitual mode of occupation which requires a definition of nationality in which colonization is the structuring principle. (Cook 62)

Here, Gunnars’s description of the “white Inuit” is considered a rejection of imposed “definition[s] of nationality” based on occupations and, again, their indigenusness and natural affiliation with the land is emphasized and legitimated. The author redirects the meaning and origins of the term “white Inuit” to suit her own border dismantling purposes.

Gunnars takes ownership of the name “white Inuit” and chooses to emphasize their identity in *The Prowler*. In doing so, in the Canadian context, Gunnars aligns her people – “us in the North” (38) – with the marginalized, visually signified non-white Inuit. In “Gender, Narrative, and Desire in *The Prowler*,” Daniel Coleman supports my perception of Gunnars’s correlation of “white Inuit” with “oppressed native peoples of the arctic zone” (21). This connotative association serves the text’s function as a purporter of white subjectivity. With her depictions of the occupied and discriminated against “white Inuit,” Gunnars subverts the inherent racialization associated with the “racial binary” (i.e. the privileging of whiteness). The best example of the reversal occurs when the narrator explains that the visual signifier of fairness was a liability to the colonized Icelanders. She considers the darkening of her hair colour at puberty a blessing with which to hide her “white Inuit” identity: “I was one of the fortunate ones, for at the age of

thirteen or fourteen my blond hair turned brown. When that happened everyone thought I was Russian because that is what I looked like. I was called the little Russian girl and was content with that" (19). She even studies Russian literature and shows off her father's Russian book collection and brags about his proficiency in the language in an effort to help "spread the rumor." The desire to identify herself with the darker Russians is an inversion of the binary, specific to the Icelandic social/political situation. Generally speaking, both historically and systemically, in terms of establishing "a relation of dominance," in colonial discourse there is "one underlining binary" which constructs the colonized as visually signified dark and the colonizer as light in pigmentation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 24).

At a girls' school in Denmark, Gunnars is ill at ease with her hybridity and, once again, disavows both sides of her composite origins. In the Copenhagen school, discrimination against and segregation of the "white Inuit" is explicit, and, again, Gunnars does not want to be identified with this marginalized group. Half "white Inuit" herself, she speaks about the Icelandic girls as if she is detached from their situation:

There were fifty-nine Danish girls in this school and eleven Icelandic ones. The white Inuit girls were not liked because they had packs of dried fish in their rooms and they did not lift their feet properly when they walked. The rumour was that they were too lazy to lift their feet. They bunched up together in the dining room, in the gym, in the halls, and only made friends with each other. They talked about going home again and thought the Danish girls were effete. (65)

Interestingly, the hybrid Gunnars, also half Dane, is content to be marginalized from both groups and fall "into no category":

The shufflers, as they were sometimes called,
did not count me in their group. They thought I was
one of the effetes. The effetes did not understand why
I was never seen with the shufflers. (65)

Gunnars makes no attempt to publically demonstrate her membership to either group. Even though she does later betray her loyalties when she becomes “an apologist for the shufflers” (65), trying to justify their perceived laziness to the Danish girls, she accepts and prefers her displacement from both circles and the less restrictive identity as a suspected “Russian genteel.” Later in the novel, her defence of the “white Inuit” girls is explained by Gunnars. She may not openly identify herself with the disadvantaged Icelanders, or any group, but, Gunnars states, “I recognized even then that it is not possible to sympathize with all sides at once. When you choose your allegiances, I thought, you ally yourself with the one who suffers” (142).

Gunnars’s fidelity to the oppressed “white Inuit,” whom she does not want to be affiliated with, is a powerful contradiction to the colonial concept of ‘passing.’ She obviously identifies with the Icelanders. As already stated, the narrator names herself and her sister “white Inuit girls” and uses self-inclusive terminology such as “we are the white Inuit” (7) and “us way up here in the North” (83), but it becomes possible for her to circumvent the inequality associated with being named “white Inuit” by others. Hair colour and language, some of the more mutable characteristics to achieve “passing” for membership in a different ethnic/racial group, are her means of de-classification. The narrator chooses to elude both her inherent national designations, which would mark her as either colonizer or colonized, and, fortunately, she has the capacity to “pass” for a number of international identifications. Other visual signifiers of “race,” such as skin colour, are not as adaptable to individual resolve.

However, the narrator does not always escape classification within the context of her hybrid ancestry:

In my father's country I was known as the dog-day girl, a monarchist, a Dane. Other kids shouted after me: King-rag! Bean!

In my mother's country other kids circled me haughtily on their bicycles. They whispered among each other on the street corners that I was a white Inuit, a shark-eater. The Iclander (16).

Here, the narrator relates her outsider status and experience of discrimination within both parental nationalities. Her hybrid heritage situates her precariously on the border between occupier and occupied. It is this uncomfortable positioning which Gunnars strives to elude by the further complexifying of her hybridity through diversification of language. Emigration also becomes a means for Gunnars to evade the inherent tensions of her origins. In the Preface to *Unexpected Fictions*, Gunnars expresses the "relief" of Icelanders, like herself, who came to North America and "were, in fact, released from [this] history": "In North America you were able, quite simply, to forget about your past if you wanted. You could defect, go to the city, become a new person" (*Unexpected Fictions* xix). For Gunnars, in terms of her desire to re-create herself and her own experience as a white immigrant in North America, it was a less formidable task to negotiate a fresh elusive identity in the "new world" than in the insular historical framework of Icelandic occupation.

Language

Brydon further articulates the narrator's desire to be marginalized from both her maternal Danish and paternal "white Inuit" ancestry, as well as from any category. Brydon summarizes the "white Inuit" condition in *The Prowler* as "already hybrid, privileged by race and underprivileged by location." Thus, Gunnars's congenital hybridity is further multiplied:

The narrator's already hybrid identity as white Inuit is further complicated by different parental legacies, by language, by class, and by changes in the power structures governing her island as well as shifts in geographical location. Her response to such endless discriminations of difference is to multiply the contaminations. (198)

Consequently, Gunnars decides to become a prowler of borders and willfully transgress categorization. Seeing "familiarity with a language" as the determinant of identity, she will study "methods of escape with greater intensity," learn many languages and "confuse them all" (133). In contrast to Brydon's choice of terminology, Buss prefers the term "braiding," rather than "contamination," to describe the narrator's strategic hybridity: "for there is no sense in Gunnars's text that she feels the negative sense of contamination from any of her multiplicity of selves, rather, as she says in H.D.'s words, 'You are contained in the things you love' (section 54)" (Buss 199). To my mind, Brydon chooses the more negative term "contamination" to address the narrator's linguistic challenge to the myth of "cultural purity" associated with the North, and national absolutes in general: she adopts "contamination," in order to subvert myths of cultural authenticity, of purity of identity. The word "contamination" insinuates a suspicion towards notions of purity rather than towards the concept of multiplicity of selves.

Gunnars, herself, is linguistically diversified. Although Iceland is officially unilingual, it is

unofficially trilingual, and most Icelanders speak many languages. In Gunnars's essay, "Words on Multilingualism," she states:

Those of us who come from such small European countries have never lived anything but multilingualism. English was my fifth language but it has become the dominant one over the years. Languages have become to me like items in a department store: they can be picked up at any time. (3)

Just as Gunnars herself shops for languages that suit her purposes, Gunnars's narrator in *The Prowler* selects languages to serve her identity-fracturing goals. The problem is that she has a difficult time finding a language that will not identify her with past, present, or future colonizers of Iceland. In this context, even Gunnars's preferred Russian identity becomes suspect. As Cook observes,

Her attempt at evading identification through language – a process that increasingly aligns her with the unnamed prowler who slopes through this narrative – is unsuccessful precisely because the country in which she lives seems to allow for an apparently unending succession of occupiers, each enforcing their own tongue. If she were to become fluent in Russian, she thinks, this would only mark her as a colonist should the Russian army come to occupy this small island. (38)

Gunnars's prowling of languages and her noncompliance with any one designation of nationality, as identified by language, is epitomized by her prowling narrative itself. A further example of Gunnars's slipping in and out of language occurs at a time when Iceland is occupied by Americans and Gunnars attempts to conceal her intimacy with the English language.

When English classes started, we were around thirteen. It was discovered, to my own mortification, that I already spoke English. I tried to defend myself. I denied my knowledge of English and said to the others: I don't really know the language, it only seems that way. (*Prowler* 133)

It is as if the dominant language has impregnated her consciousness against her will, further subverting national myths of cultural integrity. The narrator was just “getting by” in the aftermath of Danish colonization, due to the stigma of speaking her Danish mother’s native tongue, when she laments that “fate has to turn around and join me up with the new colonizers as well” (133).

However, Gunnars’s narrator learns that there are advantages to mastering the master’s language. Gunnars describes Iceland as a country where children are not allowed to speak, aligning the colonized Icelanders with the powerlessness of children. In contrast to her muted Icelandic voice, Gunnars is given the liberty to speak in her Icelandic school because she knows Danish, the language of the former colonizer. For example, her principal grants her leave to speak, answer her own questions, and even skip a grade in school because she “already” understands Danish: “He was grinning warmly. I understood he had just given me the right to speak” (41). Despite the obvious advantages of knowing Danish, Gunnars and her classmates are not eager to gain the advantage of the oppressor’s language. Their Danish language class becomes “a kind of cold war” (82). Lessons are boycotted by the students, even by Gunnars, who already knows Danish due to her maternal link to the language. The students, including Gunnars, want the language of their former colonizer removed from the curriculum, identifying the language as a bond with the enemy itself. This overt linguistic battle is indicative of Gunnars’s internal anxiety as she negotiates her hybridity as half colonizer-half colonized. When their disgruntled teacher finally abandons the miscreant class, Gunnars “detected a note of triumph in his exit. There are some people, he seemed to insinuate, who are there own enemies” (82). Gunnars interprets her hybrid positioning as situating herself as her own enemy. This is why she does not take advantage, as the principal encourages, of knowing the oppressor’s language but

strives to further complicate her identity with multiple languages.

Skin as a Visual Signifier

In Gunnars's Iceland battles are waged in language class and reading Russian novels becomes a personal crusade. However, diverse linguistic aspirations aside, Gunnars's narrator, as a "white Inuit," also raises the issue of skin as a visual signifier in *The Prowler*. The text conceives of Gunnars as hybrid due to an ancestry mixed between two opposing nationalities, and Icelanders, in general, are considered hybrid, according to Brydon, based on their privilege of whiteness being compromised by the under-privilege of their geographical and political positioning. Focusing on the Icelandic's white skin, I would like to return to the concept of the "racial binary" and the notion of skin colour as a visual signifier of difference between the colonizer and the colonized. The Danes name the Icelanders the "white Inuit" during their occupation of Iceland, and, in doing so, identify them with the non-white Inuit of the North. The binary of dark/colonized, light/colonizer does not fit the Icelandic situation, as it does in the Canadian context. However, Gunnars's comparison of Icelanders with a non-white colonized group is significant in terms of the pertinence of race discourse and a hierarchy of human difference. The concept of a racial hierarchy acts as the psychological justification required for colonial powers, such as the Danes and others who have occupied Iceland, to authenticate dominance.

To my mind, it is clear that Gunnars's re-appropriation of the name "white Inuit," as previously mentioned, affiliates the Icelanders with their non-white counter-parts. In *The Prowler*, Gunnars also highlights the "indigenous" connection of the "white Inuit" to the land. She further pursues the correlation by emphasizing the "classless" nature of traditional Icelandic society: "they

come from a classless society" (*Prowler* 65). Generally speaking, classlessness is seen as a characteristic of Inuit and other indigenous cultures. It is less clear, however, whether or not Gunnars uses the comparison to equate the suffering of white and non-white Inuit, or as a means to aid her examination of her hybrid positioning as privileged by race and underprivileged by locale.

Gunnars repeatedly delves into the history of imposed deprivation suffered by her people: "The white Inuit were prevented from leaving the island and prevented from trading with other nations. As a result there was not enough food. The population decreased" (126). In contrast to her Danish mother's country, where "there was a great deal of food" (64), the narrator rhetorically queries as to Iceland's privation: "why has there been such a long history of starvation?" (44). Limited mobility, segregation, and virtual genocide through starvation are recognizable as the same colonial tactics waged against the First Nations in North America. The acute hardship experienced by the Icelanders due to discrimination and poverty even results in the narrator's sister's resolution to starve herself to death: "I just don't want to be who I am" (18), she explains. In this act she achieves agency over her own body and rejects her imposed identity. The impossibility of being able to live within a circumscribed definition is illustrated by the sister's will to die. Conversely, for Gunnars, this despair fuels the development of multiplicities with which to evade any confinement of her hybrid identity.

Gunnars's implication of a similitude of condition between Icelanders and other Aboriginal groups in *The Prowler* is complicated, in terms of the "racial binary," by the fact that the "white Inuit" are white and sometimes fairer than their colonizers. Perhaps due to an awareness of skin difference, based on the concept of whiteness as the norm, as a signifier of the colonized, Gunnars

visually marks the skin of the subjugated Icelanders. She does this with the physical inscription of deprivation in the form of disease. The narrator articulates the significance of disease to the national psyche as she describes the health preservation-center on the island: "the center was built to eradicate tuberculosis, leprosy, scurvy, polio. In that country those diseases were the national inheritance. They molded people, their thoughts, their aspirations" (36). To convey a congenital quality to afflicted skin, Gunnars places the narrator in her diseased sister's hand-me-down clothing, just prior to her own diagnosis of a skin disorder:

In silence I began to peel off my older sister's hand-me-down clothing. Jacket, mittens, sweater, undershirt. I stood in the middle of his [the doctor's] room naked to the waist and extended my arms for him to see. There was nothing to say. He could see for himself. My skin. Something had happened to all of my skin. (37)

Later, Gunnars refers to the above scene, in which the narrator is horrified to discover that her skin is marked, as a decisive moment of truth within the text:

There is a further suspicion that if the truth were to appear it would be a paltry thing in rags. It would be small and bony, taking off its hand-me-down clothing and exposing its embarrassing skin. There would be fear there, perhaps of a kind of leprosy, and an aura of hopelessness. It would be a speechless thing. (156)

In this passage, Gunnars links diseased skin, as the visual signifier of difference, to the colonial condition laid bare. Again, the "hand-me-down" reference calls attention to the "white Inuit's" racially-based heritage of contagion.

When Gunnars asks her principal, "why is this the only place in Northern Europe where there are lepers?" (41) we learn that the country's pathology is caused by external contaminants as well

as by hereditary deprivation. The principal answers that Iceland “is where other countries dumped their lepers. They did not think the people on this remote island counted” (41). There was a leprosy and a tuberculosis sanatorium placed on the island to accommodate the influx of illness. This imported pestilence is significant when considered alongside the myth of the Inuit as a pure race, at risk of contamination. According to Brydon, the “Inuit can seem a last symbol of cultural integrity” (Brydon 198). For this perspective, Gunnars’s “white Inuit” become further hybridized with the introduction of foreign pathologies into their environment.

The Icelanders’ bodies are disfigured by rashes, scabs, and sores related to malnutrition, as well as epidemics such as leprosy and polio. To emphasize the import of disease as a visual signifier of Iceland’s oppression, the narrator’s memory, as well as Gunnars’s text, itself, is blemished:

There was much illness. Large patches of months and years were blotched out. A kind of ink stain appeared in the text, where the consciousness became obliterated...A desire to forget.

The ink stains did not always have names. Often they were called the flu, or they bore the titles of common childhood illnesses. On one occasion it was a form of typhoid fever. On another occasion it was suspected of being polio. But most of them were just there, frequent collapses, a way of life. (103)

This smear over memory and the text is a coping mechanism to deal with pain and suffering. In her interview with Cristina Gheorghe, Gunnars addresses this concept of repressed afflictions as “stains” over memory:

We engage in selective memory. We blot out what was painful and unresolved. We hold on to the good moments. We notice things in relation to past experience. Those are survival techniques that the mind has developed, just as the body introduces a form of morphine into the body instantly, when a

pain inducing event occurs. *The Prowler* is a confrontation of sorts with that particular awareness. (Gheorghe 53-54)

As previously mentioned, Gunnars expresses a sense of “release” and “relief” at the possibility of crossing borders, of shedding her skin and becoming a “new person” in the North American context. The narrator, as an immigrant in America, no longer bears the burden of her Icelandic history as a physical stigma or as a label. Her people “were not called the white Inuit there, and how I liked America” (*Prowler* 140). She observes that blemishes or “defects” are less conspicuous in North America. However, the narrator senses that she is still marked, or scarred with difference. She discerns, “if there are scars they are all on the inside. Only occasionally do they surface, but when that happens it is a shattering experience” (149). Thus the corporeal imagery of marked skin is sustained throughout *The Prowler*, ultimately utilized to represent inner suffering. Thus, immersion in North American society is a partial cure for the narrator’s precarious, uncomfortable positioning as a hybrid of both colonizer and colonized, as well as in terms of privilege and under-privilege. Mobility also allows for her further multiplication of, and even evasion, of identity. However, it remains only a partial remedy because the inner scars, remnants of discrimination and a circumscribed existence, are immutable.

Conclusion

Gunnars uses skin to convey difference, but language is her focal point of concern in terms of issues of inequality, both in Iceland and, particularly, as an immigrant to Canada. The author's experience of being labeled as an "ethnic" writer in Canada, because English is not her first language, has become the new front for the identity debate. She has crossed many boundaries to re-create herself as a poet in Canada and rejects yet another narrowing label adhered to her person. In her paper, "Words on Multilingualism," she confronts the invitation to participate in a "ethnic" issue of a literary journal by discrediting the descriptor: "An 'ethnic' writer always struck me as somehow not a full member of the writing community in Canada and the term itself seemed tainted with a vague form of racism" ("Words" 1). Here, Gunnars makes the same parallel between language differences and the subversion of classifications based on race that *The Prowler* plays out. However, in terms of skin colour, white privilege is not compromised by her relocation in Canada, and unlike non-white immigrants, Gunnars has the "grant," to use Dionne Brand's expression, of inclusion and the freedom to mold her own identity.

In her article, "Icelandic-Canadian Literature," Daisy Neijmann characterizes Icelandic immigrants as experiencing "rapid integration into the larger Canadian host society," alongside their attempt at an "exclusively Icelandic settlement" in order to preserve their language and culture. Gunnars, an outsider to the Icelandic community at large, is not concerned with cultural purity, as *The Prowler* attests to. In *The Icelandic Voice*, Neijmann comments specifically on Gunnars's incorporation of her Icelandic immigrant experience into her writing,

In Gunnars's works, we find a different focus on the theme of ethnic identity. As an immigrant who is forever on the move, she is not so much concerned with the recovery and affirmation of heritage. Ethnic

identity for her is not an extra dimension of the self, but an experience of duality. Her focus is not so much on dispossession and affirmation, but on dislocation and integration. (248)

Of the two scenarios for the future direction of Canadian literary discourse which Enoch Padolsky outlines in "Ethnicity and Race: Canadian Minority Writing at a Crossroads," Gunnars, in terms of the above quote characterizing her work, and *The Prowler* itself, definitely corresponds to the "one in which a plurality of elements, including race and ethnicity" provide the basis. Yet, Gunnars's extensive use of skin as a visual signifier of difference in *The Prowler*, points to her dire cognizance of Padolsky's alternate scenario "in which race provides the primary 'irreducible and fundamental constitution' of the social order" (Padolsky 21). In the North American context, a setting in which Gunnars is no longer underprivileged by "race," her postmodern "challenge" to the boundaries of identity can be seen as what Hutcheon refers to as "the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses" (Hutcheon 131). However, *The Prowler* goes beyond the boundary of identity deconstruction for its own sake in its exploration and treatment of the postcolonial concerns – race, skin colour, language, colonial politics – associated with its oppositional stance to the confines of fixed identities.

The Reconstitution of a Hybrid Identity: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

And I looked all over, traveled all over, finally went home after many years. The writing of *Halfbreed* was part of that journey home. I found it there, in the spirituality of my own people. Their ability to laugh, to dance, to celebrate something as basic as life.

Maria Campbell, *The Book of Jessica*

Introduction

In *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell embraces her hybridity, both as a restoration and revision of her “Halfbreed” identity, as a means to escape colonial binaries and hegemonic linguistic and racial definitions. The autobiographical text traces Campbell’s personal healing journey as a “Halfbreed” woman, from a self conception based on shame and self-hatred, to one of self-acceptance and pride in her people. The narrative allows the reader an intimate and graphic view into Campbell’s impoverished childhood in Northern Saskatchewan, her abusive failed marriage, and her battles with prostitution, drugs, and alcohol. Throughout, Campbell’s resolve and sense of humour are evident, and her story ends with her addiction recovery and life as a social activist. By the end of the narrative journey, Campbell arrives at the position of awareness from which she begins the healing process of writing *Halfbreed*. By means of her recollections of Métis dances, weddings, funerals, family hunting trips, and outings into town, alongside the recounted stories of

her elder family members and the inclusion of historical facts, Campbell fashions a statement of her life, as well as the lives of her people, from times predating her birth to the present. In unadorned and sometimes graphic prose, Campbell's story describes physical displacement, poverty, and negative self identity as facts of her people's racialized existence.

The violent effects of racism, as a symptom of colonialism, is an explicit overtone of Campbell's autobiographical narrative, recounted with the clear purpose of enlightening a white Canadian audience:

I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams. (Campbell 2)

Campbell's journey of self discovery, through the process of writing *Halfbreed*, is also intended to promote community healing, as well as to educate a white readership. Kateri Damm's essay "Dispelling and Telling" affirms the success of the text to these ends:

It [*Halfbreed*] became an important public act of telling and was [sic] therefore, both a social and political act. By speaking out, Campbell, through her story/telling gives voice to a silence born of oppression, hardship and domination. It speaks the unspoken and unspeakable. It lifts the veneer of complacency in Canadian society and shines a bright light on the racism supporting our nation state. (Damm 108)

Through directly addressing and engaging politically with her white audience, Campbell conversely constructs them as outsiders. In "Making Faces: Defiance and Humour in Campbell's *Halfbreed*," Kate Vangen refers to Campbell's double voice of inclusion and exclusion in terms of her approach to her audience:

While readers are invited to participate in the narrative, made both palatable and realistic...they nonetheless remain outsiders. The readership Campbell addresses...is, by extension, like the children who taunted her for being a halfbreed when she was a child. (Vangen 190)

Campbell's double voice effectively demands the white reader's attention while simultaneously excluding them from the text. For example, when Campbell describes the extreme poverty of "Halfbreed" people, she qualifies her assertion with an ostracizing aside to white readers: "your people have it [poverty] too, but...you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow" (Campbell 9) – in other words, do not think that you can comprehend or identify with our poverty. The deliberate marginalization of her white audience is an effective reversal of the discrimination that Campbell both witnesses and suffers at the hands of whites in *Halfbreed*. Overall, the negotiation of Campbell's relationship with and connection to her white side and the white world is negative and limited due to the racial prejudice of whites directed against her people. Campbell's doubleness of voice will be further explained in terms of other aspects of her expression of hybrid identity.

Halfbreed, as an exploration of hybridity, is hybrid even in its structure. In Campbell's text, autobiography is blended with testimonial to accommodate both the personal and social nature of Campbell's examination of her own hybridity. According to Julie Cairnie in "Writing and Telling Hybridity: Autobiographical and Testimonial Narratives in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*," Campbell's fusion of autobiographical and testimonial writing, largely ignored by critics, "suits the purposes of her text (an exploration of a hybrid identity)" (Cairnie 95). The two genres, autobiography – a "narrative of a unique or exemplary life" – and testimonial narrative or *testimonio* – "designed to initiate social and political change" with its roots in the Latin American

social upheaval of the 1960's and 70's – seem to “work at cross purposes.” However, in *Halfbreed*, the genres “both blend and conflict” (101).

To my mind, Campbell’s construction of her own “Halfbreed” identity emulates a similar problematic synthesis, in terms of the negotiation of her mixed heritage as both a point of synthesis and a separation of composite entities. My exploration of the text will focus on Campbell’s deconstruction and reconstitution of the term “Halfbreed” and on the elements of union and division which she grapples with as she establishes her aggregate identity both as an individual and as a member of a similarly marginalized community. Campbell’s search for an authentic identity, one with which to replace the imposed marginal status and cultural invisibility allotted to “Halfbreed” people, is an unclear pursuit. Her text articulates her hybrid identity in terms of painful detachment, as well as in celebratory expressions of a culturally specific heritage. In doing so, *Halfbreed* privileges cultural syncreticities, such as the Michif language – a language developed from components of both Indigenous and European tongues – and disturbs 19th century colonial definitions of hybridity based on physiology and racial binaries. According to Jodi Lundgren in “Being a Half-breed”:

Discourses of race divide people by suggesting that their differences are genetically entrenched. Cultural syncretism, conversely, emphasizes hybridity, and the Métis identity has always been syncretic. (Lundgren 66)

However, this subversion of racial binaries, although key to Campbell’s empowering definition of her own hybridity, is complicated by the reality of skin colour as a persistent colonial visual signifier of race. Campbell’s subsequent collaborative text, *The Book of Jessica*, is significant to these discussions of identity. As a companion piece to *Halfbreed*, it allows for further inquiry into

the white elements of Campbell's hybrid identity, which were not fully realized in the earlier text.

Transforming "Halfbreed" From Within

As stated in my introduction, Campbell's text operates as a testimonial in its call for tangible political activism, directed against poverty and towards Native and women's rights. However, *Halfbreed* also advocates social change in its deconstruction and re-coding of the term "Halfbreed," utilizing autobiographical recollections as the blueprint for transformative action. Campbell uses the pejorative word "Halfbreed" throughout her text, as well as claiming the term as the title of her book. As opposed to substituting the racialized name with a less derogatory designation, such as Métis, Campbell takes ownership of the word and challenges its colonial-based social construction. In her essay, "Border-Crossings," Maureen Slattey suggests that Campbell has internalized a "spoiled identity," the "a sense of being a non-people" that is the legacy of the "Halfbreed." Throughout *Halfbreed*, Campbell aspires to "re-people her heritage" (139). The re-coding of the name, often used as a racial slur by both whites and "Halfbreeds" – Maria even calls her own family "no-good Halfbreeds" in a fit of frustrated anger (Campbell 50) – becomes instrumental to this process.

Historically, individuals of mixed Aboriginal and European parentage have been disparagingly referred to using racial terminologies such as "Halfbreeds," "breeds," and "mixed-bloods." According to Françoise Lionnet, in her introduction to *Autobiographical Voices*, "these expressions always carry a negative connotation, precisely because they imply biological abnormality and reduce human reproduction to the level of animal breeding" (Lionnet 13). A well known linguistic projection of this negative view point is the racial misnomer "mulatto," based on

the ill-fated union of horse and donkey and their barren mule offspring. Lionnet observes that there is “no real equivalent for the word *métis*” in the English language. “Métis” etymologically descends from the Latin *mixtus* or “mixed” and refers to a cloth woven of two different fibers: “it is a neutral term, with no animal or sexual implication” (14). Although Campbell does not take issue with the word “Métis,” she chooses instead to confront the derogatory “Halfbreed” as a negative externalized, and internalized, construct of her identity formation.

Contemplating hybridity, Lionnet concludes that, in general, “the Anglo-American consciousness seems unable to accommodate miscegenation positively through language” (14). Thus, the “Métis” become “Halfbreeds.” A further example of the pervasive negative slant of the lexicon, related to *Halfbreed*, is the label “non-status Indian” (Government instituted designations are repeatedly alluded to by Campbell in terms of her people’s lack of hunting, trapping, and land rights in comparison to their “full-blood” Indian relatives). Campbell, herself, has internalized the reductive animal breeding associations of “Halfbreed,” evident in statements such as, “I’m going to do something with my life besides make more Halfbreeds” (Campbell 117). This “blind spot” in the language itself, born out of colonial fears of the threat of contamination to pure patriarchal lines, “is another way of making invisible, of negating, the existence of non-whites whose racial status remains ambiguous” (Lionnet 14). *Halfbreed* serves as a subversion of this colonial erasure in as much as it is a testament to the harsh realities faced by a racially and linguistically designated “non-people.”

Campbell’s text depicts “a miserable life of poverty” with “no hope for the future” (Campbell 8) as she begins recanting the story of her people. She laments what became of the “Road Allowance People,” her predecessors whose “fathers had failed during the rebellion to make a

dream come true” who, themselves, had their homesteads seized in the 1920's and offered to immigrants:

I hurt inside when I think of those people. You sometimes see that generation today: the crippled, bent old grandfathers and grandmothers on town and city skid rows; you find them in the bush waiting to die; or baby-sitting grandchildren while the parents are drunk. (8)

Again, Campbell poignantly addresses her white audience in saying, “*you* [my emphasis] sometimes see” them. The white reader is singled out and forced to examine their own preconceived notions. Campbell’s text outlines the social and political reasons why “Halfbreeds” lose hope and how violence and alcoholism become manifestations of that state of despair. For example, Campbell, keenly aware of the social erasure of her people, argues that repeated attempts to secure their land rights fell on deaf ears:

They sent many petitions and resolutions to Ottawa but again, as in Ontario and Manitoba, Ottawa was not interested and continued to ignore their existence. (4)

What she chooses to highlight demonstrates that the poverty and shame of the “Halfbreeds” is not due to some biological defect. According to Damm, Campbell also counters the perspective that it is a “sin” to be poor (61), assumed by Campbell herself in her youth, by attacking “the idea that Native people have the same choices available to others in society and so are responsible for their ‘problems’” (Damm 105). Campbell takes great care to describe the ways in which “Halfbreeds” were eroded from a self sufficient group, to a people who were left with nothing but a government “blanket” to cover their shame (159). This didactic function of the text acts to inform the white reader, but also acts as a means to cure Campbell’s own self-loathing.

Campbell's account of her people being rendered politically invisible and being reduced to squatters, due to their hybrid origins, is a circumstance which has been proven to be not exclusive to the "Halfbreed" experience. For example, in her article, "Constituting Hybridity As Hybrid," Monika Kaup cites historical data which states that, en masse,

the existence of mixed-race peoples has been lost in the racial polarization of North America where both the historical processes of mixing and the resultant people themselves have been obscured... Collectively, they [people of mixed Native and European ancestry] are characterized by an almost universal landlessness and an oppressive poverty, conditions which historically have inhibited political combination or action. (Kaup 185)

Thus, it is evident that with hybridity, in general, comes an imposed condition of invisibility and marginal status. In *Halfbreed*, however, Campbell strives to assemble a culturally specific legacy. It is significant to note in the above citation, in relation to Campbell's text, that even the origins of mixed-race people have been blurred and negated as illegitimate. Thus, Campbell attempts to redress the historical oversight of her own "Halfbreed" ancestry as part of her narrative project.

On a personal level, Campbell authenticates her cultural heritage by tracing her lineage back to the noted Métis leader, Gabriel Dumont. With obvious pride she recalls that her Great Grandma Campbell, "'Cheechum,' was a niece of Gabriel Dumont and her whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont during the Rebellion" (Campbell 11). In a wider context, Campbell outlines the social aspects of her family's mixed marital unions, as well as those in the larger community, such as the phenomena of white "war brides," along with some insight as to their impact on her "Halfbreed" society:

We also acquired some new relatives from the war: war brides. Many of our men brought home Scottish and English wives, which of course didn't go over very well with our people. They marry either their own kind or Indians. (It is more common among Indians to marry a white.) However, these women came and everyone did their best to make them welcome and comfortable. (22)

These genealogies are expressed in terms of historical and social circumstance. Campbell's emphasis on the Rebellion and her family's loyalty to the Métis cause, and her recollections of "Halfbreed" soldiers returning from the Second World War with British wives, serve to disrupt the ill effects of reductive racial terminologies on Campbell's identity. Her "Halfbreed" heritage emerges as more than mere racial mixing.

The importance assigned to cultural, as opposed to racial, hybridity to Campbell's narrative is most obvious in her representation of the main "Halfbreed" clans. It is here that Campbell documents and claims her people's unacknowledged diversities and authenticates their history: Campbell outlines "three main clans in three settlements" and the cultural specificity of the different "Halfbreed" clans in terms of language, music, temperament, and livelihoods. For example, the Arcands were,

half French, half Cree...They were the music-makers, and played the fiddles and guitars at all the dances...They were loud, noisy, and lots of fun. They spoke French mixed with a little Cree. (23)

Another clan, comprised of the St. Denys, Villeneuves, Morrisettes and Cadieux families, is characterized as "scrubby" looking, quiet, predominantly French speaking, "*ak-ee-top*" (pretend) farmers, and moonshine producers. Campbell distinguishes her own clan, the Isbisters, Campbells, and Vandals, because of its linguistic uniqueness:

[We] were a real mixture of Scottish, French, Cree , English and Irish. We spoke a language completely different from the others. We were a combination of everything: hunters, trappers and *ak-ee-top* farmers. (23)

With pride, she even brags that her clan had the most fearless men and most beautiful women. Significantly, Campbell makes a point of naming the families in each clan as she highlights their respective distinctiveness. In establishing a genealogy, she rescues the most meaningful people in her life, as well as herself, from an imposed state of shameful non-existence. The way in which this positive sense of identity and family pride is complicated by Campbell's own anger, self-hatred, and her internalization of racist stereotypes will be discussed later in terms of the "doubleness" of her identity formation.

Campbell unsettles the term "Halfbreed" as a linear racial definition with the above detailed descriptions of the cultural variances of her people. She delves ever deeper into the staunch negative connotations of "Indian," derogatory insinuations entrenched in the dominant discourse, with a challenge to the racial binary: Native / non-Native. The immutability of the binary, based on a "one drop" theory of Nativeness (i.e. any amount of Native blood constitutes an "Indian"), is evident in the exchange between Campbell and a welfare agent, when she attempts to apply for aid in Calgary:

He insisted that I go to the Department of Indian Affairs,
And when I said that I was not a Treaty Indian but a Halfbreed,
he said that if that was the case I was eligible, but added, I
can't see the difference – part Indian, all Indian. You're all
the same. (155)

As if in response to the in-take worker's racist comment, Campbell takes care to stress the

cultural variances between her people and their Aboriginal relatives. In doing so, Campbell subverts the pervasive racist generalizations embodied in statements such as “just another drunken Indian” (168). Interestingly, this remark is made by one of Campbell’s fellow AA members, as he articulates what it is that he does not want to become. As an example of the internalization of racist stereotypes, from the mouth of an “Indian,” it serves as an effective mirror for Campbell’s white audience, a reflection of the derogatory, reductive perceptions of Aboriginal peoples in mainstream culture.

As with the term “Halfbreed,” Campbell debunks “Indian” as an all encompassing term with her keen cultural commentaries, and it too becomes, within her narrative, an unstable racial category. In her efforts to define a distinct “Halfbreed” identity, Campbell insists on essential differences between her people and “Indians.” She compares the two cultures throughout the text:

Then there were our Indian relatives on the nearby reserves.
There was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds.
They were completely different from us – quiet when we were
noisy, dignified even at dances and get-togethers. Indians were
very passive – they would get angry at things done to them but
would never fight back, whereas Halfbreeds were quick-tempered –
quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget. (25)

Campbell also observes that “treaty women don’t express their opinions” like “Halfbreed” women and when Campbell freely articulates herself, her Kokum from the reserve interprets her audacity as “the white in her” (26). She construes this disapproval and the condescending attitude of the Indians towards their mixed relatives, in general, as “prejudiced” (25). Even the name that they give the “Halfbreeds,” “Awp-peetow-koosons: half people” (25), indicates a negative predisposition towards hybridity.

In addition to the above cultural distinctions, Campbell also emphasizes the societal non-recognition allotted "Halfbreeds" in contrast to their Aboriginal kin. The collective invisibility and marginalization of the "Halfbreeds" – culturally, geographically, politically, and legally – make them the so called "poor relatives" to their Native relations. The acknowledgment of status Indian treaty rights in terms of hunting, trapping, fishing, and land entitlement create class differences and resentments between the two groups. According to Campbell: "They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing. As Daddy put it, 'No pot to piss in or a window to throw it out'" (25). Campbell repeatedly makes reference to her father's inability to provide for his family, forcing them at times to live in states of near starvation, due to discriminatory laws prohibiting him to hunt and trap. For example, unlike the status families, "it was illegal for Halfbreeds to have game out of season" (59), on the basis of their mixed-blood.

In other discussions of treaty rights, Campbell's text further questions the notion of racial categories in terms of "Halfbreed" identity formation. She demonstrates the constructed nature of these designations with the story of how her father's aunt, a "Halfbreed" named Qua Chich, achieved the benefit of full status. Qua Chich's husband broke land on what was later to become the Sandy Lake Reserve:

Some years later, when the treaty-makers came, he was counted in and they became treaty Indians of the Sandy Lake reserve instead of Halfbreeds. (20)

This government re-classification acts as a subversion of "race" as a fixed biological determinant of identity. Rather, it shows that "race" is fundamentally defined and constructed in colonial terms. The numerous examples of cultural and class based designations and differences between

Indians and “Halfbreeds,” serve to strengthen Campbell’s case for her people being a culturally specific group. However, they also further illustrate the sense of illegitimacy of “Halfbreeds” in the Aboriginal, as well as in white, society, and conform to what Cairnie describes as “an imposed marginal status” (Cairnie 96).

The “Doubleness” of Halfbreed Identity

Campbell’s formation of a “Halfbreed” identity is complicated, as is the concept of hybridity itself, by an inherent “doubleness.” As Robert Young observes in *Colonial Desire*, the concept of “hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation” (22). Although Young is referring specifically to Bakhtin’s theory of “linguistic hybridity,” we can apply this understanding to Campbell’s text in terms of the “doubleness” evident in Campbell’s discussion of the reconstitution of her “Halfbreed” identity. *Halfbreed*, as well as *The Book of Jesssica*, a collaborative play based on Campbell’s further exploration of her identity since the writing of *Halfbreed*, comprise Campbell’s reflections on hybridity in relation to the celebration of the fusion of two cultures, alongside the pain of detachment.

An example of the fundamental duality embedded in hybrid subjectivity is evident in Campbell’s understanding of the “Halfbreed” position in relations between Indigenous peoples and Europeans. Historically, “Halfbreeds” were the bridge between the Native and white worlds, fulfilling the indispensable roles of middlepersons, guides, and interpreters. Kaup describes “Halfbreed” origins in the fur trade as, “peaceful, not violent. Since traders came neither to settle nor to convert or civilize, fur trade society was a true ‘middle ground.’ Relations of equality

prevailed” (Kaup 197). Slattery affirms that “Métis proudly call themselves the ‘inbetween’ people,” in reference to their historical intermediary positioning” (Slattery 139). However, Slattery also notes, in contrast to Kaup’s notions of equality, that “the terrain of border crossings is never neutral and never level” (139) and Campbell, in hindsight, regrets the “Halfbreed” legacy of connecting two worlds and the subsequent colonization of Indigenous peoples. In *The Book of Jessica* she laments:

I’d always felt a kind of historical guilt because we had been (when I say ‘we,’ I mean Metis people, Halfbreed people, mixed-blood people) the link between Indians and whites. We had acted as interpreters in treaties, we had walked ahead of the explorers and showed them the way. (Campbell and Griffiths 21)

As a result of such shame, Campbell detaches herself from this facet of “Halfbreed” history, a potential source of pride and cohesion in her people’s identity formation. Interestingly, *Halfbreed* does not even address the fur trade as a point of origin, focusing instead on the Rebellion as the definitive historical moment for her people. The Rebellion was and remains for Campbell a symbol of the possibility of a better life for her people. This is why she takes such pride in the fact that her “Cheechum never accepted defeat at Batoche” (11); she never gave up hope for a better future.

Conversely, Campbell does acclaim her fused heritage, in the contemporary context, as a potentially healing bond between the Aboriginal and white communities. Again, from *The Book of Jessica*, Campbell’s co-writer, Linda Griffiths, states that:

She [Maria] believed that mixed-blood people were the obvious link between whites and Natives, and that they would be the ones to bring about a renaissance in spiritual thought. (Campbell and Griffiths 19)

Here, Campbell is suggesting a position of cultural superiority for the "Halfbreed" mediator, which effectively counters the imposed low cultural status of her people.

To some extent, Campbell fulfills the role of liaison in her collaboration on *Jessica* with a white writer, Linda Griffiths, as well as in their dramatic portrayal of a "Halfbreed" spirit world which would bridge both societies. In the play, the character of Coyote who transforms into Vitaline, a native elder and Jessica's spiritual teacher, provides the link to the Aboriginal world. The physical setting for the play is the white society in which Jessica, a Métis woman, lives. In "Says Who," Kateri Damm contends that the social role of intermediary, which Campbell assumes, is a calling to which "Halfbreeds" are particularly suited:

The power of mixed-blood, some would argue, is to be able to see and speak the strengths and weakness of both Indigenous and non-Native cultures. Often the mixed-bloods ...become 'bilingual' interpreters, able to speak in the idiom of both 'White and 'Indigenous' groups. Mixed bloods see with two sets of eyes, hear with two sets of ears and those who write find the ability to assimilate and process all of this into a kind of tertium liquid: a blending or 'mingling' that cannot be completely ignored or discounted by either side. (Damm 19)

Halfbreed, and its impact as a social document in both the Native and non-Native worlds, is a testament to this envisioned "power" of mixed blood.

On a more intimate level, Campbell endeavors to connect to both the Native and white worlds as she reclaims her mixed heritage. In *Halfbreed*, however, she mainly explores her link to the Aboriginal world, strongly identifying with her Native Cheechum as her role model, as opposed to her convent educated, "blue-eyed and auburn-haired" Catholic mother (13). Campbell's strong attachment to her Cheechum inadvertently contributes to her alienation from her mother and the

maternal link to white society. Once again, elements of both fusion and separation characterize her identity formation. Her identification with Cheechum and the division between mother and daughter is evident, for example, in Campbell's criticism of her mother's respect for the priest, a deference consistent to that generally found in the "Halfbreed" settlement. According to Campbell, no one in the community would speak against the Catholic institution or its reprehensible priest:

No one, that is, except Cheechum, who hated them [the priests] with a vengeance. I used to wonder why my mother was not even critical, because surely if a little girl could see the fat priest for what he was, then she could. But she accepted it all as she did so many things because it was sacred and of God. He was not just any God either, but a Catholic God. Cheechum would often say scornfully of this God that he took more money from us than the Hudson's Bay store. (32)

In this recollection, Campbell champions Cheechum as her "best friend and confidante" (16), and as an awe-inspiring figure who challenges authority, refuses Christianity, and holds her head high in the presence of whites. As previously stated, Cheechum never accepts the defeat of the Rebellion and Campbell takes pride in following in her great-grandmother's footsteps.

Although Campbell emphasizes her affinity to the Native world in *Halfbreed*, and even privileges Cheechum as a "pure" Native entity, there are exceptions to this bias. Campbell makes a case for linking her cultural hybridity, which includes her mother's white legacy, to the creative process. Campbell says of her mother:

She loved books and music and spent many hours reading to us from a collection of books her father gave her. I grew up on Shakespeare, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and Longfellow. My imagination was stirred by the stories in Mom's books. (14)

The stories, inherited from Campbell's white maternal grandfather, arouses a creative impulse in Campbell. As a child she makes up and organizes her own plays based on the tales, such as *Julius Caesar*, acquired from her maternal culture. However, the "doubleness" of her hybridity is, again, evident in the reaction of her white neighbors to the creative fusion. Campbell comments that the mix was incompatible to their sensibilities:

Many of our white neighbors who saw us would ask what we were playing and would shake their heads and laugh. I guess it was funny – Caesar, Rome, and Cleopatra among Halfbreeds in the backwoods of northern Saskatchewan. (14)

The "Halfbreeds" are deemed outsiders to white society, so Campbell's adaptation of privileged European literature is deemed a farcical cultural incongruity. However, this childhood synthesis of cultures remains an inspirational precursor for Campbell's future as teller of tales for her people.

Along the same lines, Campbell lauds her Granny Dubuque's creativity as a storyteller, in terms of her cultural hybridity:

Grannie was a combination of a very strict Catholic and a superstitious Indian, which made her the greatest storyteller in the world. (91)

Campbell credits the intermingling of two spiritual worlds as the artistic stimulus for her maternal grandmother. It is interesting to note here, that Campbell herself has been influenced by her Catholic legacy, even though she rejects it and distances herself from it in *Halfbreed*. It is only later, in *Jessica*, that she realizes that, on a subconscious level, Catholic sensibilities have fused to her own psyche. This fusion has occurred even though Campbell blatantly disavows the Church in

her community as a corrupt and prejudiced institution.

An example of this spiritual fusion occurs when Campbell rehearses *Jessica* with Griffiths and Campbell becomes alarmed at her own reaction to the profanity in the play. Campbell interprets her desire to censor the obscenities as religiously based and is forced to confront the conservative Catholic woman within. Campbell describes this reunion with her Catholic self to her co-writer Griffiths:

I could scorn Catholics, before I started to work on *Jessica*, because I thought I was free, I wasn't all bound up with that stuff. But I really was. For the first time in years and years, I found every time you said 'Fucking this and fucking that,' or told Vitaline to shove things up her ass, I wanted to make the sign of the cross and moan the rosary. For the first time in my life I had to deal with the woman I'd shoved away someplace. I almost went to Church. I had to start looking at things in the Catholic faith, real things that came from my mother, from the grandmothers, and that looking helped me to understand why everybody's been Christian for so long. (32)

Campbell was left shaken by the experience of having to deal with what she refers to as "her," this severed part of her maternal identity. Later on in *Jessica* she is more resolved, understanding that she could have never fully turned her back on "all that Catholic stuff, because most of my people are Catholic" (76). Thus, for Campbell, the inherent "doubleness" of her hybrid existence allows for such instances of cultural alienation and cohesion to co-exist.

In spite of the above examples of Campbell's maternal influences, her quiet, conforming mother who "did her best to turn [Campbell] into a lady" (16), epitomizes a largely unexamined side of Campbell's heritage in *Halfbreed*. Slattery summarizes the difference between *Halfbreed* and *Jessica* in this respect:

While *Halfbreed* depicts Campbell separating from her mother and attaching herself to Cheechum, *The Book of Jessica* describes how she came to a more complete relationship with her mother while producing the play with Griffiths in 1982. *The Book* depicts a different kind of border where she cathartically confronted her experience of her mother's colonization as her own...her goal is no longer separation from her mother but autonomy *and* attachment. (Slattery 141)

Although Campbell attempts to "lean" into her white heritage in *Jessica*, it is clear that it is problematic for Campbell to explore her white side within the context of *Halfbreed*, and continues to be somewhat untenable in the later writing of *Jessica*, due to the racism Campbell has suffered at the hands of white-dominated society. In *Halfbreed* she expresses her "bottled-up" anger and abhorrence of whites: "I'd hated those nameless, faceless white masses all my life" (168). She goes to great lengths to depict the realities of racism and their ill effects on her people in her earlier text. Cairnie states that *Halfbreed* frequently "presents division as racism which has been internalized by the community" (Cairnie 99). Campbell is shocked by the reality of her own self-hatred, when Griffiths acts it out for her in a rehearsal of *Jessica*. In reaction to lines such as "there go a bunch of Indians, all stuffed in a car, with two welfare checks between them" from the mouth of her autobiographical character, Campbell entreats her co-writer: "Do you realize how appalled I was at myself when I heard you say those things? You were playing back my own self-hatred" (31). The negotiation of Campbell's self-loathing of her people alongside her positive identity formation is integral to her journey towards acceptance and reconciliation.

In *Jessica*, Campbell further anguishes over the fissure of her "Halfbreed" identity and the dominance of white society:

I can't do it anymore. I'm not Indian, I'm not white,
I'm a Halfbreed. I live in a white world...I'm drowning
and cracking apart. (121)

Healing this painful division is a crucial step for Campbell in reclaiming her cultural loss. The white link to her identity is an imposing force despite her rejection of it and in spite of the reality that she is visually signified as non-white. This is due, in part, to the fact that when Campbell starts to explore her Native side, which she feels more inclined towards, she discovers that "Indians never let me forget that I was part white" (35). The constant reminder of her mixed heritage leads Campbell to meditate on a picture of her white grandfather and then research the history of his people. On learning that Scots and Irish people shared cultural similarities in music, storytelling, and spirituality with her own people, as well as suffered analogous cultural and land losses, she senses a bridge. Campbell conceptualizes the shared histories of pain as "a meeting place" (35), a bridge both for her and her co-writer Griffiths – who is of similar Scots and Irish heritage, and for Campbell herself and her own white ancestry.

Conclusion

Through her writing, Campbell has found a way to champion her aggregate culture in spite of the racialized divisions inherent in her hybrid identity. Picking up, either consciously or intuitively, on the original cultural meaning of the word "Métis" – to weave different fibres together – she states, in *Jessica*:

My people have walked behind other cultures picking up things their parents discarded for generations: moral traditions, sacred things, songs, prayers, everything...a way of tying a scarf, a jig step. When you look at what we have as mixed-blood people you see all these things woven into something that became a new nation. (86)

However, the “doubleness,” of her identity formation, in terms of celebration and division, is ever present and as she succinctly states in *Halfbreed*: “yet, I hated all of it as much as I loved it” (117).

In *Halfbreed*, Campbell confronts the ambiguity, as illustrated in the above quote, of her positioning as hybrid. However, it is unclear as to whether or not Campbell’s text functions as what Gloria Anzaldua refers to in *Borderlands: La Frontera*, as a “tolerance” for the inherent ambiguities of her identity formation. Anzaldua describes the female consciousness of *la mestiza* as a strategy for negotiating hybridity or borderland existence in the Mexican context:

She has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries...entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death...*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (79)

In *Halfbreed*, Campbell constructs her cultural identity in terms which seemingly oppose *la mestiza* consciousness and are, instead, analogous to nation-building language, a language itself responsible for designating her composite identity as marginal. Although Campbell successfully confronts and undermines the word “Halfbreed” as a colonial-based construction, her double voice allows colonial constructs to enter her dialogue, in terms of defining her people. Creation of

a specific history, defining moments as a people, even allusions to superior positioning are evident in her reconstitution of "Halfbreed" identity. Campbell's identity formation can be seen as the seizing of conservative exclusionary tactics, as her construction of her white audience as outsiders illustrates. Along these lines, Native writers, such as Janice Acoose, have lauded Campbell for her appropriation of the "colonizer's language" as a political tool to "name her oppressors, identify the oppressor's unjust systems, laws, and processes" (140), and for being one of the first Native women to do so. Yet, Campbell's writing approach can also be considered an unconscious default to "entrenched" or "habitual" modes of identity building. To my mind, this uncertainty in no way diminishes the text's social impact or triumph as the positive reconstitution of Campbell's "Halfbreed" identity. As Lundgren so aptly states, in her essay "*Halfbreed* A Revisiting...":

At the same time as she valorizes Halfbreed culture ["defined by mutable, extrinsic characteristics"], Campbell implicitly challenges the Euro-American belief that 'blood' is determinant of character and experience, and thus offers a challenge to racist discourse. (66)

Chapter Three

Inhabiting the Hybrid Space: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*

This visceral knowledge that one is not in oneself but in and out of oneself at the same time. The sadness of needing to return to someone unknown and undescribed, the impossibility of any return and the completeness of the indoctrination which makes that self irredeemable.

Dionne Brand, "Dualities"

Introduction

Homi Bhabha's concept of the space "beyond" – "beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities" – is characterized as a "transitory," "in-between," or "hybrid" position. According to Nikos Papastergiadis, in *The Turbulance Of Migration*, "Bhabha clearly differentiates his use of the term 'hybrid' from earlier evocations which defined it as the diabolical stain or the harmonic transcendence between different races" (Papastergiadis 193). As Bhabha suggests in *The*

Location Of Culture:

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity...an exploratory, restless movement...these 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular of communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1)

Dionne Brand is a Trinidadian-Canadian writer whose politically assertive writing exerts its

dynamic presence as such a new hybrid space. It is through this “interpretive mode,” as Papastergiadis refers to Bhabha’s hybrid or “third space,” that Brand leaps the gaps of exile, alienation, and loss of self and creates a new identity, as well as new social and literary domains. Her identity formation occurs “in [these] moment[s] of displacement”(Bhabha 185).

Brand’s novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* is a text that situates itself within Bhabha’s hybrid moment. It is a love story which examines the diasporic experience of Caribbean people, both in the Canadian and Caribbean contexts. The story follows the discursive path of Verlia as she struggles to locate a sense of self and home. Verlia’s relationships with her lovers, Elizete in Trinidad and Abena in Toronto, provide the framework within which her journey unfolds. As a young woman in Toronto, Verlia becomes romantically involved with fellow social activist Abena. Once Verlia becomes disillusioned with the Black “Movement,” she returns to the Caribbean to join a revolution and start a labour movement. Here she meets and falls in love with Elizete while working in the cane fields. After the failed revolution and Verlia’s symbolic leap to her death, a mournful Elizete travels to Toronto herself, seeking a link – Abena – to her beloved Verlia. The Black “Movement” in Toronto, as well as Revolution in the Caribbean, form the backdrop for Brand’s semi-autobiographical exploration of identity.

Reminiscent of the character of Verlia, Brand states, in an interview with Lynnette D’Anna, that she herself came to Canada when she was seventeen years old, in 1970, “just going someplace else” (D’Anna 11). She also experienced the Black Movement in Toronto and later encountered the revolution in Grenada. In the course of this interview, Brand further reveals that she had family living in Toronto and Sudbury at the time of her emigration, similar to Verlia in *Another Place, Not Here*. Sounding very much like her protagonist, Brand explains her intentions

and influences at that time:

It was exciting. I was coming to join *The Movement*. The Black Consciousness Movement was happening and I wanted to be part of it; I wanted to meet James Baldwin and read Nikki Giovanni. The world is small if you live in a colonial country Because, honestly, you only get news from away. Your news is not important, just the news from away. (11-12)

The lure of “away,” in terms of the diasporic mind set, is evident both in the novel and in Brand’s assessment of her own life and identity. For example, even once Verlia makes it to Toronto and starts a new life she still dreams of “away”: “will she become one of those women arrested in the long gaze of better memories even if they weren’t better, just not here? Here...here is leaving’ (*In Another Place...* 198). The perpetual state of mobility in the diasporic mind-set is invariably emphasized by Brand throughout *In Another Place, Not Here*: “one leg lingering on possibility, one leg light and ready for flight” (182-3). As Bhabha’s hybrid moment “requires movement and manoeuver,” Brand’s motion imagery and metaphor of potential motion are highly significant to the processes of creating a “supplementary space of contingency” (Bhabha 185) within which to claim her identity.

In fact, Brand’s work in general is inundated with thematic references to flight, escape, and movement. The author’s nimble prose poetry, as well as her lyrical writing style in *In Another Place, Not Here*, which contains elements of prose poetry, often serves to replicate and enhance the effects of her sustained imagery of flight. Elizete’s dream of fleeing Isaiah, the abusive man to whom she was given as a girl, embodies this melding of form and theme:

Fearless. I dream my eyes, black and steady in my black face
and never close. I will wear a black skirt, shapely like a wing and
down to my toes. I will fly to Maracaibo in it and you will see
nothing of me but my black eyes in my black face and my black skirt

swirling over thick living vine. I dream of flying in my skirt to Maracaibo.
I want to go to Maracaibo if it's the last thing I do. (*In Another Place* 12)

The novel's fast moving, free flowing, reverberating sentences, which often lack the compunction of commas, serve to accent the overall significance of flight to Brand's writing and identity formation. In addition, the mobius shape of the writing – or how it spirals back on itself – reflects the circular nature of the journey to home and self for Brand as she delves back into the Caribbean past, as well as into the heart of contemporary diasporic life. The continual emphasis on flights, both imagined and real, is highly significant to Brand's representation of Caribbean identity. Brand's probing and confrontation of the culture of migrancy (slavery, indentureship, and forced labour patterns) imposed on Caribbean Blacks reveals a condition of perpetual exile or of not belonging. Brand explains the collective trauma of exile, in the film *Listening For Something*, as the feeling that "there's always something missing." She says that she writes to "restore and regenerate myself and the communities I belong to (D'Anna 10). *In Another Place, Not Here* constitutes yet another step in Brand's "journey to a new kind of identity and existence" (Mavjee 28-29), both for herself and other diasporic Blacks who struggle to become "landed" and fully participate, to be fully present, in the world around them (i.e. white society). Consistent with Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Brand confronts the border of exclusion as the possibility of movement "beyond" a racialized barrier.

State Of Exile

To Brand, the condition of exile is literal in terms of geographical movements. It refers to both the prevalence and necessity of Caribbean people having to dislocate and relocate, historically as

well as in the contemporary past, whether to escape oppression, violent displacements, unwanted interventions, or due to repressive employment patterns based on race and gender (Brand emphasizes the fact that Canada imported cheap Black labour in the 1960's and 1970's in "Brownman, Tiger..."). In "Earth And Sound: The Place of Poetry," the Trinidadian-Canadian writer, Nourbese Philip, qualifies this migratory tendency, or, as she puts it, "a condemnation to wander the earth seeking a place to land," in terms of Caribbean history – "a despised past" – and a deep-rooted behavioral archetype. As a remnant of the African slave trade, it was "a relationship [to the past] that was to result in an extreme lack of attachment to the land" (Philip 59).

Verlia characterizes this sense of detachment when she returns to the Caribbean and realizes that she is estranged from her 'home' land:

All the names of places here are as old as slavery. I've learned some in the weeks going to Caicou along Eastern Road. The transport passes Choiseilles and Morne Diablo and Arima and La Chapelle. These small places, somewhere like where I come from...The meanings underneath are meanings I don't know even though I was born somewhere here, but I can hear in the way people say them...I've never said the name of a place like this, dropping darling and sweet boy and eh after them. You would have to know a place for that and I don't really know anywhere.
(*In Another Place* 211)

Here, Brand, similar to Philip, connects Verlia's disconnectedness to the painful history of slavery and indentureship in the Caribbean. Elizete also articulates acute geographical alienation when Albena tells her to "go home" from Toronto:

Go home. And really no country will do. Not any now on the face of the earth when she thought about it. Nothing existed that she could live in. What did this woman know? She know nothing about cane, anything about Isaiah, anything about Verlia

flying off a cliff?

'Lady, look at my foot I can't take the field no more and is only
field waiting for me.' (*In Another Place* 110)

Just as Elizete feels that no place exists where she could live, Brand herself states that she wants "to live in another kind of world" (Mavjee 28). Time and history separate Black Caribbeans from place; therefore, Brand strives to create "a place in the imagination" through her writing. For example, in *In Another Place, Not Here*, the character Verlia creates a visionary space as an escape for herself when she is in prison, based on the phrase, "the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love" (183). She repeats over and over again the beloved sentence from Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, "dreaming into its core," to fend off her fear of being imprisoned. Similarly, Verlia's physical "leap" constitutes deliverance to a liberated imaginary place. Verlia flies off a cliff to the fluidity of the sea as a final escape: "She doesn't need air. She's in some other place already, less tortuous, less fleshy" (*In Another Place* 247). In an overall sense, the fictional revolution that Verlia participates in, as well as Brand's real life interest in and encounter with the revolution in Grenada, become thematic symbols of the possibility, or hope, of the existence of an "imaginary place" where one could really "live." Brand expresses the significance of "revolution" as a necessary nourishment in her essay, "Cuba," from the *Bread Out Of Stone* collection:

Revolutions are not as simple as the words given to them after they fail or triumph. Those words do not account for the sense in the body of clarity or the sharpness in the brain, and they cannot interpret the utter vindication of people like me needing revolution to reconcile being in a place. (*Bread* 54)

A revolution is a political "movement" which crosses theoretical and abstract borders, as well as

engages in physical confrontation.

In Bhabha's concept of migration, imaginative border crossings are as much an outcome of the "moment of transit" as actual border crossings. Brand's representation of Black diasporic existence, throughout her writing, echoes Bhabha's sentiment. An example from "Just Rain, Bacolet," again, from *Bread Out Of Stone*, poignantly melds the physical and imaginary components of the nomadic state:

Travelling is a constant state...We were born thinking of travelling back. Its our singular preoccupation, we think of nothing else. I am convinced. We are continually uncomfortable where we are. We do not sleep easily, not without dreaming of travelling back. This must be the code written on the lining of my brain, go back, go back, like a fever, a pandemic scourging the Diaspora...How complicated they can get, all the journeys to the answer, all the journeys, physical and imaginary, on airplanes, on foot, in the heart and drying on the tongue. (*Bread* 9)

As the above quote indicates, Brand's representation of the hybrid space, its "moment of transit," is the position from which her articulation of a Black diasporic sensibility emerges. As previously stated, even her flowing, repetitious, poetic prose replicates a sense of constant movement. "The answer" being sought, in the above quote, through imaginary and physical journeying, is a sense of home or self; however, Brand's approach challenges "the idea of constantly having to *fix* oneself as a way of finding identity" (Mavjee 29). She proposes an active, complex form of representation to properly comprehend the ever-shifting, fluid constitution of Caribbean identity, as if in answer to her own query: "How do we disturb the deeply troublesome labels that admit no complexity, no range but which come to represent us in the world?" (29). Simply stated by John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, "for Bhabha, the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of

crossing” (217). Brand’s migratory writing emphasizes the process of the journeying to and away from home and self, as the instrumental component of Caribbean diasporic identity formation.

Definition of Self

Sense of place and self are intrinsically linked in the diasporic psyche. According to Papastergiadis’s understanding of Bhabha, “identity always presupposes a sense of location and a relationship with others” (193). Brand’s thematic use of the state of exile in *In Another Place, Not Here* goes beyond the physical detachment from locality and equally stresses an alienation from self. For example, shortly after Elizete arrives in Toronto, struggling to get her bearings, she becomes acutely aware that she is “homeless, countryless, landless, nameless” (*In Another Place* 48). Toronto was a place “she had no feeling for except the feeling of escape” (71). Elizete’s loss of name is associated with her loss of self, experienced in new, unfamiliar, even hostile surroundings. This loss of sense of self, or the feeling of “not being in oneself all of the time” (*Listening For Something*), becomes paramount to the representation of identity formation Brand undertakes in *In Another Place, Not Here*.

The character of Elizete experiences an acute loss of self in order to escape from physical and sexual abuse, both in the Caribbean and in Toronto. In Toronto, Elizete is raped by a man who offers her a housekeeping job and she subsequently experiences a sensation of complete detachment:

If she’s losing every part of herself then what part feels this,
which limb and which sense; whose breath is she breathing with,
whose eyes is she using now. Who is in her body making sand,
grinding glass. Why does she get up leaving herself on the floor.
(*In Another Place* 92)

Elizete's out of body experience occurs in a moment of displacement from, yet identification with, herself. Even though her body has become alien to her, Elizete recognizes her face in the mirror. Elizete also undergoes a self-determined loss of self when she pretends that she has lost her hearing. This fabricated deafness occurs when Elizete's white male employer refers to her by the false name she had adopted to fend off immigration officials and she refuses to accept the misnomer:

So I lose my hearing. One day. It was easy. The man call to me with the name I thief, and I so studying the woman I used to be that I didn't hear him. Well I wasn't that used-to-be woman for a good while now but I love she because Verlia love she. (83)

Elizete's act of self-affirmation, raising her hand to her ear to indicate that she was deaf, is simultaneously a loss of self and a strong statement of identification with self, as well as a rejection of imposed designations: "Is not my name. You see any Gloria here? Is not my fucking name, you hear me?" (85). It is within the context of Bhabha's hybrid space that such construction and reconstruction of identity becomes possible.

Diasporic identity is constructed in terms of the divided self, never assuming a conclusive form, or a state of permanence. For example, in the context of Toronto and its oppressive concrete labels that mark Black women as cheap labour, the amorphous Elizete has to "sprout legs" to fit in and survive. However, when in eminent danger of being apprehended by immigration officials, she transforms into her other elusive form and "slid[es] like a fish, out the back door" to escape (61). Elizete's two versions of self continually vacillate as she adopts an amphibian identity to survive: "she swam, reeled in, sprouting legs to crawl" (48).

Bhabha's hybridity acts as the medium "out of which a sense of being is constructed that constantly oscillates between the axioms of foreign and familiar" (Papastergiadis 192). In a further example from *In Another Place, Not Here*, the interaction between the above mentioned precepts is evident. In Toronto, Elizete is searching for the familiar, a connection to her deceased lover Verlia. The presence of Verlia's former lover, Abena, in the city is a comforting link to the only sense of home Elizete ever knew; her life with Verlia. However, Toronto is also an overwhelmingly foreign space to Elizete and she describes the city as: "No place which begins to resemble you" (*In Another Place* 63). Elizette wants to look up and recognize the flux of the sea or see a familiar face. She also states that "each time she tried to get a hold of the city she longed for another place. She did not understand the signs that she should look for": reference points of belonging. She was always "looking for recognizable signs" in her unfamiliar surroundings, but "her names would not do for this place" (70-71). The narrator characterizes the sense of self acquired in the course of fluctuation between the foreign and the familiar, again, as a divided self. In terms of Elizete's existence, as well as in a collective capacity, the narrator states, "they felt each morning as two people – one that had to be left behind and the other. The other was someone they had to get to know, the other was someone they were sometimes ashamed of" (61).

A divided subjectivity is also evident in the nebulous character of Verlia. Verlia's intentions for life in Toronto contrasts with those of Elizete, who came to the city to find a sign of Verlia, keep safe, and try not to stand out to immigration officials. Verlia, on the other hand, moves to Toronto to become her Black self. When Verlia's uncle tries to convince her to accept a circumspect life of keeping her "Blackness a secret" in Sudbury, she flees to Toronto. Verlia cannot accede to "cutting herself off from any growing, solidifying when she wants to liquefy, to

make fluid, grow into her Black self" (148-149). Here, the impermanence of self is not only depicted as characteristic of Black diasporic identity, but something that is actively sought after, desired. Verlia grows an afro, dons a dashiki, and learns a new language of revolution. She aspires "to be the kind of Black girl that is dangerous. Big mouthed and dangerous" (157). Verlia reconstructs herself in the knowledge that "it was possible to leap" into a new awoken self and life (159). Nevertheless, after her attempt at erasing all memory of her Caribbean past, family, and former self, Verlia ends up "just wanting to go home," and her process of identity formation continues in terms of a divided self:

There was a side of her she had to return for it; the one missing for years, the one she'd first cut away, then traded away little by little. The one all her fighting made her tired for. (97)

However, it is also difficult to locate a reconciled sense of self back "home" in the Caribbean, as Brand demonstrates in "Just Rain, Bacolet" when she returns to Trinidad with her lover:

We learn that you cannot come upon yourself so suddenly, so roughly, so matter-of-factly. You cannot simply go to a place, to visit friends, to pick mangoes on your way to the beach and count on that being all. You cannot meet yourself without being shaken, taken apart. You are not a tourist, you must walk more carefully because you are always walking in ruins and because at the top of a windmill one afternoon on your way to the beach near Courland Bay you can tremble...I was there at the top of the windmill taken apart, crying for someone back then, for things that exist already and exist simply and still. (*Bread* 6)

The Caribbean landscape is not innocent and the weight of its history forces Caribbean Blacks to become unsettled and maintain a distance from the self connected to that terrain and to the context of that history. In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Verlia also reads painful history into the

countryside on her return to the Caribbean, enacting Bhabha's "timelag," or the "temporal break in representation" (Bhabha 191), in her palpable witnessing and reporting of the atrocities that took place, related to the institution of slavery. Through Elizete, we are confronted with Verlia's perception of the landscape. Out for a walk together in a sweet smelling cane field, Verlia suddenly turns to Elizete and says in a "stone-rock cold" voice:

'You know how much of our people buried under this field. This place is old as water and since then Black people drown here in there own sweat.'...Verlia would cry watching fields of cane or the stony remains of sugar mills or the old tamarind tree which someone said was there since then. She understood their witness to them days and when she stand in front of them she was standing in that same time. I see she body curve in pain at these moments, the spirits rush up to hold she in their ache. Under the tamarind tree where they say many get hang, I see her turn transparent and blue in the rain-damp dirt. She had sadness enough for all their sorrow. She remember them in she body. Vein does remember blood. The spirits call she and make their display in she. You don't ever live for yourself there. (*In Another Place* 84)

Brand and Verlia's visceral encounters with, and their translations of, the landscape become "space[s] for the negotiation of identity and history" (Bhabha 198). Verlia personifies what Bhabha refers to as "the act of 'rememoration'" – a term which he pays tribute to Toni Morrison for – and what he describes as "historical revision and the production of political and cultural agency" which "emerge through a discursive time-lag" and "turn the present of narrative enunciation into the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted" (198). Within this hybrid space, a divided self is an unavoidable coping mechanism to shield oneself from the legacy of anguish, at the very moment that the painful history is shaping the meaning of one's existence.

John Clement Ball discusses Brand's use of spirits and ancestral figures in terms of their

empowering potential, as well as their portability and resilience, in "White City, Black Ancestry."

In this essay, Ball states that Brand's incorporation of

Black ancestry and resistance into a strengthened consciousness extended beyond the city's limits by acts of identification and association. That kind of awareness, militantly committed to racial memory and open to the individual's extension into a collective self, not only allows ancestral figures to survive in the city, it makes them the key to the black immigrant's well-being. (Ball 18)

In *In Another Place, Not Here*, there is an interesting occurrence of Black ancestral spirituality in

Toronto, again, through the medium of Verlia. After her release from prison, Verlia sees the white police officer who arrested her and wants to hurt him in some way, as he had harmed her.

She wants to say something riveting and injurious to the cop:

Something to read him back to his mother's womb; something to wrench his own flesh from its bone as he'd done hers. When it came out of her mouth it wasn't only out of her mouth but first her finger marking his face, an old gesture marking an enemy, and then she spat on the floor in front of him. 'Never have a day's peace. Look for me everywhere.' Such an old curse creeping out of her. She did not remember learning the gesture. (*In Another Place* 184)

It is Verlia's intuitive awareness and memory of the history that she is cut off from that allows her to transcend the borders of time and space and corporally receive the ancestral sign in a time of need. Through the transmission, her self temporarily transforms from a frightened young activist to a powerful obeah woman. Elizete also perceives that spiritual forces are alive and well in Toronto, and remain an integral component of Black consciousness and identity even in this new urban setting: "Obeah all around if anyone thought they'd escaped obeah" (59).

In the above examples of cultural synthesis, in which Brand transnationally links African spirituality, by way of Caribbean diaspora, with modern day Toronto, a notion of hybridity based

on cultural integration is manifest. A further example of such hybridity, crucial to Brand's enactment of Bhabha's "hybrid" space in *In Another Place, Not Here*, is the intermixing or creolization of language. The impact of the blending of the imposed, imported, English language and education system with African language forms, causally linked to the institution of slavery, in the context of the Caribbean tongue, is defined by Edward Brathwaite as "nation language," in his essay of the same name:

Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. (311)

Brathwaite emphasizes that "nation language" is not a dialect, which he interprets as "inferior English," but a language in its own right. It is a hybrid language that is English, but "closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean" (311).

In "The Absence of Writing," Philip similarly maintains that "Caribbean English" is a distinct language. She describes the tongue as having "a slippery, muscular quality to it...Language that has kinetic energy and returns the reader to that connection between body and word" (Philip 51).

In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand poignantly illustrates Philip's sense of "knowing the language in [the] body" (51), which characterizes "nation language" or "Caribbean English."

Elizete's description of the moment when Verlia first speaks to her is saturated with the linguistic cadence of the blended language:

Then, she say 'Sister.' And I could not tell if it was a breeze passing in that heat-still day or if I hear the word. 'Sister.' I know I hear it, murmuring just enough to seem as if it was said but not something that only have sense in saying. I know I hear it

silver, silver clinking like bracelets when a woman lift her arm to
comb hair. Silvery, silvery the wind take it. (*In Another Place* 14)

Brand's hybrid mode of expression – in terms of meaning that does “not...only have sense in” articulated language, but also in what seems “as if it was said” – is, in and of itself, an “in-between” site of cultural negotiation which allows Brand to communicate the possibility of an enunciation, a “murmur” that may have gone unnoticed, into a tangible, emotive moment.

Conclusion

In her article, “Dionne Brand: The New Wave Writing That Hates Suffering,” Sylvia Priestley-Brown suggests that Brand “does not consider herself ‘on the margin of Canadian literature’,” instead, she sees her writing as “the making of Black-Canadian literature” (Priestley-Brown 102). Similarly, Bhabha describes Toni Morrison's writing as establishing “the presence of a black literary work,” through her memorialization of “the ‘not there’” (Bhabha 192). The two writers are similar in that they challenge the boundaries of grand narratives by making up what is “not there,” by utilizing the “in-between” spaces. Fellow Trinidadian-Canadian poet Claire Harris also describes her writing as filling a void: “what we turn to we essentially have to make ourselves” (Harris 118). These writers feel the need to create what is “not there” because, historically, the machinations of slavery – the violent dissemination of families, and the deliberate dehumanization and deprivation of language and culture – systematically eradicated identity; left an absence.

In *In Another Place, Not Here*, the character of Verlia symbolizes the creation of presence in space. According to Elizete, “Verl is sure of what she make in her own mind and what she make didn't always exist. I like it how she leap” (*In Another Place...* 7). Like her character Verlia,

Brand herself leaps racialized historical and spatial gaps; the legacy of diasporic Blacks who “needed history, something before this place, something that this place cut off” (41). Brand’s “cultural enunciations in the act of hybridity” (Bhabha 252), or “signs of agency” take shape from the “time-lag, from the stressed absence that is an arrest, a ceasure of time, a temporal break” (199). Through the process of conceiving *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand inhabits the hybrid space.

Conclusion

**Hybridity is the most unlikely contender for this role as
'multi-purpose globalizing identity kit'.**

Nikos Papastergiadis

My initial interest in the study of hybridity arose from a personal perspective – based on the multiple hybridities within my own family – and a desire to better understand the ways in which the concept of hybridity can be negotiated in terms of identity formation. The study of these texts, written by a culturally diverse group of Canadian women, is not meant to undermine the cultural specificity of each author by using the blanket term “hybridity.” It is, instead, meant to explore the significant differences – for example, in terms of skin colour – between the authors and their experiences of marginalization, and to engage their respective texts as important contributions to the discourse of hybridity in the Canadian context. The variance of responses to hybridity, in relation to narrative form, is crucial both to the authors’ own individual thematic purposes, as well as to the scope of my comparative study, which focuses on comprehending the similarities and incongruities between different types of colonial existence and suffering.

Gunnars’s *The Prowler*, a self-consciously postmodern narrative, presents a precarious alternate position, in regards to the experience of marginality reflected in Campbell’s and Brand’s

texts. Gunnars's narrator's desire to marginalize, or free herself from both sides of her blended ancestry is an endeavor in stark contrast to the ambition for belonging, explicit thematic quests in *Halfbreed* and in *In Another Place, Not Here*. Gunnars's text endorses a "positively valued marginality" that Linda Hutcheon, in "Circling the Downspout of Empire," views as detrimental to postcolonial concerns:

Post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses. (130-131)

Hutcheon considers the de-stabilizing of the subject as the central difference between postmodernism and postcolonialism, although "there is still considerable over-lap in their concerns – formal, thematic, strategic" (131). It is conceivable that Gunnars, as a white person of hybrid origins, has the position of privilege from which to claim marginality; she does encounter North America as a liberating space, in relation to her former prescribed identity in Iceland. In contrast, life in Canada for Campbell and Brand, where the historic and systemic weight of race still exerts a palpable force on its non-white citizens, is not as liberating an experience for Campbell and Brand as non-white, as their respective narratives vividly attest. However, in spite of Gunnars's postmodern strategy to identity de-formation and the problematic of her positioning as white, *The Prowler's* political motivation, its careful consideration of language, race, skin as a visual signifier, and its opposition to fixed identities in the colonial context, may be considered a successful blending of the postmodern and postcolonial.

Brand, as a Black Canadian, does not have the choice of eluding a fixed identity by learning

new languages. As *In Another Place, Not Here* depicts, Blacks are physically marked as cheap labour, segregated to certain districts of downtown Toronto. Brand states in "Notes for Writing thru Race," that in Canada there is no possibility of "slipp[ing] into 'whiteness'," so she becomes engaged in "the face-off between 'whiteness' and all it has excluded" (188-189). As a writer, she must clear a new hybrid literary space within which to articulate her existence, as even in the Caribbean setting there is no sense of belonging, but rather a painful detachment from the violence of history and the landscape itself:

Here, there was no belonging that was singular, no need to store up lineage or count it; all this blood washed thick and thin, rinsed and rinsed and rubbed and licked and stained; all this blood gashed and running like rain, lathered and drenched and sprinkled and beat upon clay beds and cane grass. No belonging squared off by a fence, a post, or a gate. Not in blood, not here, here blood was long and not anything that ran only in the vein.
(*In Another Place* 39)

This passage, in its lament, serves as a poignant testament to the impossibility of "positively valued marginalization" for members of the Black diaspora, such as Brand. In *In Another Place, Not Here*, marginal existence or a perpetual sense of not belonging is portrayed as an endemic state for Caribbean Blacks. Through the intervention of the Bhabha's hybrid space, characterized by restlessness and movement, as well as Brand's fluid writing style, this thematic sense of non-belonging is embodied by Brand's elusive identity formation.

In her autobiography, *Halfbreed*, Campbell similarly searches for a sense of belonging as opposed to marginalization, but where Brand negotiates a transitory presence, Campbell seeks to create a cohesive "Halfbreed" identity. However, in reconstituting the name "Halfbreed" and establishing her people as culturally and historically distinct, Campbell distances or marginalizes

herself from her maternal white ancestry. Throughout the narrative, Campbell's aversion to whites is conspicuous: "I hated those nameless, faceless white masses all my life" (168). This distancing is understandable considering the physical and internalized racism that Campbell has suffered her whole life, at the hands of whites. As an act of reconciliation, in terms of her mixed heritage, Campbell collaborates with a white writer on *The Book of Jessica* as a means to connect to her alienated white side. This attempt to explore her white heritage indicates that a sense of belonging is closely tied to Campbell's conception of her "Halfbreed" identity.

In an overall sense, *The Prowler*, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place, Not Here* challenge dominant cultural perceptions of difference which serve to uphold divisive language and binary notions of race. However, in spite of the texts' apparent challenges, the authors themselves re-articulate binary notions in their narratives to some extent. Gunnars complicates her own subversion of the conventional binary with her creation of a new colonizer/colonized binary based on the visual signifier of diseased and non-diseased skin. Campbell's text strives to subvert colonial-based constructions of her "Halfbreed" identity, yet, in doing so, she assembles a Native/white binary of her own. For example, Campbell describes her Native side as stereotypically superior to whites in terms of spirituality and storytelling skills. Brand's writing in general also affirms a binary of sorts with her staunch emphasis on Black/white relations. Specific to *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand repeatedly represents Blacks as fluid, amorphous figures and characterizes white Toronto as concrete. The commonality of this restatement of binary thinking in all three texts is symptomatic of the colonial context in which they were composed. In this light I consider the phenomenon of the "double voice," while most explicit in *Halfbreed*, also implicit to some degree in *The Prowler*, as in *In Another Place, Not Here*.

Nevertheless, through the examination of the respective distinctness of the narratives a comprehensive appreciation for the strategies of negotiating hybrid identity within a racialized society can be realized. The identity formation undertaken by Gunnars, Campbell, and Brand reflects their culturally specific living histories and contemporary lives. However, when considered comparatively, the differing literary approaches of Gunnars's, Campbell's, and Brand's explorations of hybridity converge on some of the same variables. Gunnars bases her hybridity, proposed along racial lines, on linguistic acquisition and the rejection of definitions of nationality. Campbell reconstitutes her hybrid origins in terms of racial definitions, national identity, genealogy, and the celebration of a specific culture which includes linguistic elements such as the Michif language. Finally, Brand's hybridity is encountered with respect to the space that she creates within which to express the elusive vitality of Black diaspora. This differing focus aside, Brand's text also addresses hybridity in terms of the creolization of language, which is evident in the writing style of *In Another Place, Not Here*, and similarly draws racial designations. All of the texts can be seen as diasporic narratives; perhaps an indication of the transitory nature of hybridity in general. Even Campbell, who attempts to construct a fixed national identity, affirms a borderland identity for "Halfbreeds" in her reference to them as the "Road Allowance People." For these reasons *The Prowler*, *Halfbreed*, and *In Another Place, Not Here* become more than mere theoretical pursuits within the discourse of hybridity. The texts act as keen illuminations, highlighting both the scope and cross-over of cultural and psychological determinants which continue to maintain the binary notions of previous centuries and strategies of survival and identity maintenance, in terms of hybridity, within the colonial context.

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