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"If I were Her" - Fictions of Development from Cape Town, Canada and the Caribbean: A Relational Reading

Miki Flockemann

Summary

A comparative approach to South African texts with those produced in the Americas, notably the African-American and Afro-Caribbean diasporas, is currently still an under-researched area in South African literary studies. It will be argued that what has been referred to as the strategic value of a "diasporic double consciousness" can offer fresh perspectives on fictions of childhood and particularly novels of development (especially the *Bildungsroman*) which track an emerging subjecthood located physically and metaphorically between developing and developed countries. The focus here is on a relational reading of differently situated fictions of childhood, adolescence and young adulthood set in Cape Town, Toronto and New York. An exploration of the fictional strategies employed by Dianne Case, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Jamaica Kincaid will show how the dialectic established between "verbal" and "social" text foregrounds cultural specificity while also offering scope for reassessing both diasporic and local texts.

Opsomming

'n Vergelyking van Suid-Afrikaanse tekste met dié wat in die Amerikas, veral die "African-American" en "Afro-Caribbean" diasporas geproduseer is, is 'n navorsingsveld in Suid-Afrikaanse literêre studies wat nog nie na behore ontgin is nie. Hierdie artikel maak die stelling dat die strategiese waarde van 'n "diasporiese dubbelbewussyn" 'n nuwe perspektief kan bied van verhale van kinderjare, en veral die *Bildungsoman,* waar die ontwikkeling van die "self" ontbloot word. Hier ontstaan die ontwikkelende self fisies en metafories tussen ontwikkelende en ontwikkelde lande. Die fokus is op 'n leesstrategie waarin tekste uit verskillende geografiese liggings in hulle verband met mekaar gelees word, soos in hierdie geval, verhale van kinder- en jeugjare wat in Kaapstad, Toronto en New York onderskeidelik afspeel. Dianne Case, Marlene Nourbese Philip en Jamaica Kincaid slaag daarin om 'n dialektiese verhouding tussen die "verbale" en die "sosiale" tekste te laat ontstaan, wat kulturele spesifiteit beklemtoon terwyl dit ook ruimte bied vir 'n heroorweging van beide die diasporiese en die lokale tekste.

> This is not our country. We have no say here. We don't belong here.
>
> (Dianne Case 1991: 32)

> If I were in her shoes, I would have gone mad, or maybe run away, but she didn't. At least she had me.
>
> (Marlene Nourbese Philip 1988: 8)

> (Diaspora) double consciousness compels us all to see ourselves and our others in the same mirror.
>
> (Samir Dayal 1996: 49)

Fictions of childhood which use the narrative perspective of a child or adolescent to trace a coming to consciousness either in works that revisit childhood and youth as a way of reading adult identity, or as marketed for a young adult audience, have become a significant feature of South African literature produced over the last decade. Indeed, there have been some rather dismissive references to what has been described as "a new rash of writing [that has] broken out as white South African novelists recall their pasts through the eyes of the children whom they say they were" (Roberts 1996: 22). However, it is precisely the way such fictions of childhood represent how "identity is learned and rehearsed" (Whitlock 1995: 8) that is of interest here, particularly in view of current repositionings of identity politics in the postelection period. Furthermore, the way in which fictional texts engage with and deconstruct hegemonic structures articulated through family ideologies and other institutions can also be read in relation to the preoccupation with "bearing witness" in the public domain through testimonies given before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by survivors as well as by perpetrators, who frequently draw on childhood experiences to support amnesty applications.[1]

As suggested by the first epigraph from Dianne Case's Cape Town-based *92 Queen's Road* (1991) location, and a sense of (un)belonging is another significant aspect of the perspectives on coming to consciousness described here. While differently situated South African texts have been discussed comparatively in order to expose historical and aesthetic differences as well as social inequities, such readings should be balanced by looking at other texts produced in similar but not-the-same geopolitical contexts, such as in this case, Marlene Philip's *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990), situated respectively within the Afro-Caribbean diasporas of Toronto and New York. The purpose here is not to gloss over the cultural and historical specificities of the texts by Case, Philip and Kincaid, instead, I hope to indicate how the concept of "diasporic double consciousness" that is associated with texts produced throughout the Asian and African diasporas, can offer fresh

perspectives for looking at South African texts like *92 Queen's Road.*

Drawing on diaspora studies by, for instance, Homi Bhabha (1994) and Paul Gilroy (1994), Samir Dayal cautions against the danger of a "facile and rootless cosmopolitanism masquerading as transvalued diaspora" (1996: 46) and points to the strategic value of a diasporic double consciousness which forces acknowledgement of unequal power relations. Claiming a broader definition of double consciousness than that associated with W.E.B du Bois's famous "sense of always looking at yourself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity", Dayal posits that

> [d]oubleness is more productively conceived as the interstitiality of entering (or leaving) and destabilizing the border zones of cultures, as fracturings of the subject that resist falsely comforting identifications and reifications. Its negative value is that it denies the subject's sovereignty and stresses the performativity of the subject. For *this* doubleness there can hardly be a richer figure than "diaspora".
>
> (Dayal 1996: 48)

Such "negatively defined doubleness", according to Dayal, becomes an enabling strategy which provides scope for an "internal critique" (1996: 55). This, in turn, has implications for what is a common trope in fictions of childhood from developing countries, namely the parallels between developing self and processes of sociopolitical transition.

As Helena Lima has pointed out, the equation between the developing self and the developing nation in the traditional novel of education, or *Bildungsroman*, is one of the ways in which cultural practices are transformed in countries undergoing a process of decolonisation (cf. also O'Neale 1982: 25-37). This transformation of the genre, says Lima, "offers provisional readings of origin and identity, rhetorical configurations that will undergo further change as the process of recovery continues" (1993: 36). The concern here, as suggested by the epigraphs above, is to explore the way these texts interrogate or transform the *Bildungsroman* genre in terms outlined by Lima, and how a "relational reading", by emphasising the strategic value of diasporic double consciousness, is useful for texts like *92 Queen's Road*, which, for a variety of reasons, have not been discussed in the context of diasporic writings. South African texts are noticeably absent from comparative studies of "new literatures" such as Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin's *Decolonising Fictions* (1993). The term "relational reading" is taken from Cheryl Wall's comments on the need to read texts by black women writers in relation to other expressive traditions (1989: 9), though here I will be primarily concerned with similar texts from different geo-political

situations.

At a writers' forum hosted by the *Mail & Guardian* on "Transforming South Africa: The Power of Imaginative Writing", held in Cape Town in the year following the April 1994 election, fictions of childhood featured prominently, though the different positions taken by writers were revealing. For instance, Mark Behr, author of the compelling and controversial *The Smell of Apples* (1993), somewhat provocatively used poststructuralist arguments on constructions of identity to emphasise the need to, in his words, "open up subjectivity" in order to understand racism at a deeply personal level; and in view of his later public admission to being a police informer in the 1980s this now seems somewhat disingenuous. (Shades of appeals for amnesty, perhaps?). However, it was striking that at this forum women writers like Dianne Case who have been positioned as minorities within totalising black/white apartheid dichotomies stressed the need to explore the psychic trauma of apartheid in relation to constructions of coloured identity during childhood, while Agnes Sam, who is of Indian descent, expressed irritation at the way in which overtly political themes have been foregrounded in fictions of childhood at the expense of exploring the processes of subjectivity and even childhood pleasures. This suggests that fictions of childhood produced in a society in transition can provide fertile ground for analysing attempts to redefine "new", or reclaim suppressed identities.[2]

The transformation of cultural practices referred to by Lima can also be viewed as an aesthetic of transformation employed to represent the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood - here discussion of fictional strategies used to represent an emerging subjecthood will need to be informed by debates around speaking for or about, those situated as Others. The focus will be on Dianne Case's *92 Queen's Road* (1991) which is set in the post-Sharpeville, pre-Soweto era, and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) which deals with the experience of Afro-Caribbean exile and migration and is set in Toronto where Philip now lives.[3] However, in order to situate discussion of these lesser-known texts which have been marketed for a young adult audience within debates about transformation of the *Bildungsroman* genre, comparisons will be drawn with Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990), a novel of development dealing with the experiences of the nineteen-year-old Lucy, who leaves both Caribbean mother and motherland to work as an au pair in New York. Although Kincaid says that *Lucy* is not a sequel to her celebrated *Annie John* (1985) which tracks the painful but lyrical passage of Annie's relationship with her mother in coming to consciousness as woman and as "colonized subject" (Eder 1990: 3), it is significant to this argument that *Lucy* begins where *Annie John* ends, with Lucy's journey from developing to developed country.

Issues of identity are of course complicated by cultural affiliations in a diasporic context. Marlene Philip, who was born in Tobago, came to writing late in life after qualifying as a solicitor. Commenting on the difficulty of finding a "voice" in which to write, Philip says that as a consequence of the colonial enterprise, "[f]or the African in the Caribbean the equation between word and image was destroyed, if only temporarily" (1989: 271). Having as her only tool the very language that denied her identity, she has had to transform that language:

> The paradox of this acquisition is that the Africans learned both to speak and to be dumb at the same time, to give voice to the experience and image, yet to remain silent, and that silence has had a profound effect upon the English-speaking Caribbean artist working in the medium of words.
>
> (Philip 1989: 275)

Similarly, Kincaid, born in Antigua as Elaine Potter Richardson and currently living in the United States, comments in characteristically sharp tones on the ironies underlying her own indictment of Anglophiles in "the language of the criminal who committed the crime" (quoted by Kakutani 1988: 19).

Attention to the narrative strategies employed here will indicate how these texts offer what Lima refers to as "provisional readings of origin and identity" (1993: 36) and attempt, in Philip's phrase, to give expression to the "split image of voiced silence" (1989: 275). For instance, Case's text establishes a dialectic of values through the juxtaposition of short vignettes narrated by an apparently naive six-year-old growing up in Cape Town while Philip's novel is informed by a dialogic pattern of debate between the adolescent protagonist and older women in the diasporic Afro-Caribbean community of Canada. In Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) the reader is presented, as in Case's *92 Queen's Road* (1991) with a series of vignettes, but in this case the anecdotes provide glimpses of her island childhood, and give an account of the first year of her new life in New York, where she is reminded on her arrival of "how uncomfortable the new can make you feel" (p. 4) - a comment not only on her new undergarments, purchased for the trip. Described as simultaneously "impressionistic" and "transparent", with "everything exposed (except the soul)" (Eder 1990: 3), for Lucy "the past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in" (p. 137). Claiming that the narrative traces her "re-invention of herself", the narrator self-reflexively draws an analogy between this process and the visual arts: "I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist". Significantly, she says of her strategy, "I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know" (p. 134).

A relational reading of the stages of emotional and physical maturity posited

by these narrative perspectives of child, adolescent and young woman foregrounds how different temporal contexts inform representations of coming to consciousness as part of a broader process of decolonisation. The child narrator in Case's novel lives in an immediate, but evolving present, where news of Verwoerd's assassination merges with events in the Springbok radio serials and her family's own domestic dramas; this, for Case, is an important aspect of understanding apartheid constructions of South African subjectivities. In Philip's *Harriet's Daughter*, the adolescent Margaret acquires a sense of her own history through reading about the heroic slave Harriet Tubman (upon whom she attempts to model herself) and this enables her to make connections between American slavery, the Jewish Holocaust, and her own mother's "slaving away" at domestic chores. The young adult perspective of Lucy, however, tracks a more complex negotiation between present and past in her refusal to be a colonised subject. Unlike the other two youthful narrative perspectives, in Kincaid's *Lucy* (1991) this involves an exploration of Lucy's sexuality which is intimately bound up with her process of disentangling herself from both mother and childhood island home, as Lucy sees her sexuality as a vehicle for challenging the way her mother has internalised colonial systems of morality. For Lucy, an intense and bitter preoccupation with her own psychosocial history is thus integral to her "re-invention" of herself. Mariah, her liberal, beautiful but often obtuse American employer, who, to Lucy's irritation claims: "I have Indian blood in me" (p. 40), remarks in a tone tinged with envy, "What a history you have" (p. 19), as Lucy struggles to put a distance between herself and bittersweet memories of her mother and the motherland with which she is equated. On her arrival in the States Lucy sees her future as "a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight" (p. 6), referring to her disappointment at the ordinariness of the foreign landmarks, which in her unhappy island daydreams represented "lifeboats to my small, drowning soul" (p. 4). However, at the end of her first year, she sees her life "stretched out ahead of me like a book with blank pages" (p. 163), pointing to an emerging subjecthood located physically and metaphorically between the developing and developed country. This representation of an emerging subjecthood can thus suggest possibilities not yet available to the two younger protagonists in Case's and Philip's texts.

While both *92 Queen's Road* and *Harriet's Daughter* have won awards in the category for "juvenile literature" it will become clear that these are narratives of childhood and adolescence, rather than being limited to or for a young adult readership. As Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith have pointed out, there is a disturbing trend that sees the young adult novel as lacking the significance of adult (i.e. serious) South African literature, which is why such texts have

received scant attention by academics. They comment on the

> devaluation of books written for the adolescent as being necessarily linked to plots containing teenage romance, sexual exploration and angst with "high interest and low vocabulary", written by people who could never write real books for an adult literary market, and received within a milieu driven solely by didactics, literacy development, entertainment as escapist strategy.
>
> (Mitchell & Smith 1997: 174)

In the writers' forum referred to earlier, Case suggested that using the voice of Kathy as central narrating consciousness to explore the personal trauma of apartheid becomes a useful strategy for balancing the child's private experiences against the social text in which she lives, but of which she is not yet fully conscious. Case also made it clear that her Kathy's story is intended to counter the hegemonic values offered by the ubiquitous *Kathy and Mark* readers that as recently as 1997 were, astonishingly, still in use as part of many primary school reading programmes. However, looking at Case's text in relation to other, similar texts within - and more particularly for the purposes of this discussion - outside the country, can suggest alternative readings through a process of defamiliarisation, particularly when comparing the effects of using differently situated perspectives. Such comparisons will point to the "destabilizing [of] the border zones of cultures" in terms of the diasporic double consciousness outlined by Dayal (1996: 48).

In *Harriet's Daughter*, Margaret says of her friend Zulma, just arrived from Tobago and desperately unhappy in the unfamiliar cold climate of Toronto, "If I were in her shoes, I would have gone mad, or maybe run away, but she didn't. At least she had me" (Phillip 1988: 8). The comment, "If I were in her shoes", invites a relational reading not only of the experiences of Margaret and Zulma, but of Case's novel from Cape Town in relation to the novel from Canada, as both texts are concerned with growing up in a continuum between Africa and the diaspora, childhood and adolescence. In diasporic literature, childhood is often equated with romanticised evocations of the landscape of home, which is set against the alienating environment of the metropolis: in these works, however, home is the "new" metropolis, Cape Town, and Toronto, and yet these are also "not home", as Kathy's Uncle Reg puts it: "[W]e don't belong here" (Case 1991: 32). It will become evident that while *92 Queen's Road* and *Harriet's Daughter* are concerned with childhood and adolescence as subject, the "liminal" state of adolescence seems appropriate to the cross-cultural situations in which the protagonists attempt to negotiate the meanings of their personal experiences and their developing gendered and racialised identities. In other words, puberty itself becomes metonymic of a developing political and

feminist consciousness in different geopolitical contexts.

The distinction between writing *for* adolescents, and writing *of* adolesc*ence*, can be seen as a variation on a theme that has much occupied cultural theorists concerned with writing about/for/to those situated as Others. Several contributors to anthologies dealing with the formulation of a black and feminist aesthetic stress the dialectic that is established between insider and outsider in writing by black women.[5] For instance, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's reference to the "simultaneity of discourses" (1989: 17) as a characteristic feature of black women's writing is useful for looking at texts dealing with the processes of entry into young adulthood. Henderson applies Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "heteroglossia of social dialects" where each social group expresses "shared values, perspectives, ideology, norms" (1989: 118) to a discussion of what she refers to as black women's ability to "speak in tongues" (p. 123). Such "speaking in tongues", "plurality of voices" and "multiplicity of discourses" evident in writing by black women can also be identified in Case's and Philip's young adult narratives which construct one or more "balancing" consciousness, either through a peer or an older woman, as in *Harriet's Daughter*, or, as in *92 Queen's Road*, through the juxtaposition of voices in conversation in forty short vignettes. Similarly, the comparison of a text from apartheid South Africa with a text produced within the diasporic context of Canada is itself intended to provide a balancing perspective that is in keeping with what can be termed a relational rather than universalising reading. The cultural insider/outsider dialectic that is explored in these texts is paralleled in my own position as simultaneously partly inside (in fact located very near to Queen's Road, Woodstock, where Case grew up), but also outside the specific (en)gendered cultural and racialised identification process described here.[6]

In her study of the way young adults manipulate the forms available to them through popular culture to formulate and raise questions in their writings concerning their own personal and social identity, Gemma Moss argues they are not passive consumers, but are able to negotiate meanings from a variety of "knowledges" that they are confronted with. Writers are never wholly inside, nor outside their texts (Moss 1989: 114). Commenting on the way children make use of a variety of discourses, Moss claims that, "[b]y drawing attention to the contradictions between different sets of knowledge that children use in their writing we can open up questions about power and questions about difference, about masculinity and femininity" (1989: 124). It can be argued that the construction of childhood voices in these two texts deliberately sets out to achieve something similar: despite the fact that these texts are written for adolescents by mature writers, one can speculate about the way such texts invite readers to negotiate their own meanings, rather than accept given meanings,

which is the case in some didactic novels aimed at a young adult audience.

92 Queen's Road consists of a collage of experiences, personal and public, as witnessed by Kathy from the age of six to pre-puberty. The apparently naive narrative recounts closely observed daily events in the lives of Kathy's family against the backdrop of popular radio serials like *Mark Saxon* and *Consider your Verdict* which mark the different times of day. The diversity of voices represented here replicates the cultural and social ethos of the time, and this is achieved through a technique whereby the narrative voice repeats snatches of conversation similar to what Robert Frost has called "sentence sounds" where "the sentence sound often says more than the words. It may even as in irony convey a meaning opposite to the words" (quoted by Scully 1966: 52). For instance, there is the ever stern voice of the grandmother, Ma, who is suspicious of both her Moslem and Jewish neighbours, and whose homely and familiar platitudes and admonishments place her as a figure of anxious, but caring, authority: "That child has no ears .... Ornaments on the side of her head" (Case 1991: 2). Then there are the voices of Kathy's young and unmarried mother, of Cedric the lodger who, when in the mood, "dressed up in his Connie Francis outfit and sang 'Where the boys are'" (p. 5), and the seafaring Uncle Reg who provides glimpses of a world beyond Woodstock. All code-switch between English and Afrikaans and occasionally "Kaaps", a local creole, demonstrating the community's propensity for cultural translation. However, Ma's English has a strong residue of Afrikaans syntax in keeping with her apparently Calvinist moral values, thus indicating her own culturally ambivalent situation in the apartheid dichotomy.

In *Harriet's Daughter* the "contradictions" and "different sets of knowledge" referred to by Moss (1989: 114) involve the juxtaposition of different child/ woman perspectives which establish the dialogic aspect of the text. However, perhaps paradoxically, the dialectic of values offered in Case's text through the juxtaposition of different vignettes narrated by Kathy can be seen to provide scope for a more interactive reading and a more complex construction of value, precisely because *92 Queen's Road* uses a more naive narrative perspective than does *Harriet's Daughter*. Similarly, questions about power are raised through the interplay between personal and broader historical factors, although the two texts again achieve this in different ways.

Margaret/Harriet devises a game, "The Underground Railway", inspired by her reading about Harriet Tubman. Through this she shares and literally plays with her newly acquired knowledge of the past. Margaret is aware of the power of dominant perceptions of beauty, the importance of knowledge and education, and even of the concept of "children's rights", whereas Kathy in *92 Queen's Road* has not yet achieved a sense of a hierarchy of knowledge and information.

At the same time, the family relationships in both novels interrogate the dominant conceptions of masculinity, femininity and the question of difference referred to by Moss (1989: 124). This is achieved partly through the way each family is positioned within the larger body politic. It is significant that in both texts "Father" becomes associated with dominant hegemonies, whereas the fathers (referred to pejoratively only as "He" in *Harriet's Daughter*) are themselves disempowered because of their racially determined social status. Interestingly, Kathy only registers the existence of her (absent) father once she has been made aware of her marginalised (because coloured) position.

Unlike Reg's gifts of exotic dolls, Ma's Christmas present to Kathy is "the most beautiful bride doll I had ever seen" (Case 1991): 41). But the gift of the yellow-blonde, blue-eyed doll contradicts the anger Ma directs at her son Peter for deciding to pass for white, so that the family shamefully have to sneak into the white suburb after dark to visit him, for fear of being noticed by the neighbours. This is typical of the dialectic of values established in Case's novel: the narrator does not question what the gift of the doll signifies when she receives it, she only becomes aware of its significance in the following vignette when an irate father chases her off the "whites only" beach in Kalk Bay on their traditional Boxing Day: "Get away from those coloured children" and at Kathy, "'You coloured children have you own beach. Go on! Shoo!' he said, and gave me a shove with his foot" (Case 1991): 45). This scene culminates with her first realisation of her herself as a racialised subject, and is accompanied by a feeling of humiliation:

> I was trapped - there was no escaping it.
>
> All the while that I sat there, I ran my finger in a daze up and down my arm, as if I could erase that terrible feeling of being coloured. But with each stroke of my finger, the big girl's voice echoed in the waves:
>
> This ... is ... coloured. This brown skin.
>
> (Case 1991: 47)

However, Kathy's narration itself serves to "erase" that shame and translate it into anger. Her subsequent "understanding" of the effects of racism and the injustice of the Group Areas Act removal is represented as an emotional and physical reaction rather than a consciously articulated thought: she says of her anger that it "came at me like a whirlwind and became my own. I felt it stirring through me, finding its way into my marrow and fermenting there" (p. 86). Yet the complexity of South Africa's racial politics is suggested in a later scene when, on the day Verwoerd is assassinated, Kathy comes home to find Ma refusing a request for a cup of coffee or tea from two "young and friendly" white municipal workers who have come to install a telephone; instead, "she

stared at them, making them feel uncomfortable", and they scuttle off in a hurry. "They don't even know that their Prime Minister was stabbed" (p. 54), Ma says with what one assumes is disdain and satisfaction. Although Kathy typically never qualifies this sort of remark, it is obvious that Ma considers herself superior to the white workers.

The relationship with peers reveals the ambiguity of the adolescent's processes of identification and provides a useful strategy for resisting dominant discourses. In *Harriet's Daughter,* this occurs through dialogue and debate in a way that is more direct (and hence more didactic) than the dialectic of values established in *92 Queen's Road* through the juxtaposition of multiple short scenes. A case in point is a conversation between peers in *Harriet's Daughter* where Ti-cush, Zulma and Margaret/Harriet discuss Margaret's newly invented Underground Railway game while experimenting with make-up, and braiding each other's hair. The scene illustrates the negotiation of values by the three friends, while at the same time establishing differences between them in terms of their "situatedness" in terms of class/race identification. The way this scene merges the personal and the public sphere is interesting, for in their discussion of the game, they manipulate the "meaning" of the history of slavery for their own purposes. Ti-cush's wanting to be a "beautiful mistress" of a slave owner, points to her collaborative status, and this is borne out when she later betrays the secrets of the game. In answer to the question: "Can slaves be white?" (p. 64) Margaret/Harriet thinks: "I was surprised, I hadn't thought of this. I mean I thought that all slaves were black, but Ti-cush's question made me think". Eventually she decides, "Hell anybody can be a slave, right?" (p. 64), and her answer here is prompted by the recollection of her mother's erstwhile employer, a Holocaust survivor. At a more sub-liminal level, her recognition of her own mother's "slaving away" at housework extends the condition of oppression beyond the racial categories, to include gender.

In the interaction between the young adult and parent there is a telling contrast in the way Margaret's parents respond to her "womanish" (cheeky, rude) behaviour. In his obsession with avoiding Canadian stereotypes about blacks and maintaining what he sees as respectable status as "Coloured folk", her father adopts an authoritarianism that alienates both daughter and later wife as well. The way the family relationships here replicate colonial relationships is suggested when Zulma's stepfather, enraged at the discovery that Margaret's mother has secretly financed the girls' trip to Tobago, visits her father hoping to find an ally against the women:

> Is this country I tell you, sir, it full up they head with all this feminist talk and make them feel woman is boss. Every day you turn on the T.V. is somebody else

> talking about how women have to have they rights; they want to wear pants and run man life, and time and time again I have to tell my wife that two man-rat can't live in one hole.
>
> (Philip 1989: 134)

When Zulma's father laments that it is the diasporic context where wives are exposed to feminist ideas on Canadian television that is to blame for the situation where women "want to wear pants and run man life", it is suggested that separation from the motherland does not only entail loss, but also provides the potential to contemplate alternatives, and to renegotiate given cultural and gender identities. For Margaret the temporary physical and geographic separation from the family, particularly the father, results in a reassessment of her relationship with him. When she looks out of the aircraft window and sees Barbados, her father's homeland, below, she is also able perhaps to see "Him" differently, because she is no longer locked in conflict with him personally. This replication of the familial with the colonial relationship develops from a confrontation with a masculine, patriarchal order ("He"), to an identification with, and transformation of the mother as fellow/woman, and this takes these two novels beyond the familiar mother/daughter conflict in Western novels of development. Instead of the daughter speaking for or about the mother as source of conflict and of competition, the mother, in *Harriet's Daughter,* begins to speak for herself.

At the end of *92 Queen's Road,* however, the reassessment of the parent occurs simultaneously with Kathy's emerging womanhood. When Kathy says, as she does at several points in the novel, "I'm old enough, you know, ... and I understand" (Case 1991): 105) - a reference to her mother's new relationship and impending marriage - the dialectic established in the novel suggests that this "understanding" is again still only partial. This pre-pubescent "moment" in Kathy's understanding can be read against Kincaid's older Lucy who can only gain independence as young woman through separation from mother (and, by implication, motherland). Discussion of Kincaid's preoccupation with the processes of coming to subjecthood has stressed the "self-alienation" resulting from this, "since to know oneself through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation" (Silverman quoted by Murdoch 1990: 31). Significantly, it is the diasporic context that enables Lucy's "re-invention" of herself. As Thulani Davis puts it, "[h]er story is not about the shock of emigrating from one culture to another; it dwells in the psychological space between leaving and arriving" (1990: 11). One recalls how the child Lucy used to daydream about the unfamiliar metropolitan landmarks, seeing them as "lifeboats" to her "small drowning soul" (Kincaid 1990: 3) and would imagine herself "entering and leaving them, and just that, entering and leaving over and over again" (p. 4). It

has been pointed out that the novel ends at the beginning of Lucy's new life signified by the writing of her name, "Lucy Josephine Potter", in the blank pages of the journal given to her by Mariah - this in turn becomes the narrative that traces the processes of her own becoming (Marien 1990: 13).

I have argued that these narratives which construct the voices of minors within minorities as child/woman attempt to give expression to what Philip calls the "split image of voiced silence" (1989: 275) through the naive narrative voice, as well as the sentence sounds which often mean something other than what they say. A simultaneously inside/outside consciousness is constructed internally through the use of peers and older women in *Harriet's Daughter,* and through the juxtaposition of diverse voices and vignettes in *92 Queen's Road.* As this narrative strategy produces a reading of adolescence as condition, these works are not "simply" for a young adult readership. Nevertheless, one needs to ask, how does this provide ways to transcend the contradiction referred to by Philip, "both to speak and be dumb at the same time" (1989: 275)?[6]

A possible response to this is suggested by Chilean critic and poet Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, who, (like Henderson) applies Bakhtinian concepts of social discourse to work by black women. Her emphasis on the need to see "woman, self, social being" as "constituent elements for the writing subject's sociality" (1989: 116) are echoed in Philip's reference to the need to transform the image/word split. Philip says that as she continues to write in her "fathertongue", she needs to effect "a metamorphosis within the language from fathertongue to mothertongue. In the process some aspects of language will be destroyed, new ones created" (1990: 278). According to Diaz-Diocaretz women's writing exists in a "social text" with sets of variable functions and the woman writer's point of view, voice and strategic consciousness are "part of the represented world in which patriarchal and cultural sociolects as well as the [writer's] ideolect are conjointly interacting" (1989: 115).[7] This interaction of the ideolect/sociolect can be seen as similar to the insider/outsider dialectic referred to earlier. In other words, one can, says Diaz-Diocaretz, analyse how the woman's (or in this case the constructed child's/woman's) world-vision can be "sifted" from the "world-vision of patriarchy", in a way not unlike the diasporic doubleness as described by Dayal which provides scope for an internal critique (Dayal 1996: 55).

Much stress has been put on the dynamic aspects of strategies used by black or minority women writers, and, as Cheryl Wall argues, as a result of the "unmistakably polyvalent experience" of such women, the appeal to self is not necessarily ahistorical or essentialist. Quoting Teresa de Lauretis, she asserts the concept of a "multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with language" (De Lauretis quoted by Wall 1989: 10). These texts, by constructing apparently naive child/woman

writing subjects, negotiate the interaction between textual and extratextual, and in the process, "open up" questions of origin and identity in ways that can be seen as part of larger processes of decolonisation.

The "genesis of identity" which features so strongly in these texts is thus a significant aspect of the way the *Bildungsroman* genre has been transmuted in these works. Relevant here is this description of the way Kincaid's *Annie John* diverges from the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre, which echoes Lima's comments on the provisional readings of origin and identity (1993: 36). Referring to the way Kincaid differs from this tradition in terms of her own race, culture and gender, Murdoch points to the way the "ontological basis of the protagonist's struggle" (1990: 326), is informed by these differences:

> As such, the very discourse of the novel - specifically the genesis of identity as it is addressed here - derives from and speaks to a particular cultural milieu whose conditions of existence determine, in their turn, the way in which signification is constructed in this novel.
>
> (Murdoch 1990: 326)

Murdoch goes on to comment on the way in which the specificities of the Caribbean cultural context distinguish Kincaid's text from the African-American context in relation to the way signification is constructed. For example, as a result of the peculiar colonial histories of the West Indies, people from different islands, although sharing a common history, tend to see each other as "different" from one another: this, says Murdoch, "seems an unalterable feature of West Indian Culture" (1990: 326), further complicating the process of cultural identification and the genesis of identity amongst peoples of African descent in the Caribbean. This extends, by implication, to the South African context as well, further underlying the way a relational reading, while offering fresh insights, always affirms particularity.

The comparative or relational reading adopted here suggests that the newly discovered personal and political awareness celebrated in *Harriet's Daughter* and *Lucy* is also a possibility for the protagonist of *92 Queen's Road*, even though the time had not yet arrived for Kathy, or her country. However, these fictional accounts should not be read as comparative political commentary on the situation of minorities within the context of Canada, Cape Town, and the Caribbean diaspora; instead, a relational reading suggests that Kathy's situation is not fixed, as different vignettes represent "moments" in her coming of age. Case has repeatedly stressed the importance of "understanding" the past, and says of the anger that lies behind her writing of *92 Queens's Road*, "It's good to write about it when you're angry - it's part of the story" (Case quoted by Rosenthal 1992: 5). Helena Lima observes that while for Lukács, the novel

"seeks by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life", the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, she believes, "paradoxically attempts both to represent the movement from fragmentation and loss toward wholeness and homeland, and to deny the possibility of such recovery" (1993: 54). This is illustrated in Lucy's process of un-loving her beloved mother, because she reminds her of her own colonised subjectivity - "my past was my mother" (Kincaid 1990: 90) - yet, she transfers her love to Mariah because, "during the times I loved her it was because she reminded me of my mother" (p. 58).

Works like these provide an important contribution to transformations of the traditional novel of development, yet this is not always recognised because of the way youth literature like *92 Queen's Road* is marketed and relegated to separate sections of the library or bookstore. Reading these three texts in relation to one another reveals how they are differently placed on a continuum between childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. One can speculate that the distinction between a "bourgeois aesthetic" and its association with ideological domination, and what has been referred to by John Willis as a "grounded aesthetics" which is the process by which ordinary people make sense of the world (Willis quoted by Storey 1993: 191), and where the "aesthetic qualities do not reside in the artefact but in its use" (McGuigan 1992: 116) is appropriate to the effect of using an apparently naive narrative voice. As Whitlock suggests, the effect of modelling one's prose on the techniques of naive realism becomes a way of representing the private, ordinary life as a site of resistance by challenging dominant discourses, and in the process, recovering a personal, hidden history often lost in the sphere of macropolitical forces (Whitlock 1995: 9). It is interesting too, that in South Africa, "not-quite" popular forms like youth literature have served as a barometer for ideological shifts during periods of political transition and a relational reading of these texts has indicated the ambiguity and fluidity of the child/adolescent condition described here, pointing to the potential facing the developing self, as well as the developing nation - which in the "child's/woman's world view" would always be seen as multiple and various, rather than homogeneous.

Notes

1. Amnesty applications of people like Brian Mitchell and Eugene de Kock have referred to the way their attitudes and values were "shaped" by parents, church and state. For instance, a piece on De Kock titled: "Nerdish Looking Boy Turned Killer" which describes his relationship with his authoritarian father, suggests a projection of agency onto childhood experience which "turned" him into the killer he has become (*Cape Times*, 31 October 1996, p. 9).

2. There has been much debate in the media recently about "coloured" identity, and although a significant group still identify themselves as part of the black majority, small ethnic and separatist groupings have emerged recently, such as the KWB (Coloured Resistance Movement). In December 1996, on the anniversary of the freeing of the slaves at the Cape in 1834, the December 1st Movement was formed, with the aim of redefining a broadly defined coloured history and identity, and this has given rise to criticism from cultural theorists like Neville Alexander, who warn against attempts to define a distinct "coloured" identity when such an identity will always remain subject to social change and to political pressures, particularly during times of historical transition. (Yazeed Fakier, "A Debate Coloured by Race" *Cape Times*, December 4, 1996, p. 8).

3. Marlene Nourbese Philip won awards for poetry collections such as *She Tries Her Tongue* (1989) and *Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989). *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) is her first novel and has received numerous awards, including the Canadian Children's Book Centre's Choice Award in 1989. Dianne Case has won the Young Africa Book Award twice, for *Love, David* (1986) and in 1991 for *92 Queen's Road*. Her first novel, *Albatross Winter* (1980) won the Africa Adventure Award. Her most recent publication is another novel, *Madam, this is Annie* (1996), her first not marketed for young adults. Published as part of the Macmillan Modern Writers Series, this is a series of internal monologues addressed by Annie to her white employer, and is set in the final days of apartheid.

4. See, for instance, the debates generated around Gayatri Spivak's "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" *Oxford Literary Review* 8(1/2) (1986), and anthologies like *Changing Our Own Words* (1989) edited by Cheryl Wall, and *Reading Black, Reading Feminist* (1990) edited by Henry Louis Gates *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), edited by Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, is concerned with writing by women from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora; similarly are *Motherlands* (1991) edited by Susheila Nasta, and *Wild Women in the Whirlwind* (1990) edited by Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin.

5. In an interview Case recalls how "[p]eople used to ask me, What are you?" as her father was Indian, while her mother was classified as Coloured (quoted by Rosenthal 1992: 5). Her family moved to Wynberg after the Group Areas Act of 1950 had relocated people from District Six which had a largely cosmopolitan community:

   > The district also had large numbers of immigrants from Britain, several thousand Jews from Tsarist Russia and several more thousand Mfengu, Gcaleka and Gaika from the Eastern Cape. But a vast range of nationalities were represented in the District, including considerable numbers of Indians, Chinese and Australians.
   >
   > (Vivian Bickford-Smith 1990: 37)

6. Although not autobiographical, both Case's and Kincaid's texts draw on the writers' own life-stories.

7. According to Diaz-Diocaretz "in the interaction between the extratextual and the textual a meeting ground is crucial between self, social being, writing subject and the subject of utterance" (1989: 117).

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