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FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: THE TRAJECTORY OF DIONNE BRAND'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Rogério Silvestre da Silva

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2008

Supervising Professor: Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

This study discusses the trajectory of Dionne Brand's poetry in its political engagement with the issues of diaspora, post-colonialism, the Multiculturalism Act in Canada, and struggles of visible minorities. The poet's political discourse is mainly analyzed in light of the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality. The analysis shows that Brand explores a multitude of voices, that is, a polyphonic discourse in which the poet articulates her political views in order to represent the experience of otherness. Findings also show that Brand's poetic act of resistance expresses her hybrid language which subverts the dominant discourse. The poet also discusses her experience with racism, her vision about the notion of national identity, and her criticism against the media regarding the manipulation of violence and cultural destruction.

Key words: Diaspora, visible minorities, race, gender and Multiculturalism Act.

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RESUMO

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: THE TRAJECTORY OF DIONNE BRAND'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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Professora Orientadora: Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Este estudo discute a trajetória da poesia de Dionne Brand, em seu engajamento político em assuntos como diáspora, pós-colonialismo, o Ato do Multiculturalismo no Canadá, e as lutas das minorias visíveis. O discurso político da poetisa é analisado primeiramente em relação às intersecções entre raça, classe, gênero e sexualidade. A análise mostra que Brand explora uma multiplicidade de vozes, isto é, um discurso polifônico, no qual a poetisa articula sua visão política em ordem de representar a experiência da diversidade. Os resultados também mostram que o ato de resistência poética de Brand expressa a sua linguagem híbrida, a qual subverte o discurso dominante. A poetisa também discute sua experiência com racismo, sua visão sobre a noção de identidade nacional, e o sua critica contra a mídia, em relação à manipulação da violência e da destruição cultural.

Palavras Chaves: Diáspora, minorias visíveis, raça, gênero e Ato do Multiculturalismo.

Número de páginas: 69

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INTRODUCTION

Dionne Brand's history starts in Trinidad in 1953 and it is transferred to Canada in 1970, where she has developed her art a writer. Brand's work includes poetry, fiction, non-fiction (criticism, autobiographical prose) and film. Through all these genres, Brand has revealed a consistent political engagement, addressing issues of diaspora, colonialism, and struggles of minorities, among others.

Brand's career as a poet began in 1978, with the book of poetry *'Fore Day Morning*. In the following year, she published *Earth Magic*, which is dedicated to children. In 1982, *Primitive Offensive* introduced to the literary field a Brand more concerned with her politics and social issues in regards to her experience and her African origin, keeping "[t]he fragmented modernist image or allusion works by being able to refer to an understood continuum, a shared history or literary tradition" (Lynette Hunter 13).

In *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), Brand intertwines public and personal history documenting the U.S invasion of Grenada, which occurred while she was working there as an Officer for the Caribbean People's Development Agency. The poet narrates the realistic vocabulary recounting the invasion in Granada in three separated sections: "Languages," "Sieges," and "Military Occupations."

The following decade starts with *No Language is Neutral* (1990) which marks a significant change in Brand's poetry. This collection of poems "can be read as a contestational dialogue between differing national localities and languages, then it also offers a dialogue between differing literatures—recognized as fluid and contradictory discursive fields" (Jason Wiens 3). For this volume of poetry, she received her first nomination for the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1990—one of the most

prestigious award in Canada. With prose poems and longer lines, Brand also makes use of her recently-discovered lesbian sexuality in the section "Hard against the Soul."

The issue to be discussed in the proposed investigation concerns the engaged character expressed in Brand's poetry, exploring boundaries of race, class, gender and nationality. More precisely, I will be analyzing Brand's poetry in relation to the term polyphony,[1] examining the multiple voices in which she articulates her political engagement from her third collection of poems, *Primitive Offensive* (1983) to her most recent *Inventory* (2006). Through these voices, Brand embodies positions of different minority groups in Canada such as Black, Chinese, Italian, French, South Asian, Jews, and so on. Taking this into consideration, I will be investigating the trajectory of her poetry in its dialogic relation with the phenomenon of multiculturalism in Canada.

The proposed investigation is centered on Brand's position as not only a Black woman and outsider, but also as a Caribbean immigrant with affinities with Marxism, feminism and the other forms of political activism against oppression faced by "visible minorities"[2] in Canada. Her writings at once transmit a personal narrative of resistance against white domination. Specifically, Brand starts her poetry by expressing the history of oppression, slavery and colonization. In her third book of poetry, *Primitive Offensive*, she brings to the readers her past, her ancestral African origin and the slavery legacy. In *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), she interweaves public and personal history documenting the invasion of Grenada by the U.S., which occurred while Brand was working there as an Officer for the Caribbean People's Development Agency.

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[1] The quality of "polyphony" in Brand's poetry is the orchestration of a plurality of voices, especially those in opposition to dominant discourses. Mikhail Bakhtin borrows the term "polyphony" from musical terminology to define the dialogic character of the novel. "Within a novel perceived as a musical score, a single 'horizontal' message (melody) can be harmonized vertically in a number of ways, and each of these scores with its fixed pitches can be further altered by giving the notes to different instruments."(Glossary , *The Dialogic Imagination*, 430-31).

[2] The term is primarily used in Canada to describe people who are not of the majority race in a given population. In March 2007, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination described the term as racist. http: //en.wikepedia.org/wiki/visible_minority. April 10,2008

In *Land to Light On* (1997), Brand articulates the urban life of immigrants in Canada. By doing so, she affirms, "[i]f I am peaceful in this discomfort, is not peace, / is getting used to harm" (3). She mentions Canada as a place where she is an outsider, but she also mentions the many outsiders have come and settled in the country, sometimes not satisfied with the land and its people, and sometimes not with themselves. In *Inventory*, the political perspective is extended to a global concern. Brand critically describes the atrocities of our contemporary world. She writes an unequivocal statement: "the physical world is not interested in us, / it does what it does,/its own inventory of time, of light and dark"(46). In this collection of poems, although Brand's gaze is more global than local, the Caribbean (her geography of origin) and Canadian contexts continue to be depicted. In *Inventory*, the main character is a woman who for "[o]ne year [...] sat at the television weeping,/ no reason/ the whole time/and the next, and the next" (21), watching global events unfold without a break, without letting her attention to the massacre she is observing to waver.

The proposed investigation will discuss Brand's multiple voices incorporating her own life experiences as an immigrant in Canada, and also her memories of the Caribbean. In addition, these voices embody the fears, reactions and rejections lived by other outsiders in Canada. Brand, in her essay "Whose Gaze and Who Speaks for Whom," affirms,

> [the visible minorities] should talk again about the repression of their cultures by this concept of 'whiteness.' [They] haven't been excluded, [they have] been repressed, and [they] don't need access, [they] need freedom from the tyranny of 'whiteness' expressing itself all through [their] lives. (189)

As for the implications of the issue of multiculturalism, although Brand does not specifically mention the term "Multiculturalism Act"[3] and its policies in her poetry; she positions herself against the "white" domination in Canada. Moreover, her poetry speaks of the necessity to confront oppression and the colonial legacy faced by Black people.

My analysis will have as theoretical and critical basis, the studies of Ian Henderson Angus, and Hamani Bannerji, Smaro Kamboureli, Hamini Bannerji, and Neil Bissoondath which discuss the implications of diaspora, colonialism, dilemmas of minorities and policies of Multiculturalism in Canada. I intend to explore the different perspectives among these theorists and critics: Angus and Hutcheon(positive view of multiculturalism as social ideal, although conscious of the problematic issues of minorities and policies) and Kamboureli, Bannerji, and Bissoondath(highly crtical of the history of oppression in Canada and the Multiculturalism policies). Then, I intend to situate Brand's political engagement among these scholars.

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[3] The Canadian Multiculturalism Act lays out the Government of Canada's Multiculturalism Act. Two fundamental principles of the Act are:

> * All citizens are equal and have the freedom to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage.
> * Multiculturalism promotes the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in all aspects of Canadian society.

The Act also "promotes and endorses activities and initiatives that:

> * ensure that Canadians of all origins have an equal opportunity to obtain employment at NPB (the National Parole Board);
> * enhance the ability of all individuals and communities of all origins to contribute to the continuing evolution of Canada;
> * enhance the understanding of and respect for the diversity of members of Canadian society;
> * are sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada, and
> * make use of the language skills and cultural understanding of individuals of all origins.

http://www.npb-cnlc.gc.ca/infocntr/multiculturalism_e.htm. April 23, 2008.

Ian Henderson Angus's "Multiculturalism as a Social Ideal" provides an account of what constitutes the term multiculturalism in Canada. According to him, Multiculturalism may be described as a sociological fact because Canada is the result of immigration. Angus also illustrates that Multiculturalism can be seen "[as a] social ideal that expresses how English Canada ought to conduct itself" (139). For Angus, what constitutes the politics of multiculturalism in English Canada as a social ideal is their expansion of a "democratic theory to include the public recognition of particularities" (146) among all the ethno-cultural groups in the country, even though it would be reducing French Canada (one of the two " founding nations") as a part of it. In any case, as Angus points out, "the social diversity [in Canada] has led to a lack of national unity that must be overcome by a policy oriented toward what [they] have in common"(139). This may be understood that multiculturalism as a social ideal may be able to act more effectively in the sociological context lived by all ethnic groups.

Linda Hutcheon's introduction in *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, follows Angus' discussion to investigate the tension caused by the Multiculturalism Act in terms of ideal and ideology. Hutcheon's discussion about the Multiculturalism Act is centered on contemporary Canadian literature. She claims that the notion of the two solitudes comes from the dominant ethical groups: French and English. On the other hand, this notion nowadays has been changed due to the multicultural reality in Canada. Hutcheon explains epistemologically why she used the term "multicultural" instead of "ethnic" in the title of the anthology. She has chosen the term "multicultural" because the word refers to social hierarchy and privilege in relation to English and French Canada. Hutcheon illustrates that the word 'ethnic' comes from the Greek root *ethnos*, meaning 'nation' or 'people'" (2) which could suggest that all people in Canada are ethnic, including the dominant groups: French and English. What

Hutcheon demonstrates that these two founding groups are ethnic, but they also have different cultural origins. On the other hand, the term ‘ethnic’ is also used to refer to the ‘other.’ But it is not associated with the French and English groups which are privileged in Canada, For Hutcheon, the word “multicultural” is less offensive to refer to the others. In other words, the ‘multicultural’ characteristics that have been caused by the immigration process in the country “[have also] changes forever [the] concept of what constitutes Canadian literature” (6). Subsequently, Hutcheon points out that Canada has always been a multicultural country, and that multiculturalism policies have been responsible for balancing the social tension and cultural richness.

Hutcheon states that the social tension and the literary impact caused by Multiculturalism in Canada are described by “both authors and characters they create: the time and condition of immigration, age, gender, class and gender, race” (6). At the same time, she implies that the Multiculturalism Act is a model of civil acceptance of diverse ethnicities in Canada, even though Hutcheon does not deny the effects or racism by the dominant class. Clearly, “victims of racism are those whose identity was forged within the colonial cauldron” (Robert Stam 477). In fact, racism is a complicated and rigidly ordered system which is difficult to examine because, according to Hutcheon, 100 per cent of non-native Canadians are immigrants or have immigrant background (12). She claims that “[r]acism extends not only to relatively new arrivals to Canada but to those who were here well before any European colonizer” (8). This argument is controversial because the multicultural ideology in Canada has not addressed (8) the term racism against the native peoples in the country.

Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* provides an understanding about the legacy of colonialism in Canada.

Obviously, she is interested in examining the element of diasporic literature[4] and the policies of the official Multiculturalism Act in the country. Kamboureli also presents a review about *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fiction.* According to her, *Other Solitudes* points out that Canadian literary tradition has given respectful consideration to ethnic literature. *Other Solitudes* seems to suggest "that ethnic writing has always been part of the canon" (163). In this way, it seems that *Other Solitudes* implies that there is not any marginalization in relation to the ethnic writing in Canadian society.

One of Kamboureli's major discussions focuses on the fact that the diasporic identity causes a marginalized position. In other words, the place for which one longs (home) will just have an "allegory of values" in relation to the "new home." In fact, this cult of origins is a nostalgic manifestation for the past. A poem by Brand in the collection, *Land to Light On* corroborates Kamboureli's thoughts in this regard:

> Look, let me be specific. I have been losing roads
> and tracks and air and rivers and little thoughts
> and smells and incidents and a sense of myself
> and fights I used to be passionate about
> and don't remember […]
> I have been forgetting everything, friends, and pain.
> The body bleeds only water and fear when you survive
> the death of your politics, but why don't I forget.
> That island with an explosive at the beginning of its name
> keeps tripping me and why I don't recall my life
> in detail because I was always going somewhere else […]. (15)

In articulating her condition as an outsider, Brand expresses her sense of immobilization. She does not support the dream of returning home (the island, Trinidad), or alternately, of belonging to a new home (Canada). The diasporic experience creates a lack of identification which justifies the outsiders' uncomfortable condition in the land and with its people. Furthermore, they are uncomfortable

[4] This sort of literature is associated to "[t]the experience of displacement, the process of acculturation or integration, the gasp between generations, the tensions between individual and their communities—these are some of the themes that inform diasporic literature" (130).

sometimes with themselves. Also, Kamboureli observes that the "diasporic experience constitutes an instance of self-identification by negation, a negation that affirms the subject's belonging to Canada" (139).

In her introduction of the anthology *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, Kamboureli advocates that since the late 1980s, multiculturalism has not only reached widespread acceptance in the political and social contexts, but also in academic fields. She also proposes that her anthology is an attempt to change the readers' understanding of the term "minority literature" in Canada. Kamboureli presents "a body of writings" (1) which has been a part of the main literary tradition. According to her, this body of writings belongs to authors who, like Dionne Brand, are generally immigrants of different races, ethnic origins, genders, places, ideologies, sexualities and thematic concerns. These issues are fundamentally engaged in the experience of diasporic phenomenon expressed by these authors' literature in outstanding ways. For Kamboureli, these so-called 'marginalized' contributors' writing often reflects the racial discrimination they faced in Canada. Nowadays, their literature has been "included in courses on Canadian literature and has become the focus of recent critical studies" (3).

Kamboureli proposes that this multicultural literature in Canada may not be called minority because it reflects the interests of the majority population which is generally portrayed by these authors. This multicultural literature is concerned with the relation of a 'marginalized' group toward to the dominant white culture's self-image which is in the 'center' of the literary canon. In fact, Kamboureli directly proposes that her anthology's aim is to restore "all the gaps of cultural differences in Canadian literary canon" (5). She believes that within this complex multicultural history of Canada, was

constituted “the fundamental question of what” (12) comprises Canadian identity. Kamboureli also argues that the Multiculturalism policy has created an expectation in relation to “the process of decolonizing the inherited representation of Canadian history, the literary tradition, and other forms of culture…” (12). Along these lines, the Canadian history is a history of the legacy of colonization, even though its history is “history of discovery of [the country] as a new home whose newness constantly calls forth the spectre of the past, the nostalgic replay of other geographies” (1).

Neil Bissoondath’s *Selling Illusion: The Cult of Multiculturalism* in Canada implies that the phenomenon of multiculturalism as an act has started as a progressive social policy. According to him, “the Multiculturalism Act is in many ways [as] a statement of activism”(39). Bissoondath explains that Multiculturalism is a vision of the government which does not let evolve either English Canadian society nor the individual within that society. Bissoondath argues that the Multiculturalism act never addresses the multicultural sense of the Canadian society as the way that it really is. It gives an imprecise conception in respect for human differences, namely, it gives a vague notion of human differences “—what it means for the nation at large and the individuals who compose it” (39).

Himani Bannerji’s “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of Canada” exposes a discussion not about who is for or against the multiculturalism. According to her, the state of visible minorities in Canada has a difficult affiliation with each other. For Bannerji, the multitude of voices constructed in Canada project that all the visible minorities continue to live as outsiders “- insiders of the nation which offers a proudly multiculturalism profile to the international community” (4).

Bannerji offers that the idea of hegemonic culture associated with the two invading nations, English and French, just creates a notion of unity, or integration, among all different ethnic groups. It is an ideological notion that tries to hide the real crisis lived by the non-white or dark-skinned people in Canada. Thus, Bannerji suggests that "the ideology of multiculturalism nationhood (8) attempts to neutralize these visible minorities groups in relation to their class, gender and race. For her, "[b]ilingualism, multiculturalism, tolerance of diversity and difference and slogans of unity cannot solve this problem of unequal power and exchange" (14) among the cultural diversity in Canada. The notion of unity is difficult to define in Canada because the country by itself would not be able to erase the diversity and its "elements of surplus domination due to its Eurocentric/racist/colonial context" (8).

On her turn, Bannerji emphasizes that "[e]xpressions such as "ethnic" and "immigrants" and "new Canadians" are no less problematic"(19). For Bannerji, all the white people of European ethnicity who immigrated to Canada are considered invisible immigrants. She points out the Multiculturalism policies in Canada "based on integration […] instead engage in struggles based on the genuine contradiction of [their] society" (24).

Following Bannerji's discussion Brand's "Whose Gaze, and Who Speaks for Whom" proposes a powerful study of race, sex and politics in contemporary culture. According to her, "[w]hat distinguishes Canada from other ex-colonies of Britain […] is its status as a 'white' nation" (125). Brand's discourse is focused on the black experience in regards to the centrality of white domination in Canadian culture. Brand argues that both English and French Canadian societies (the dominant ethnic groups) carry the sensation of 'losing' their characters to the accumulation of black communities

in the country which are always made up of “recent immigrants and always suspect” (122). This clearly contradicts the multiculturalism policy which “recognize[s] the existence of communities whose members share common origins and historic contributions to Canadian society, and enhance their development” (qtd. in Hutcheon 371). Brand also observes that people of color and other visible minorities are subordinated by the white culture’s rules. In her vision, the imperialist domination denies the development of the dominated people, creating a cultural oppression. For Brand, words such as “[a]ccess, representation, inclusion, exclusion, equity: All are other ways of saying race in [Canada] without saying that [visible minorities such as non-white or dark-skinned bodies] live in a deeply racialised and racist culture” (189).

Brand, in fact, has been considered as a significant voice in contemporary postcolonial Black and Canadian literature. Her poetry has expressed a compelling examination of the history of those people who have lived, suffered and struggled for change. However, the practice of multiculturalism policies is not explored in her works. Brand’s literature reflects on her Marxist and feminist stances. She investigates issues of the African Diaspora and (new) colonial oppression and preventive gender and race classes. Moreover, her poetry is focused on her own and others’ positions as outsiders in an aggressive culture experience.

The purpose of this study is to explore the political trajectory of Brand, considering her position as a Black woman, immigrant, feminist, and Marxist. I shall examine how her political engagement is expressed in her poetry. In addition, I shall bring Brand’s critical prose and interviews into dialogue with my analysis. More specifically, this study aims at verifying the polyphony in Brand’s poetry, in its articulation of the effects of colonialism, and conflicts of nationality, race, gender, and

social class. Indeed, most of these issues are directly related to the experience of diaspora and the phenomenon of multiculturalism.

After having presented the theoretical framework of Canadian Literature in regards to the term multiculturalism as a political act, as well as a brief comment on what Brand's interest is in her literature. I also will bring into my investigation significant scholars who have analyzed Brand's works over the years. In fact, for the present analysis in its context of investigation, a final acknowledgement referring to the possible relevance of the present study must be made.

A large number of publications have attempted to discuss the issue of postcolonial literature into which Brand's writing is inserted in the academic field. Her writing expresses the sense of (dis)location in regard to the domination of the 'white' cultural imperialism. Her writing [is] "[…] (dis)locating the national narrative of subjectivity, for example, into the diaspora of cross-cultural, -racial, -gender, -class, and –erotic identification" (Dickinson 157). She articulates her political thought in favor of freedom of cultural diversity in Canada.

The corpus of the study will have as a primary source some of Brand's poems and fragments of poems from the collections: *Primitive Offensive* (1982), *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *Land to Light on* (1996), *Thirsty* (2002), and *Inventory* (2006). Secondary sources include theoretical and critical texts relevant to the subject, among which are studies by Linda Hutcheon, Hamani Bannerji, Ian Henderson Angus and Smaro Kamboureli.

The present thesis is divided into three chapters:

In the first chapter, "Silence Needs Words Instead of Whispering," I will begin by selecting passages from *Primitive Offensive (*1983) and, *Chronicles of the Hostile*

Sun (1984), focusing on Brand's geography of origin. At first, Brand brings to the reader the Caribbean history as well as her own ancestral African origin. Later, Brand makes a lyrical response to the invasion of Grenada by the U.S in the 1980s. Through these collections of poems, I will investigate Brand's initial political engagement in its focus on the past. Then, I will discuss poems from *No Language is Neutral*, the collection published two years after the Multiculturalism Act was legislated as a federal policy in Canada. This collection is a mark in Brand's career as poet. She keeps her concern for the past, her memory of the Caribbean. For the first time she expresses her homosexuality and reflects on the power of the language that regulates race, gender and sexual identity. In order to conduct a discussion of these issues, I add Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Particularly, I focus on Butler's notion of gender identity which is constructed by language—i.e., a notion of "performative construction of gender" (25).

In the second chapter "Out There: ""You Can Smell Indifference," I shall analyze passages from *Land to Light On* and *Thirsty* which mark a significant shift in Brand's poetry, centering on a sociopolitical narrative and the national identity in Canada. Brand's engagement moves towards urban conflicts in Canada regarding racism and discrimination issue. Not only expressing her position as an outsider, she embodies other outsiders' voices depicting their conflicts, mainly related to racism and violence in Canada—the "white" oppression. In this chapter, I add Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," Butler's and Bhabha's notion of performativity.[5]

[5] In his book, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha advocates the notion of performativity which lies in his cultural analysis, i.e., "the subject of cultural discourse—the agency of people—is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between of pedagogical and the performative"(148). In the second chapter entitled "Interrogating Identity," Bhabha investigates Franz Fanon's desire "of the total transformation of Man and Society, focusing on the ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality"(40). According to Bhabha, Fanon's "work splits between a Hegelian-Marxist dialect, a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the Unconscious" (41). Bhabha observes that Fanon's "evocation of the

In the third chapter "The Catalogue of the 21st Century: "The Ravaged World is here,"" I shall analyze Brand's most recent book of poetry which articulates a global vision of the most discouraging aspects of the world in which we are currently living. In this collection, Brand's political perspective expands from the local to the global. Brand writes an inventory of the tumultuous years in our new century and the value of the media representation of culture of other. Her poems describe fragments of the postmodern cities drowning and burning in destruction across TV screens.

This research should contribute to the other studies on Brand's writing as an *engagé* poet, considering her position as an immigrant, Black woman, feminist, and Marxist. This investigation will also bring contribution in relation to the study of diasporic literature and the phenomenon of Multiculturalism in Canada. Another point to be made is that this study should be relevant to other discourses focusing on the problems of "visible minorities."

'I' restores the presence of the marginalized; his psychoanalytic framework illuminates the madness of racism, the pleasure of pain, the agonistic fantasy of political power" (41). Also, Bhabha claims that according to Fanon, the black soul is a white man's artifact, i.e., to understand the process of identification in an operative image of desire, Fanon presents three conditions that underlie his observation:

* The dream of setting up in the settler's place, i.e, the dream of the inversion of roles;
* The unconscious of speaking the form of the otherness: "the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, i.e., the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body"(45); and
* "[T]he question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image—that is, to be *for* an other" (45).

CHAPTER I

"SILENCE NEEDS WORDS INSTEAD OF WHISPERING"

1.0. African Ancestry in Cultural Themes of Tradition.

The poetry book *Primitive Offensive* (1982) runs about 59 pages and in it Brand emphasizes her social and political viewpoints toward the past, centering on her African ancestry. The poet describes the offensive superiority of the white culture, observing the legacy of colonization, i.e., the hostility that black people have suffered under by the dominant culture. In this book of poetry, Brand makes use of words in the official languages of the Caribbean which are remnants of the colonizing powers such as English, French, Dutch, and Spanish, without denying the presence of various languages and the historical encounters with the region. Furthermore the poet keeps the topics of the native Caribbean culture, encompassing the historical issues of forced migration and enslavement, the related themes of home and exile, and colonialism. Personal inventory merges with collective history as illustrated in the line: "so many hundreds of us without lineage/ without mothers to call us by name" ("Canto XI" 51).

In "After Modernism: Alternative Voices in the Writings of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and Marlene Philip," Lynette Hunter analyzes the works of these three significant black female writers from Canada whose origins are from the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Hunter tells us that, "[p]olitically the most assertive of the three writers discussed" Brand is as well as her works "poetically the most traditional" (13). The appropriateness of a verbal tradition, literary or linguistic as observed by Hunter, illustrates that Brand's discourse depicts alternative strategies against dominant cultural representation, and also embraces the language of social resistance.

Following Hunter's observation, Jason Weins, in his articles "'Language Seemed to Split in Two': National Ambivalence(s) and Dionne Brand's 'No Language is Neutral'" claims that

> Brand clearly sets herself in opposition and antagonism to Canadian cultural dominance and that her work, as Hunter puts it, realizes "the necessity of voicing the fears, reactions, rejections that are tied up in the Black experience of Canada's racism" (3).

What they examine is that Brand's writing is within a formal tradition, appropriating canonical poetic forms like the *cantos* to describe the unfixed traumatic African heritage that black people have and attempt to escape the cycles of trauma and violence that plague their communities. Thus, as a postmodernist poet, Brand de-naturalizes the canon, i.e., she appropriates its form in order to subvert it.

In fact, one of my interests in reading Brand's poetry in *Primitive Offensive* is not only to consider Hunter's focus on her use of the dominant tradition but also on what Weins points out: "Brand's oeuvre demonstrates, politically and aesthetically, a closer identification with Latin American and Caribbean poetic traditions than with those of North America"(3). Brand declares that she started writing like an African American poet, using a kind of declamatory style. Briefly, in order to expand upon this, I quote Brand from a published interview conducted by Pauline Butling: "I started writing that way and then, at some point, I recognized that I couldn't sustain it because it wasn't my language" (71). In the essay "'In another place, not here': Dionne Brand's Politics of (Dis)Location," Peter Dickinson quotes Brand from the article "The Language of Resistance" where the poet concludes: "I don't consider myself on any margin, on the margin of Canadian literature. I'm sitting right in the middle of Black literature, because that's who I read that's who I respond to" (156).

In *Primitive Offensive*, the poet illustrates the brutalities of racism in the past evaluating the oppression of people's lives imposed by European domination, as the speaker states:

> Ashes head to toes
> juju belt
> guinea eyes unfolded impossible
> squint a sun since drenched
> breasts beaded of raised skin
> naked woman speaks
> syllables come in dust's pace
> dried, caked rim of desert mouth, naked woman speaks
> run mount, tell.
> when the whites come they were dead men
> we did not want to touch them
> we did not want to interfere in their business
> after the disappearances
> many times there were dead men among us
> and we cursed them
> and we gave them food
> when the whites came they were dead men
> five men died in our great battles before
> guns gave us more heads of our enemies…("Canto I" 3).

By portraying the specters from the past, especially the victims and agents of the slave trade, Brand highlights the brutalized body represented by a "naked woman," i.e., a body which plays "a role as a talisman and sigh"(*A Map to the Door of No Return* 4). Furthermore, the poet evokes the black people's inability to act out against white domination. Instead of fighting against to it, black people do not "want to interfere in [the whites'] business." The existential dilemma faced by those oppressed individuals corroborates the idea that "slavery also metaphorically relates to cultural imperialism," (Ellen Quigley 3). Quigley also claims that in the "Caribbean origin becomes abduction into slavery rather than pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic, and pre-social bliss" (3). I want to stress here the fact that according to Quigley:

> Brand negates legitimate subjects, objects, communities, and origins. Simultaneously, she witnesses the reality of neo-colonial violence that attacks bodies and selves, in historic slavery, the Grenada massacre, as well as in contemporary Toronto and the Caribbean. In the two-pronged attack

> on legitimacy, a shifting third term develops that is neither abjection in otherness nor legitimacy in authentic or proper selves (16).

My analysis of Brand's *Primitive Offensive* focuses on the long poem entitled "Canto VII," and aims at investigating the poet's use of images taken from Cuba, where the poet Brand illustrates her identification to other African Caribbean peoples. She also explores the history of black revolution in Haiti, and connects their issues to other events elsewhere in the past in order to show the white domination in the world. By making a connection between violence and domination of culture by power, the poet reminds us of the conditions of people of color in her geography of origin. The poem begins with the lines:

> Guajiro making flip-flops on the wing tip of
> the american airline
> they decided,
> hot,
> carnival along the Malecon,
> cerveza,
> Jose, Miguel, Carlos,
> I met them twenty years later
> Luis though, still dances for the turistas.(36)

In this passage, it is relevant to observe the condition of the Amerindian ethnic group of the La Guajira Peninsula, playing with the wing of the American airline: "the wing of the plane dips, / aren't you afraid? / it could be a bomber, / and they in the street." This evokes not only the fragility of the Caribbean people in the past, at the time of invasions and in the present, but also makes use of the context of carnival where playfulness can be a mask of transgression. The airplane wing, a museum piece of the revolution, still "[threatens] Havana with its powerful steel influence." It is worth noting the repetition of the act of "playing" with the airplane wing, "making flip-flops," "cartwheels," and "handstands" in the heart of Havana (the city as a museum portion of the revolution. In sum, the poem mirrors many of the greatest moments of violence which occurred in the

Caribbean, the “continent of blood” (38) and the “museum of the revolution” (36),—especially those related to the Cuban revolution.

In “Canto VII,” the poet presents images of the traumatic consequences of colonialism, beginning with a reference to the 16th century Spanish priest Bartolomé de Las Casas:

> De Las Casas, the viceregent
> drained
> a continent of blood
> to write the Common Book of Prayer
> even as he walks
> his quill drips
> even his quill
> is made of my tail feather
> feather of balance
> feather of gold
> but this little pale viceregent
> in his little pale robe
> hail marys embroider his blue lips
> still he is not alone,
> his acoloytes beat his accoutrements
> lingeringly, kindly, even now
> his sperm atonement on his dry hands,
> lizards eat on the latrine floor,
> that left, soaks into the oppressed
> ground
> and brings up dead
> bodies from the bush (38).

Brand depicts the horror of the European domination, by illustrating the role of the historical figure of De Las Casas, who immigrated to the Caribbean in 1502, and witnessed the extermination of the natives. Brand states that Las Casas himself recognized his own deed by supporting the Spanish conquest when he first arrived in the New World. Also, he agreed that Spain had the responsibility to convert the Caribbean’s natives, but not to kill them.

Later the poet offers a positioning in which the impact of hostility and domination are set in different places, as follows:

> terror’s legate

scribes a hecatomb of this antillian
archipelago
scribes desert, bantustans to a continent
still plundered,
condemned to these antilles...(38).

The speaker mentions, for example “hecatomb”— a public sacrifice of animals to the gods in ancient Greece—and “bantustans”—a worldwide homeland during the era of apartheid. The use of both terms implies an on-going history of violence and oppression. The past mirrors the necessity to understand the present with its relevant preoccupation regarding the problematic politics of class struggles, race, poverty or violence faced by marginalized individuals (Bannerji 21).

Addressing the history of black revolution in Haiti, “that book with/ no preface and no owner” (39), the poet’s task is to revive historical memory, looking for what has been lost:

describe 1492
describe 1498
describe 1502
describe 1590
describe 1650
describe, describe, describe
some one
describe,
lost words, instances
slave of adjectives
closer, closer
adjectives, nothing, what!
Dessalines you were right
I can hear that cry of yours
Ripping through that night... (41).

The poet once again is concerned with veracity, by centering her words on actual dates. Brand evokes events of defeats which would change the territory of the Caribbean, especially the black Haitian leaders Toussaint and Dessalines as heroes. For instance, 1492 was Christopher Columbus’ first journey across the Atlantic Ocean. On Columbus’ third voyage, in 1498, to the Western Hemisphere, he discovered the island

of Trinidad. In the same year, Columbus's brother Bartholomew founded the city of Santo Domingo, now part of the Dominican Republic.

All the preoccupation regarding the past is also reflected on social and cultural themes connected to family life, involving specially the role of women under various forms of oppression. Still in "Canto VII," Brand shows that women's bonds actually go beyond the realm of the family:

> a woman, she, black
> and old said,
> somos familia,
> I could not understand,
> It was spanish
> So she touched my skin
> Todos, todos familia eh!
> Yes, Si! I said
> to be recognised!
> she knew me!
> and two others did too (37).

In essence, this passage presents an image of women as characterized by the presence of a "gramma's speech, by saying "somos familia," "Todos, todos familia eh!." The speech suggests not only recognition of community and racial bonds, but complicity in historical terms. The reference to an old black woman as the core of a family evokes Brand's own history. She lived closer to her "grandmother [who] acted as her mother for many years while her mother was 'away' earning money" (Hunter 16). By using a direct discourse, Brand maintains the integrity of the speech, making it sound genuine.

From this analysis I conclude that Brand, as a Caribbean woman of African ancestry has explored in *Primitive Offensive,* the topics of her geography of origin and culture. Essentially, the poet explores the elements of cultural tradition, the ancestral memory and the dislocation of the self which are inserted into the historical events of the African people's oppression. In addition, she premises a recreation of the conflict faced by other black people in the Caribbean and Europe with a criticism of neo-

colonial values. The subversion of canonical forms expressed in Brand's discourse evokes a hybrid language which represents her engaged character.

1.1. The Caribbean Occupation by Imperialism in *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun.*

One of the smallest island nations that grew out of the British colonies in the eastern Caribbean, Grenada like its neighbors, was inhabited by people whose origin came from black African ancestors. Its original inhabitants, the Carib Indians, were wiped out during the early stages of colonialism, as Brand describes in *Primitive Offensive*. Receiving independence in 1974, Grenada still maintained its place within the Commonwealth of Nations. British supremacy ruled the legislative body on the island until it was overthrown in a bloodless coup d'état in 1979, led by Maurice Bishop. At the time, Eric Gairy who led Granada to its independence from the U.K, became the first Prime Minister of Grenada. While Gairy attended a diplomatic mission at the United Nations, Bishop overturned his government and subsequently declared himself Prime Minister of Grenada. Bishop's politics were established within a Marxist-Leninist government that quickly arrayed itself with the Soviet Union and Cuba. [6]

In the 1980s, the world still lived in the shadow of the Cold War. The intense conflict divided the world into two different political ideologies: democracy and capitalism supported by the U. S government and its allies, and communism in the case of the Soviet bloc. During this time, the Grenadian government began constructing an international airport with the help of the Cuban government— Bishop claimed that the airport was constructed to facilitate tourism on the island. Ronald Reagan, the president

[6] http://www.carriacou.biz/index.php?page=Maurice%20Bishop. August 10, 2007.

of the U.S. during that time, observed that the airport and other spots on the island were an indication of the operative support of Cuba for Grenada and against his nation.[7]

After graduating from the University of Toronto, Brand started working with Black organizations in Canada. She went to Grenada after the revolution of 1979. The move from Canada to Grenada encouraged her to keep following her leftist politics on the island. In 1983, Brand was working as an information officer for the Caribbean People's Development Agency. A year later, *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* was published, depicting this recent history of Grenada and the effects of neo-colonialism in the Caribbean. According to Dickinson, Brand

> has enumerated the politics of her particular *dis*locations in *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* in terms of a further set of spatial paradoxes. Despite having lived *here* —in Canada— for most of her life, what seems to matter most is that Brand was born down *there*—on the Caribbean island of Trinidad (author's italics, 160).

In order to conduct such debate regarding Brand's (dis)location, I want to reinforce this sense of "spatial paradoxes" as reported by Dickinson, adding one of the poet's last poems in the section "Military Occupations":

> I am not a refugee,
> I have my papers,
> I was born in the Caribbean,
> practically in the sea,
> fifteen degrees above the equator,
> I have a canadian passport,
> I have lived here all my adult life,
> I am stateless anyway ('For Stuart' 70).

Hence we may recognize that these lines have an autobiographical character. It is impossible not to read Brand's work as confessional. The persona in the poem refers to having her papers in order or owning a passport as being "meaningless in the face of an obdurate national psychology" (Dickinson 160). This implies the sense of being "stateless anyway." The word "state" evokes a politically organized body, that is, a

[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Grenada. August 10, 2007.

sense of location that does not belong to the persona. In other words, the poet's statelessness implies she is aware of her Canadian citizenship, but she is still devoid of a legitimate location. Therefore, Brand simultaneously demonstrates an ambivalent position in regard to Canada "both home and enemy territory" (Dickinson 161). In this respect, Neil Bissoondath observes in *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* that in Canada: "[c]itizenship, whether through birth or naturalization implies belonging" (132), but according to Brand: "[b]elonging does not interest [her]" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 85).

In sum, the poet concludes in her essay "Notes for Writing thru Race" that black people have lived in Canada for three centuries as being racialized by the concept of whiteness. Her experience as an outsider corroborates her lack of belonging expressed in a language which is hybrid, ironic, dialectical, and postcolonial. In this regard, I draw on Fred Wah's analysis of Bhabha's concept of hybridity

> as a persistent thorn in the side of colonial configurations, rather than "third term that resolves the tension between two culture"(175). This constant pressure that the hyphen brings to bear against the master narratives of duality, multiculturalism, and apartheid creates a volatile space that is inhabited by a wide range of voices (74).

What I argue here is that the poet's personae shifts from her own personal voice to others' voices, demonstrating the polyphonic construction in favor of unprivileged individuals in society as described in the section "Military Occupations" where Brand gradually offers a sequence of the U.S invasion, and the response of the local community:

> All afternoon and all night,
> each night we watch a different
> fire burn,
> Tuesday, Butler House
> Wednesday, Radio Free Grenada
> Thursday, The Police Station

> A voice at the window looking “the whole damn town should burn”
> another “no too many of us will die”(38).

The countless acts of hostility that Brand witnessed during her day-to-day routine on the island are recorded by the tone of her polyphonic voice, by presenting a dialogue between the self and other. This section offers an account of the effects of the U.S invasion in the local community, revealing Brand’s engaged position.

In a world where mainstream culture is founded upon a patriarchal system, the poet claims in her article “Whose Gaze, and Who Speaks for Whom” that in Canada “[c]ulture is organized around “whiteness”[…] Formal culture is itself stratified by class, gender and sexuality, organized around maleness, class and heterosexual privilege” (159), the strength of Brand’s poetry lies in her powerful social protest against the imperialist domination, as we can notice in the poem “Eurocentric”:

> There are things you do not believe
> there are things you cannot believe
> (in fairness i do not mean women here except
> jean kirkpatrick and the like)
> these things
> they include such items as
> revolutions, when they are made by people of colour
> truth, when it is told by your privilege
> percussive piano solos, squawking saxophones
> rosa parks’life, bessie smith’s life and any life
> which is not your own,
> ripe oranges with green skins,
> blacks lynched in the american way,
> Orange Free State, Bantustans,
> people waking up in the morning, in any place where you
> do not live,
> people anywhere other than where you live wanting
> freedom
> instead of your charity and coca-cola,
> the truth about ITT or AFL-CIO
> until it is a blithe expose in your newspaper,
> women, who do not need men
> (even male revolutionaries refuse to radicalize their
> balls)
> housework
> massacres more in number than 1 american officer
> 4 american nuns,

> sugar apples, cutlass, mangoes, sapodillas, […]
> war, unless you see burning children;
> hunger, unless you see burning children;
> hibiscus flowers and anthurium lilies
> rain, on a beach in the caribbean (in the section "Language 21).

As a social activist Brand represents the struggles of marginalized people and describes the U.S cultural and political hegemony. Brand makes a severe description of violence caused by the U.S invasion in order to promote democracy throughout the Cold War years. She mentions eminent female figures: Jean Kirkpatrick and Rosa Parks. Kirkpatrick was the American Ambassador to the United Nations, a fervent anticommunist, who served as a foreign policy adviser in Ronald Reagan's government in 1980. According to her, Reagan's government was responsible for giving back to the U.S its military strength and to set free the people of Grenada from the soviet's terror and tyranny. In 1984, at Republican National Convention, Kirkpatrick delivered the memorable "Blame America First" speech.[8] Ironically, the poet points out that Kirkpatrick's discourse on behalf of the U.S invasion as a "help" to Grenada to resist Communist subversion. A black woman, Rosa Parks worked as a seamstress, and one day, she refused to give up her bus seat to a white man, in Montgomery, Alabama, U.S., in 1955. Her reaction has been retold countless times, and led to the Montgomery bus strike, which was the first large-scale, organized protest against segregation that used nonviolent tactics. Yet, the poet makes use of the trivialization of violence, by stating that atrocities do not shock you "unless you see burning children" as in that famous photograph of the Vietnam War.

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[8] Regarding Grenada, she said: "They said that saving Grenada from terror and totalitarianism was the wrong thing to do—they didn't blame Cuba or the communists for threatening American students and murdering Grenadians - they blamed the United States instead but then, somehow, they always blame America first."
http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/conventions/san.diego/facts/GOP.speeches.past/84.kirkpatrick.shtml. May 18, 2007.

In the preface of her anthology *Splitting Images*, Hutcheon observes that irony is "as one of the discursive strategies used by such marginalized or "minoritarian" artists to signal that resistance—perhaps even that celebration" (48). By pretending to speak a dominant language while subverting it at the same time, Brand illustrates Hutcheon's observation that the advent of 'postmodernism' resulted in a sort of "politicized irony"(vii). In this regard, I quote Brand's poem "For Stuart":

> a little red neck in Sudbury
> (actually a big red neck, more than six feet tall)
> invited me to his radio show
> whereupon he seized one of my poems
> and using it as evidence, called me
> a marxist,
> (actually the poem was feminist)
> I denied it of course, I'm no
> Dilettante…(64).

The poet's description of the white man as "a little red neck" who is not little, but big, illustrates her use of irony. The poet also evokes the evidence that "[w]hen you get called a marxist / (they use it as a curse you know) / for saying that the Americans have no damn right/ invading Grenada, (besides this calculation being / totally unscientific) / you know what is coming." In the narrative itself, the poet makes use of the idea of a coalition between being a Marxist and a Feminist, in order to reflect her own restrictive gender and race: "(Stuart being jewish and I black),"demonstrating her severe criticism against white patriarchal world order.

By addressing many of society's marginalized groups, particularly black people, and women, Brand's appeal is far reaching. After all, her discourse reflects her personal role in the history of diaspora, and deals with the post-colonial situation of living in a world where being black are still not essentially an optimistic state. The poet affirms that:

> I'm sick of writing history
> I'm sick of scribbling dates

> of particular tortures
> I'm feeling the boot/[…]
> I'm sick of hearing chuckles/ at my discomfort/
> I'm sick of doing literary work
> with north americans…("For Stuart" 65).

All the discomfort faced by the poet's racialized position in society corroborates at some point her immobilization—for instance, her sickness of "doing literary work/ with north americans." This observation of Brand's political trajectory reveals her double-voiced discourse, by tracing an extended relation of identity—a confrontation between different cultures: Afro-American, Caribbean and Canadian cultures. This ambiguity corroborates the complex act of dealing with the use of a language and its conventions by white discourse. Brand's voice invokes the black tradition which reminds us of Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s concept of signifyin(g) [9] which refers to "things which are never made explicit" (83)—a strategy of black figurative language use"(84).

In *No Language is Neutral*, for instance Brand continues to write about her experience in Grenada. In the section "Return," the poet offers a tribute to Phyllis Coard, Minister of Women's Affairs in the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada. She writes:

> Phyllis, quite here, I hear from
> not even from your own hand in a note
> but from some stranger how dragger it
> from a prison wall…(8)

[9] The African American scholar Gates Jr. proposes in the book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, an African theory of interpretation of the black term of signifyin (g) which is closely related to double-talk and trickery of the type used by the Monkey of these narratives; and uses the trickster characters of Esu and the Signifying Monkey to read 20th-century African American literature. Gates Jr. himself admits in his book *African American Literary Criticism*, "[i]t is difficult to arrive at a consensus of definitions of signifyin (g). He affirms that he has written the term with bracketed final g ("Signifyin (g)) and the white term "signifying." [...] The bracketed or aurally erased *g*, like the discourse of black English and dialect poetry generally, stands as the trace of black difference in a remarkably sophisticated and fascinating (re)naming ritual graphically in evidence here[...] The absent *g* is a figure for the Signifyin (g) black difference" (46). The black tradition is double-voiced and the same time it is in the margin of discourse embodying the ambiguities of language which "is [its] trope for repetition and revision"(52).

> Phyllis, quite here, I hear how
> you so thin now, but still strong
> your voice refusing departures and
> soldiers cursing…(9)
>
> Girl, how come is quite here I hear from you,
> sitting in these rooms, resenting this messenger,
> out here, I listen through an upstart castigate…(10).

Brand's necessity to be located 'here' in the Caribbean territory seems to demonstrate the latent position to hear the different stories of oppressed people on the island. Phyllis appears as a proper example: a woman who refuses "departures and soldiers cursing." The portrait of otherness in the poem is patterned after the imperialist's power's gaze. Brand's statement reminds us of Linda Martin Alcoff's "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991) which focuses on the speaker's location, by asking "if [Brand does not] speak for those less privileged than [herself, is she] abandoning [her] political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of [her] privilege?'(100). Alcoff's request is problematic due to the fact that Brand does not flee from her origin and *engagé* position. She speaks for those less privileged than herself in a position which she can give voice to the subaltern who "cannot fight it with dignity" (from "October 25th, 1983" 42).

I conclude that in expressing her personal viewpoints as a witness of the U.S invasion, Brand brings to her discourse the reasons how neocolonialism and subsequent racist social structures have affected black people in the Caribbean. The poet also invokes the history of trauma and suffering faced by black people in the past as the poet does in *Primitive Offensive*. The historical circumstances of the Caribbean occupation by U.S. imperialism amplified how white people have a limitless capacity to reinvent themselves and to consider themselves to be superior to all other races.

1.2. "Back there and here" and "the unordinary romance of women who love women" in *No Language is Neutral.*

No Language is Neutral is Brand's best-known work to date. It is a short book but its range of political, social, and historical reference is wide. The poetry in this collection depicts a considerable change in the poet's writing. Brand uses in her discourse the language that "[she] grew up in" (Brand qtd. in Kamboureli 407). She explores a demotic speech (related to a colloquial use)—that has gained respectable consideration especially in recent critical studies. In fact, Brand states that "[she] decided to use the demotic [in her literature] when [she] could examine it much more carefully. [She] wanted to work it like a language rather than work it as an example of culture" (qtd. in Butling 72). In fact, the poet emphasizes that the use of demotic in the British formal standard English writing is only used in the dialogue in many novels to demarcate on the text "the difference of class and race and all those things" (qtd. in Butling 74). Weins' focus on Teresa Zackodnik's ""I am Blackening in My Way": Identity and Place in Dionne Brand's "No Language is Neutral"" illustrates that Brand's writing demonstrates an allegory of the restrictions of 'Standard English,' i.e., the poet "locates her critique of language not in an attempt to resurrect or construct a neutral language, nor from a liminal position between Standard English and Nation language,[10] but in the heteroglossia of both languages" (Zackodnik 194 qtd. in Weins 7). Brand's poems also incorporate her "newly-discovered lesbian sexuality" (Butling 64), and her persistent articulation of her diasporic experience.

[10] Eduard Kamau Brathwaite defines "nation language" as "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers" (History 5). Distinguishing nation language from dialect, he further argues that it is "the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean" (13), whose poets borrow from the resources of the calypso and deploy a dactylic rather than iambic rhythm in their work (qtd. in Weins 8).

This book of poetry depicts a testimony on behalf of not only colonized people, but all kinds of ghettoized individuals, whose lives have been submerged into the stratification of the Standard English language. Brand suggests that while the Caribbean resembles paradise, it is place that is devoid of authority, by announcing "… language here was strict description and teeth edging truth / here was beauty and here was nowhere" (first section of "No Language is Neutral" 19). This statement refers to the term Nation language which is a language with a strong influence of ancestral African languages: "it is English which is not the standard, imported, educated English" (Brathwaite qtd. in Zackodnik 7). Furthermore, this book of poetry has "witnessed the transformation of the Canadian policy as well as challenges to its cultural dominant [ce]"(Wiens 5). The social and political contexts inserted in *No Language is Neutral* has encouraged discussion about "the relations of ethnicity to citizenship"(5) inside and outside of Canada.

Speaking about the relation of ethnicity to citizenship in Canada, I want to focus on Brand's own lived experience of racism in the Canadian society. In this matter, I draw on W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness." This division of the poet's identity as a Canadian / a person of color / and other evokes that

> This city,
> mourning the smell of flowers and dirt, cannot tell
> me what to say even if it chokes me. Not a single
> word drops from my lips for twenty years about living
> here[…]
> I became more secretive, "language
> seemed to split in two, one branch fell silent, the other
> argued hotly for going home"
> (Tenth section of "No Language is Neutral 28).

What I want to demonstrate here is taken from Kambourelli's *Scandalous Bodies.* She proposes that the female body is a location "where the constructions of race, gender, sexuality, and nationalism are implicated in each other while retaining their distinct

roles in the formation of the subject"(x). The fact that the language splits in two, it is not only related to the collision of Nation language and Standard English, but also to a 'dialectic of identity." The multitude of features of Brand's identity as Canadian, Caribbean, a person of color and lesbian evokes "the combinations of self and other within and self and others outside" (Zackodnik 16). Back to Fraser's article, she highlights that "Brand's work does not fall between two languages, but rather that it constructs a third, hybrid language, using elements of both"(3). What Fraser means is that Brand's poetic approach represents a crucial act of resistance (3), that is, her discourse not only characterizes a racialized and a gendered language, but also a polyphonic collision of languages which express the conflict in denouncing the way marginalized individuals continue to be submersed in the white male power structure, as she expresses in her essay "This Body for itself":

> I grew up in a society where sensuality was not forbidden, where calypso crystallized the sexual *double entendre*, where two days of Carnival encouraged sexual display, but this did not mean sexual freedom for women. All the openness and display took place within the context for serving male sexuality. Perhaps there were more exceptions, or at least I'd like to think so[…] despite the cross-dressing Carnival Mondays(mostly men dressed as women), on Ash Wednesday a lesbian could be raped for such public display (48, the author's italics).

My focus on this book lies in the section "Hard against the Soul." which like the other prose poems represents "a personal narrative of debasement and subordination, demonstrates the contingencies of power in determining authority in language, and performs a poetic act of resistance" (Weins 7). To corroborate this previous quotation, I will cite two stanzas of the opening section "Hard against the Soul," where Brand's contestational dialogue illustrates,

> this is you girl, this is the poem no woman
> ever write for a woman because she 'fraid to touch
> this river boiling like a woman in she sleep
> that smell of fresh thighs and warm sweat

> sheets of her like the mitan rolling into the Atlantic.
>
> this is you girl, something never waning or forgetting
> something hard against the soul
> this is where you make sense, that the sight becomes
> tender, the night air human, the dull silence full
> chattering. Volcanoes cease, and to be awake is
> more lovely than dreams (4).

All six stanzas of this poem start with the line: "this is you girl." Butling observes that "it's very interesting as a writing position, to be addressing 'you' instead of speaking as 'I,' even though the 'you' may be the 'I.' And the 'you' can also include someone else" (80). In answering Butling's observation, Brand replied: "[b]oth, maybe" (80). Also, the poet affirms in this interview with Butling that

> I'm very wary about using the "you" because it's easy to sound accusatory. And that tone reveals that you're not taking any responsibility in the poem. Somebody else is always doing something. So it's very tricky to use it (Butling 80).

The projection of this 'you' is a dramatic device that allows the poet to dialogue with herself, exploring her "first visceral recognition of [her] sexuality, [her] lesbian sexuality" (qtd. in Butling 80). In sum, the poet uses the dialogue between self and other in order to demonstrate that gendered and racialized identities are not "the only provisional identities being performed" (Dickinson 166) in her poems in *No Language is Neutral*.

As much as in any lived experience, the poet illustrates:

> The truth is, well, truth is not important at one end of a
> hemisphere where a bird dives close to you in an
> ocean for a mouth full of fish, an ocean you come to
> swim in every two years, you, a slave to your leaping
> retina, capture the look of it[…]
> always fear of a woman watching the world from an
> evening beach with her sister, the courage between
> them to drink a beer and assume their presence
> against the coral chuckle of male voices. In
> another place, not here, a woman might...Our
> nostalgia was a lie and the passage on that six hour

> fight to ourselves is wide and like another world, and then
> another one inside and is so separate and fast
> to the skin but voiceless, never born, or born and
> stilled…hush (tenth section of "No Language is Neutral 30).

Addressing this polyphonic conflict of languages regarding these notions of racialized, genderized, and sexualized signifiers which keep women in a voiceless position, Brand makes a rigorous criticism against the white patriarchal world. Butler's *Gender Trouble* argues that bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence. According to her, "the construction of the gendered body creates a series of exclusions and denial"(135), that is, she points out that gendered identities are constructed and constituted by language, i.e., the discourse 'does' gender which means that "Women, Lesbians, and Gay men, [who] cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality" (Wittig qtd. in Butler 116). Brand affirms to Butling: "[m]ale domination just scared me. I had a different reaction than a lot of women. I wasn't even a lesbian or even knowledgeable of desiring women as a possibility. Male domination just scared me" (qtd. in Butling 77).

As stated previously, the section "Hard against the Soul" introduces the discovery of Brand's sexuality: "I have become myself. A woman who looks/ at a woman and says, here, I have found you" (50). The poet's ability of articulating her lesbian existence expresses her need to be heard, as she implies: "you can hardly hear my voice by now." The poet expresses the necessity to give voice to a lesbian presence toward heterosexist ideology. As she observes:

> Then it is this simple. I felt the unordinary romance of
> women who love women for the first time. It burst in
> my mouth. Someone said, this is first lover, you
> will never want to leave her. I had it in mind that I
> would be an old woman with you (45).

Regarding Brand's lesbian sexuality, I agree with Zackodnik's views that Brand offers a

"new language that [voices] lesbian existence and experience" (10). The poet addresses her partner's body and her own, claiming that "the lesbian has decolonized her body" (Cheryl Clarke qtd. in Zackodnik 10128). Zackodnik sees that Brand's "love poetry uses a language that creates her bodily" (11):

> these warm watery syllables, a woman's tongue so like a culture, plunging toward stones not yet formed into flesh, language not yet made ... I want to kiss you deeply, smell, taste the warm water of your mouth as warm as your hands. I lucky is grace that gather me up and forgive my plainness (35).

Brand explores in her poem a body which is not anterior to language. The poet also invokes the invisibility of lesbian language— a "language not yet made." The speaker longs for creating a language with her lover within a common tongue.[11] At the same time, the poet makes a crucial critique of white / male culture, as she emphasizes: "I only know now that my/ longing for this old woman was longing to leave the/ prisoned gaze of men" (47).

In the entitled essay of the book *Bread out of the Stone*, Brand argues the sexism issue, by stating,

> [s]omeone decides that my sex should be cut into me. Not the first sex, not the second sex. The'third sex.' Only the first two can be impartial, only the first two make no decision based on their sex. The third sex is all sex, no reason (19).

Similarly to Brand, Monique Wittig[12] emphasizes that,

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[11] What I stress as a common tongue is related to the lesbian body which corroborates the definition of performativity as proposed by Butler. She believes this aspect of discourse expresses the experience of pain as an analysis of the body as it is a signified in language, after all, the regulation of sexuality [is] within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality (116).

[12] Wittig is one of the contributors that Butler dialogs with in her controversial book *Gender Trouble*. According to Witting, "a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man. But further, a lesbian has no sex; she is beyond the categories of sex (113). In addition, this book has been quite influential and significant, not only in women's studies, but in a wide range of fields. Butler stresses the need to subvert the social arrangements, namely she argues that gender is not a preconceived category, but as a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler's emphasis 140). In other words, gendered identity is seen as provisional, arbitrary and performative. After all, Butler examines [i]t would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of 'women' that simply needs to be filled in with various components of *race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete* (15, my italics).

> one is not born female, one *becomes female*; but even more radically, one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man.[…] the lesbian appears to be a third gender or, as I shall show, a category that radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description.(the author's emphasis, qtd. in Butler 113)

Drawing on Wittig's focus, I intend to acknowledge the limited position of the third sex. The reciprocity of Wittig's observation with Brand's statement appears to emphasize the marginalization of lesbian discourse which is at once performative, because it recovers "from silence and giving bodily shape to the invisibility of lesbians in heterosexist society and language" (Zacknodnik 10), as the poet's persona says:

> Someone said, this is your first lover, you will never
> want to leave her. There are saints of this ancestry
> too who laugh themselves like jamettes in the
> pleasure of their legs and caress their sex in mirrors.
> I have become myself. A woman who looks
> at a woman and says, here, I have found you,
> in this, I am blackening in my way. You ripped the
> world raw. It was as if another life exploded in my
> face, brightening, so easily the brow of a wing
> touching the surf… (50).

The persona's corporeal map explores the women's desires, establishing their bodies' discovery. In this context, the poet demonstrates an argument by tracking her own shifting experiences of "blackness" as a woman, lesbian and immigrant in regard to her body, and language.

In conclusion, in *No Language is Neutral*, Brand not only subverts the conventional "Standard English" but also reflects upon her own lesbian, racialized and gendered languages as being not neutral toward 'educated English." The poet expresses her exiled experience as being in a paradoxical place of belonging, demonstrating that

her ambivalent tension between self and other makes a space for multiple voices and discourses.

CHAPTER II

OUT THERE: "YOU CAN SMELL INDIFERENCE"

2.0. "I'm getting into the business of false passports and new identities": A discussion of Canadian National Identity in *Land to Light On*.

The official policy of the Multiculturalism Act represents the acceptance of ethnic diversity in Canada. The Act itself has incorporated the struggle against intolerance and racism with the purpose of promoting the full and equal participation of ethnic minorities in all aspects of Canadian society, (i.e., economic, cultural, and political life). However, the policy has intensified the tensions in the already complex relation between "visible minorities" and the dominant culture inside the nation, dealing with issues of ethnicity and national identity.[13]

In the memoir book *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), Brand offers a deep analysis of centuries of history, beginning with the Africans as slaves, and a meditating on Blackness in the Diaspora. Furthermore, the poet evokes a provocative contribution to the debate about Canadian identity, by claiming that:

> [c]ountry, nation, these concepts are of course deeply indebted to origins, family, tradition, home. Nation-states are configurations of origins as exclusionary power structures which have legitimacy based solely of conquest and acquisition. Here at home, in Canada, we are all implicated in this sense of origins. It is a manufactured origin nevertheless playing to our need for home, however tyrannical. This country, in the main a country of

[13]Anthony D. Smith in his book *National Identity* observes some features to understand national identity, as follows:

1.an historic territory, or homeland;
2.common myths and historical memories;
3.a common, mass public culture;
4.common legal rights and duties for all members;
5.a common economy with territorial mobility for members (14).

> immigrants, is always redefining origins, jockeying and smarming for degrees of belonging (64).

The poet resists leaving behind her past origin to follow the process of belonging to the 'manufactured one'—the Canadian origin. Her stand regarding nationality, nation, identity and belonging reminds us of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities." He states that a nation is "imagined" because the members of that state seem to be unable to know each other, i.e., even if a nation is very small, its members will never " know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them" (6). Anderson suggests that within the citizens' minds, there seems to be a sort of communion that extends the notion that they live in a unified system.

Following Anderson's notion of "imagined communities," I want to address Bannerji's "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of Canada," where she discusses that the Multiculturalism Act, mainstream political thought and the news media in Canada all depend on "the notion of a nation and its state both called Canada, with legitimate subjects called Canadians in order to construct us as categorical forms of difference" (12). This 'us' refers to the visible minorities—individuals whose dissatisfactions are related to the social and cultural construct of national identity in Canadian society. According to her, the sociopolitical conditions lived by those marginalized groups illustrated their need to struggle against the projected and objectified position toward the dominant culture of values. In this regard, Bannerji adds:

> "[w]e remain an ambiguous presence, our existence a question mark in the side of the nation, with the potential to disclose much about the political unconscious and consciousness of Canada as an "imagined community."[…] while we continue to live here as outsider — insider of the nation which offers a proudly multicultural profile to the international community (4).

It is worth noting that the viewpoints here lie in the idea of a hegemonic culture— i.e., in the shadow of the two invading European nations (the English and the French). Bannerji claims that the notion of two solitudes tries to hide the real crisis faced by the visible minority groups living as outsiders inside the Canadian society.

In the preface of the book *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Northrop Frye proposes that "the question of identity [in Canada] is primarily a cultural and imaginative question, something sharply limited in range" (i). He assumes that the issue of identity and unity are a common link in any kind of culture; however, he states that particularly in Canada, identity is seen as local or regional, that is, it is rooted in the perception of culture. The term unity is seen as "national in reference, international in perspective, and rooted in a political feeling" (ii). The assimilation of identity with unity produces a empty gesture of nationalism. The contrary intensifies the sense of separatism —the social tension in the country. Frey also defends the idea that unity is the opposite of the sense of "uniformity," that is, the assumption that everyone "belongs," or has similarities in thoughts, behavior, and

> produces a society which seems comfortable at first but is totally lacking in human dignity. Real unity tolerates dissent and rejoices in variety of outlook and tradition, recognizes that it is man's destiny to unite and not divide, and understands that creating proletariats and scapegoats and second-class citizens is a mean and contemptible activity (vi).

In *Land to Light On,* Brand focuses on this Canadian context, as illustrated: "Out here I am someone without a sheet / without a branch but not even safe as the sea, / without the relief of the sky or good graces of a door" (3). The poet begins with metaphor using words such as "sheet," "branch," and "sea." As an immigrant, Brand expresses her sense of abandonment: a person without a "sheet" and devoid of her "branch"—i.e., her ancestry. The speaker emphasizes her dissatisfaction, by saying: "If

I am peaceful in this discomfort, is not peace, / is getting used to harm" (3). Living out of home —the Caribbean — means to be "not even safe as the sea." I want to call attention here to the fact that Brand uses this paradox, addressing the sea as an emblematic in-between position, that is, the sea and its fluidity can change at any moment— like Brand's own ambivalent position, regarding a national identity. In *Scandolous Bodies*, Kamboureli observes that "[e]thnic discourse tends to entwine the experience of loss and of being othered in a web of old and new cultural registers, showing the ethnic subject to inhabit an in-between position (139). To put it succinctly, Brand affirms that: "escape does not necessarily lead to rescue . . . the new place is not necessarily better and . . . for somebody with a history of oppression there might not be any 'better'" (qtd. in Goldman 21). In articulating this lack of belonging, the poet points out:

> Out here, you can smell indifference driving
> along, the harsh harsh happiness of winter
> roads, all these roads heading nowhere, all
> these roads heading their own unknowing way,
> all these roads into smoke, and hoarfrost, friezed
> and scrambling off in drifts, where is this
> that they must go anytime, now, soon, immediately
> and gasping and ending and opening in snow dust.
> Quiet, quiet, earfuls, brittle, brittle ribs of ice
> and the road heaving under and the day lighting up,
> going on any way (8).

The lines: "Out here, you can smell indifference driving / along" conveys the poet's position as an outsider in Canada. Her social position is reinforced by the repetition of the expression: "all these roads" in order to emphasize her lack of direction—to "nowhere," to "unknowing way" or "going on any way." The poet's dislocation implies her perception as being 'other' by mainstream society. Furthermore, the diasporic experience lived by the poet implies "[her] self-identification by negation" as pointed

out by Kamboureli who refers to a sense of ambivalence that implies the experience of being other.

In the essay "'In another place, not here:' Dionne Brand's politics of (Dis)Location," Dickinson proposes that the concept of national identity, taking into account Butler's and Bhabha's notion of "performativity"—"applied to the elaboration of gender and cultural difference"(164). According to Dickinson, racialized identity does not express any authentic inner "core" self but is the dramatic effect of performances, as he points out :

> whites are not […] racialized in accounts of cultural difference, that whiteness is the free- floating signifier, the undifferentiated, performative ground against which all other (i.e., non-white) hues of the rainbow must figure themselves in fixed and static opposition: 'White'" (168).

His argument that the impression that cultural history unfortunately took a wrong turn on whiteness which stylizes the normative in Canadian society is the same as Brand's in her essay "Notes for Writing Thru Race":

> The characteristic of 'whiteness' as 'whiteness' [is] situated itself in the identity, state-and nation-building of European colonizers. Built around the obvious and easy distinction of colour, 'whiteness' became more and more the way to differentiate the colonizer from the colonized. The European nation-state of Canada built itself around 'whiteness', differentiating itself through 'whiteness' and creating outsiders to the state, no matter their claims of birthright or other entitlement. Inclusion in or access to Canadian identity, nationality and citizenship (de facto) depended and depends on one's relationship to this 'whiteness'(173-4).

What I want to emphasize is that a cultural concern in Canada regarding both English and French Canadian societies (the dominant ethnic groups) carry the sensation of 'losing' their 'white' character to the accumulation of visible minorities which are always made up of "recent immigrants and always suspect" ("Whose Gaze and Who Speaks for Whom" 157). Brand remarks that whiteness predicates the Canadian Canadian national identity. In this understanding, the poet points out that, "people who

come to Canada should just become Canadians' or 'When I came to this country there was no multiculturalism, you could not expect a grant or anything, you just had to fit in"(174). Bringing her experience as an immigrant, Brand criticizes the process of Canadian immigration that has been around cultural and profitable relations of white supremacy from the last century until now. The immigrants, according to the poet, "got a grant—'whiteness.' It was like money and still is" ("Notes for Writing thru Race" 175).

Reinforcing the ideas discussed so far, I return to Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, where he claims that since all individuals have the sense of belonging to a given nation: "in the modern world, everyone can, should, and will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (5). Similarly, referring to Butler's ideas, gendered identity is seen as provisional, arbitrary and involving performative acts, that is, the possibility of change lies precisely "in the arbitrary relationship between such acts in the possibility of failure of identity as a politically tenuous construction" (141). In other words, identity is how we see ourselves and how others see us. To illustrate this, I will quote a poem from the section "All that has happened since":

> All of us want to fly to America right now, right away please and
> Americans wonder why, feel we must love them
> that's why, we're just jealous, that's why, we just want
> to steal what they have, thief from thief make god laugh,
> so *I'm getting into the business of false passports and new identities,* I'm taking in conferences on pomo-multiplicity,
> the everyday world, the signifying monkey, the post colonial
> moment, the Michigan militia, cyberspace, come to think of it
> give each fleeting Hutu/ Tutsi a home page, subalterns of their
> own, I'm going to Bukavu with Windows
> ("All that has happened since" 32, my emphasis).

Considering Brand's incisive irony on the issue of appropriation, the poet firstly appropriates the Americans' view of immigration—i.e., their self-image of superiority and naïve understanding of the motives of immigration. The lines "we just want / to

steal what they have, thief from thief make god laugh" intensify the irony in a reversal of roles, evoking a long history of appropriation by the dominant cultures. Finally, the poet appropriates a plurality of voices belonging to a contemporary dominant discourse to constitute a new forged identity as she concludes in the lines: "I'm getting into the business of false passports and new/ identities." Subversively the poet puts herself under the skin of the machine of power to criticize it from within as she points out that the conflicting relationship between the different ethnic groups of Rwanda: Hutu and Tutsi—"subalterns of their / own" whose racial conflict gave rise to one of the worst genocides in the country in 1994, but it was neglected by rich nations, (in particular the U.S.) at the time.

Still about the issue of immigrants, I will quote a poem from the section "Island Vanish," depicting the dilemma of visible minorities:

> We have been in this icy science only a short time. What
> we are doing here is not immediately understandable
> and no one is more aware of it than we, she from Uganda
> via Kenya running from arranged marriages, he from Sri
> Lanka via Colombo English-style boarding school to make him
> the minister of the interior, me hunting for slave castles with a
> pencil for explosives, what did we know that our pan-colonial
> fights would end up among people who ask stupid questions
> like, where are you from… and now here we are on their road,
> in their snow, faced with their childishness (75).

In this poem, Brand makes a severe criticism of the Canadians' view of immigrants. The more she comes to understand the dominant culture of values, the more clearly she recognizes that no matter for how long immigrants—I highlight here the non-white or dark body individuals—have been living in the country, for Canadians they are newly arrived: "We have been in this icy science only a short time. What / we are doing here is not immediately understandable/ and no one is more aware of it than we." The diversity of motives for migration is ignored by the dominant culture because of its self-image of

superiority as I observed in the previous poem. Despite their different life histories, the immigrants in the poem (including the poet) share a past of "pan-colonial fights" and the mark of visible minorities. The final lines show the perpetuation of the dilemma of displacement: "now here we are on *their* road, / in *their* snow, faced with *their* childishness."

An important aspect of the "colonized peoples, who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers" (Anderson 142), is the need to share culture, ancestral history and a shared physical space. In this sense, the history of Canada as a former colony that has a strong relationship with "European / English colonial[ism] and subsequently American complicity in domination," (Bannerji 13) which essentially corroborates the "relations of […] imperialism with [its] race - gender and cultural discrimination" (13).

Finally, it is essential to observe that Brand is aware of her race, her position as an outsider in order to represent other marginalized people who face discrimination in Canada because of their skin color, gender and class. The poet states the discrepancies that characterize identity, and culture in Canada around the concept of 'whiteness,' as well as illustrates the controversy regarding the Multiculturalism Act which has framed the Canadian national identity from the point of view of the dominant Anglo/ French cultures.

2.1. "We live here but don't think that we're going to live like people here!": Vision of Racism in *Thirsty*.

In the anthology *Other Solitudes*, Linda Hutcheon claims that the fear of assimilation faced by non-European or people of color inside the Canadian nation,

demonstrates that "[t]he tension between wanting to belong to the new society and yet wanting to retain the culture of the old one obviously varies from person to person in intensity and emotional weight," especially regarding the sense that "100 per cent of non-native Canadians are immigrants or from immigrant backgrounds…" (12). In particular, Hutcheon emphasizes the value of the multicultural identity expressed by writers like Brand, whose works unfold their political positions agenda regarding issues such as gender, race, sexuality and class. In fact, one of Hutcheon's aims in her anthology is to focus on the term racism as being a complicated and rigidly ordered system which "extends not only to relatively new arrivals to Canada but to those who were [t]here well before any European colonizers…" (8). Robert Stam observes that the potential victims of racism are those "whose identity was forged within the colonial cauldron: Africans, Asian, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas as well as those displaced by colonialism…" (477).

Discussing the context of racism in Canada, I stress specifically the role of the Multiculturalism Act. Some critics see controversy with the term Multiculturalism as a policy, as an ideology, and a practice which encourages the formation of ghettos which are profoundly closed cultural and racial enclaves (Shohat and Stam). As observed by Bannerji previously, she sees that difference is not simply a Canadian element in order to justify cultural diversity, but, a constructed idea "in terms of distance from civilizing European cultures" (14). Thus, she adds that

> "[d]ifference [in Canada] is always branded with inferiority or negativity", —i.e., "[t]he color of the skin, facial, and bodily features—all become signifiers of inferiority, composed of an inversion and a projection of what is considered evil by the colonizing society"(14).

To measure this argument, the dominant system appears at first to deny the historical development of the oppressed people.

In one specific passage of Brand's *Thirst*y, the speaker opens with:

> "[h]istory doesn't enter here, *life*, if you call it that,
> on this small street is inconsequential,
> Julia, worked at testing cultures and the stingy
> task, in every ways irredeemable, of saving money (7, my italic).

Life in this small street—i.e., ghettos— has played an enormous role in the metropolitan centers like Toronto. For million of families from racial or immigrant racial origin, this small street has been a natural stage in the transition from foreigner to hyphenate to native. The poet's description of the environment seems to prepare us, the readers for a tragic event which happened to a young man who is shot by the police in his own front yard:

> then nothing of him but his parched body's declension
> a curved caesura, mangled with clippers, and
> clematis cirrhosa and a budding grape vine he was still
> to plant when he could, saying when he had fallen, "…thirsty…"(4).

The term "thirsty" which entitles Brand's eighth book of poetry is also the last speech of this young man. The poet introduces this male character named Alan, a dreamer immigrant in Toronto who only "wanted a calming loving spot" (14). After all, says the poet, "we all want that but the world doesn't love you" (14). Alan's death results in a silence reflection:

> ...no one so far has said a word about him
> that wasn't somehow immaculate with his disaster
>
> […]
>
> Everything he did was half done out of eagerness,
> his homework, his half-buttoned shirt his half-shot feet,
> everything he did he did hurriedly anticipating
> what never measured his need (13).

Brand, in fact describes the conflict lived by minority individuals immersed within the multicultural reality of Canada, attempting to find balance on a tightrope in the

dominant system. Her character Alan mirrors the story of many other black people in Toronto whose lives are affected by racism. The poet offers a reflection on Allan's reality by showing the dominant culture's concerns in finding out first what an individual does, instead of who he is. They take for granted the individual's appearance as different, that is, inferior, or worthless:

> No one prepares for how [Allan] died,
> no one had a diagnosis beforehand
> unless you count the mere presence of him,
> his likeness, unless you count that
> as a symptom of what he would die of,
> unless you count a moment on a staircase
> when guesses searing as letters
> turned his face into a nightmare
> instead of the face of Chloe's boy
> who as afraid of his own shadow
> and in a panic about losing everything…(53).

Allan's mere presence in Canada strengthens "as a symptom of what he would die of," a victim of the lack of tolerance on the part of the dominant groups which responds to a "general panic running through white Canadian society about the presence and claims of people of colour and the self-destructive outcomes of years of enduring racism" ("Notes for Writing thru Race"177).

Thirsty illustrates this mass of (in) humanity in Canada. However, the book not only pinpoints a Canadian reality, but also a worldwide situation regarding big cities in our modern day. This compelling text reveals Brand's continuing severe criticism of the dominant system. Also compelling is the poet's description of cruelties in modern cities:

> All the dreadfulness that happened in America had happened,
> his inspired sermons at Christie Pits steamed,
> a baby found in a microwave, a baby shaken to death,
> fourteen girls murdered in a college, people kidnapped,

> Black men dragged, two, three young girls tortured
> and raped and killed by a sweet blond boy,
> bodies found in lakes and forests, bodies in car trunks,
> bodies god knows where in disappearances,
>
> The child killers in high schools, the rages on the highways,
> the pushing murders in subways, killers in the street,
> the brain-numbing dress rehearsal for victims and predators on tv,
> well then, all this dreadfulness had come home to him (ii 14).

Essentially, Brand uses the U.S samples of violence and violation as a reflection of the reality in the whole world regarding the dangers of drugs and crime in teens' lives. These dangers include girls being sexually abused, assassination and so on. In fact, the poet implies that "all this dreadfulness" is not always caused by people of color as emphasized in the second stanza. However, Brand does not deny that the bloodshed in modern cities may be also associated with racial identities, by pointing out the consequence faced by all modern cities around the world which cannot resolve their sociopolitical problems. In this regard, in her essay "Brownman, Tiger," Brand criticizes the Canadian dominant system, by saying:

> The newspapers said immigrants were taking away white people's jobs, the newspapers said Black youth were running amok, the newspapers said before Black people came here there was no racism, the newspapers said before Black youth there was no crime, *the newspapers said we live in a multicultural society, the newspapers said when people come here they just have to leave their cultural behind and become Canadian*, the newspapers said multiculturalism was costing too much money, the newspapers said soon there'll be more people of color than whites here, the newspapers said you had to be white to be Canadian (103, my emphasis).

Here Brand illustrates the contradiction in Canada in dealing with difference. The Multiculturalism Act does not state that immigrants should leave their cultures of origin behind, as the Canadian newspapers claim. The Act enhances the survival of ethnic groups and their cultures, but it does not help to reduce racism, violence and discrimination against those whose cultural tradition is different from the dominant culture. As stated before, the centrality in Canada is its status as a 'white' nation which

reduces people of color and other visible minorities to subordinated individuals within the same society, i.e., "[a]n unofficial apartheid, of culture and identity, organizes the social space of 'Canada,' first between whites and non-whites, and then within the non-whites themselves" (Bannerji 15). Furthermore, Brand argues that the dominant culture in Canada expects that people of color

> apologise for the inconvenience of making white folks rich or privileged off [their] backs[…]The evidence of [their] skin is guilt enough for this good city. And [they have] got to pay for answering the ads to pick apples, clean house, sew sweatshirts, build cars, clean the sick, get a job paying more than you'll ever make in a tropical country with a Canadian bank on every corner (116).

In contrast to Brand's claim, Bissondath who also has a Trinidadian origin, and immigrated to Canada, at age of eighteen, implies that to preserve "historical memory" does mean to be a prisoner of it. He suggests that, "[t]he past is the past; it must be acknowledged and understood, but it cannot be undone. Yesterday's humiliations are just that, *yesterday*'s humiliations, and to nurture them is to indulge in the fruitlessness of vengeance" (the author's emphasis 26). He also points out that the Multiculturalism Act has created more problems than solutions within Canadian society, especially regarding such programs as employment equity which are unfair because they result in reverse discrimination. Bissondath has criticized the Multiculturalism Act and has been branded as 'racist,' 'sell out,' 'traitor,' and 'Uncle Tom' from the supporters of the policy (5).

Reflecting on race and ethnic groups, it seems that visible immigrants might live next door for decades, but they always remain in some fundamental sense, aliens, as Anderson observes:

> [r]acism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history. Niggers are, thanks to the invisible, tar-brush, forever niggers; Jews, the seed of Abraham, forever Jews, no matter what passports they carry or what languages they speak and read (149).

In this sense, what Anderson and Bissondath imply is that the Canadian state has instituted the Multiculturalism Act as a symbolic tool to preserve its *status quo* within a common dominant culture, i.e., English-Canada. By adopting the act, the state opens a discussion regarding Canadian social issues such as race, culture, diversity, politics, and identity.

Still in this respect, I add Brand's comments in the essay "Notes for Writing thru Race" in which she says that "[a]ccess, representation, inclusion, exclusion, equity: All are other ways of saying race in [Canada] without saying that [visible minorities] live in a deeply racialized and racist culture"(189). The poet highlights in her speech how racism affects non-European people's everyday lives in Canada. The poet gives voice to the many other outsiders who have come to Canada and settled in, and cannot stand the painful position of facing intolerance, by affirming: "we live here/but don't think that we're going to live like people here!"(37). Brand repeatedly describes a man dying—a relief to thirst. In this way the theme of thirst demands the power of her discourse regarding the rights of marginalized communities, especially black people and women.

In conclusion, Brand seeks to demonstrate that people of color are tolerated, but never truly accepted in mainstream Canadian society. After all, acceptance is far more difficult, for it implies engagement, understanding, and an appreciation of the human similarities beneath the obvious differences. The poet's focus is directed upon the marginalization of black people and other minority groups who try to make a living for themselves in the city of Toronto to support one another through the collective struggles against discrimination and racism inside the country.

CHAPTER III

A CATALOGUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY: "THE RAVAGED WORLD IS HERE"

3.0. "Inevitably, "nothing personal is recorded here:" (re)vision of the Modern World in *Inventory.*

Inventory promotes a discussion of the contemporary world regarding not only the social, economical, political, physical or environmental aspects but also technological factors of society that have occupied a significant place within the area of literary criticism and cultural studies.

Making an inventory of new century, Brand warns us not to be surprised with the global suffering, as she observes

> The surface of the earth, how it keeps springing back,
> for now, and the irregular weather of hurricanes,
> tsunamis, floods, sunlight on any given day,
> anywhere, however disastrous at least magnificent ("VI" 89).

The political discourse expressed in this stanza above is directly centered on the issue of global warming, demonstrating the poet's concerns with global problems, here depicting the triviality disasters which have become routine in our daily lives.

The sociopolitical narrative expressed in *Inventory* is not only related to Canadian reality, but is also profoundly rooted in the traumas of the 21st century: global loss with wars, violence, catastrophe, and pain. The poet suggests that the struggle against these evils does not belong to a specific group—i.e. marginalized people such as black individuals and women—but to human beings in general**.** However, the persona in

the poems of this collection is represented by an ordinary woman, who sits "at the television weeping, / no reason, / the whole time":

> nothing personal is recorded here,
> you must know that, but
> one year the viciousness got to be too much
>
> the news was advertisement for movies,
> the movies were the real killings (22).

Brand in these stanzas juxtaposes the representation of reality with the impact of the filmic language which assumes the transparency of "the direct and natural link between sign and referent or between word and world" (Hutcheon 34). The news becomes fiction in trivializing the sense of reality as in an advertisement. Ironically, the movies with proliferation of images of violence, end up having a more realist impact than the real images from the news. The poet's criticism addresses her viewpoints regarding the representation the image of reality, as she states:

> Let us not invoke the natural world,
> it's ravaged like any battlefield, like any tourist
> island, like any ocean we care to name,
> like oxygen
>
> let's at least admit we mean each other
> harm,
> we intend to do damage.[…]
>
> we,
> there is no "we"
> let us separate ourselves now,
> though perhaps we can't, still and again
> too late for that, nothing but to continue
> (42).

In this passage, we, readers, share with Brand her sorrows and struggle by including ourselves in this sum of a collective perspective. In fact, the poet herself becomes a multiplicity in transferring her "self" to third person, 'we' and 'they.' This use of 'we'

also refers to the poet's representation of the dominant class, in speaking for them, as she reveals:

> We do not deserve it, it's out of the blue,
> the sleeplessness at borders, the poor sunlight,
> the paralyzed cars, they hate our freedom,
> they want the abominable food from our mouths (27).

What I want to argue here is that the poet represents her personal experience as embodying the experience of others, as I demonstrated before, more often individuals whose position in society is not related to power and value. Still in this respect, I want to add Bannerji's viewpoints regarding plural pronouns—her focus is on official nationalism of South Africa, Rhodesia, Australia or even Canada—by saying that "[d]ominant cultural language in every one of these countries resounds with an 'us' and 'them' as expressed through discoursivities of minotities / sub / multiculture"(14)

By evoking this 'us' versus 'them,' the poet looks at the global problems which express the cruelties faced by those less privileged individuals, as follows:

> there's laughter on some street in the world, and a baby,
> crying same as any street, anywhere, and some say
> the world is not the same, but it is you know
>
> now, same as anywhere, still, a baby crying here
> may not be about hunger, not that kind of hunger
>
> eating years into the cheeks, making puffed bellows
> of the abdomen, ah why invoke that, we know about it
>
> we don't care beyond pity, so the thing is straight and simple,
> the suburbs, the outskirts are inevitable
>
> Aulnay-sous-Bois, Jane-Finch, the faithless hyphens,
> the electrical yards, the unsociable funereal parking lots
> with transparent children and their killing play,
> that ravaged world is here (47).

Brand's illustration encompasses her criticism against the outcome of the constant wave of globalization and its effects on the subalterns' position in society. The poet's

principle lies in representing the *status quo*, as she implies in the first stanza of the poem: people are facing day-to-day reality normally. But at the same time, the poet uses her discourse as a reminder that, "now, same as anywhere, still, a baby crying here / may not be about hunger, not that kind of hunger." She brings to mind the disturbance regarding social class and ethnic issues in society. The poet criticizes the living conditions of lower classes such as immigrant racial minorities in marginal areas of big cities. In her accounts of the dilemmas of social and ethnic issues, Brand stays away from any kind of sentimentalism in order to deal with more realistically with painful catalogue of global atrocities.

3.1. Critical Debates on the Role of the Mass Media.

The advent of the 21st century began with the terrorist attack in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, seen worldwide on television. Most people in the U.S. were quick to understand that they were at war and recognized the need for a firm response against terror. From that moment, the Western countries found themselves in a war against terror. In the same year, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, with the intention of promoting democracy and to face the enemy, Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaida who had acknowledged their responsibility for the terrorist attack of 9/11. Under pressure from the U.S. military and anti-Taliban forces, the Taliban disintegrated rapidly. However, Bin Laden was not arrested or killed, but innocent civilians were killed by the U.S. army during its invasion of Afghanistan. Throughout the Cold War years, the framework of defense against Communist aggression was to mobilize domestic support against subversion, terrorism and mass slaughter as I reported in Chapter I. According to Noam Chomski, the concept of promotion of democracy abroad articulated by the U.S. in the Middle East is evidence of doctrinal system. He points out in *Failed States:*

the Abuse of Power and Assault on Democracy that it is significant (even essential) to understand that the doctrinal systems used by the U.S.

> [c]ommonly portray the current enemy as diabolical by its very nature. The characterization is sometimes accurate, but crimes are rarely the reason for demanding forceful measures against a selected target. One of many sources of evidence for this is the easy transition a state may make from favored friend and ally (who, irrelevantly, commits monstrous crimes) to ultimate evil that has to be destroyed (because of those very same crimes) (130).

Chomski's statement is related to Saddam Hussein as an illustration. The U.S. attacked Iraq in 2003, as a justification for the impassioned denunciations of the awful crimes of Saddam that compelled the U.S. to punish the people of Iraq, creating in the U.S media a stereotype of the Middle East culture to the rest of the world.

After 9/11, the Muslims had suffered stereotypical representations of their culture in the world, resulting in more and more discrimination. On this note, I want to add Robert Stam's observation regarding racism. According to him, in popular culture, racism is, from all the contextual and textual practices, the racialized difference upon which the term is constructed: otherness in order to confirm those with institutionalized power (478). This assumption may function as a restriction on people's freedom. In other words, "the symbolic battlegrounds of the mass media, the struggle over representation in the simulacral realm homologized that of the political sphere, where questions of imitation and representation easily slide into issues of delegation and voice" (Stam 478).

One of the angles of Brand's political discourse aims at criticizing the manipulation of the international media coverage, as I described previously. We, the readers are introduced to what the poet's persona watches on the TV screen:

> She has to keep watch at the window
> of the television, she hears what is never shown,
> the details are triumphant,
> she'll never be able to write them in time" (28).

The series of deaths and slaughters watched and heard by the poet corroborate the causality of violence, at the same the poet demonstrates her view towards the mass of unsympathetic people who do not care of the destruction, as she states: "let us all celebrate death"(35). Brand's criticism against the role of modern media refers to its graphic account of the details, that she ironically compares "the news was advertisement for movies,/ the movies were the real killings"(22).

Brand also incorporates other preoccupations caused "by malaria, by hemorrhagic fevers, by hungers, / by fingerprint, by dogs and vigilantes" (39). By doing so, the poet invokes the cruel reality which "seems harmless enough / and merely like the hand of God" (43). So many hopeless situations lead the poet to make use of the irony of bravado, as follows,

> Let us forget all that, let us not act surprised,
> or make coy distinctions among mass,
> murderers, why ration nuclear weapons,
> let us all celebrate death (35)

Or the horror image of

> Beating on the tympanic bone, by suicide bomb,
> by suicide bomb, by car bomb, by ambush, any
> number by sunlight, in daylight, by evening
>
> Still on those safe streets, amber alerts go out
> by television, by puppetry, in sessions of paranoia,
> in heavy suits with papers in cool hands as if staring at fools (25).

The extensive media coverage of the world regarding terrorism, violence and war is explored by the poet. Clearly, Brand makes use of irony in order to juxtapose the real world with the representation of it. I specify irony as reported by Hutcheon. According

to her, “irony [is] a general term to refer to this recognition of the discrepancy between reality and appearance” (9). She observes irony is “emblematic of the polarities that obsessed the age: subjective/ objective, absolute/ relative, reality/ illusion”(9). For instance, Brand makes use of irony in order to criticize media values that bring sorrow to the ravaged world while reducing reality to triviality: “celebrity news, unrealities of faraway islands / bickering,/ each minute so drastic, they win a million dollars”(29).

The inventory of so many evils makes the poet to ponder:

> happiness is not the point really, it’s a marvel,
> an accusation in our time,
> and so is this, Monday, February 28th, one
> hundred and fourteen, Tuesday, August 16th, ninety
> Wednesday September 14th, one hundred and eighty-
> two, Friday November 18th, eighty
> these were only the bloodiest days in one year,
> in one place (100).

These stanzas highlight the amount of details which occur daily in the world. The speaker emphasizes the hostility, but there is also a dignified simplicity and a sincere eloquence in Brand’s portrayal. It is seems to be instructive to look more closely into the human being’s deeds in order to understand that everything sounds unchangeable in this “ravaged world” with its “the bloodiest days.” Brand explores all the difficulties (mis) representation by the mass media.

Finally, the root of the word “inventory” is *inventorium,* altered to the Latin *inventarium,* which literally means “a list of what is found,” from Latin *invenre,* which means to find. Whatever is found in Brand’s *Inventory* is delivered by modern media: a catalogue of global suffering, loss, war, cruelty, disaster, and pain. The poet attempts not to fix place and time, or even a specific nation in her narration, as she reports in her memoir book: “[m]aps are such subjective things, borders move all the time [....] Paper does not halt land any more than it can halt thoughts”(52). Based on this, I conclude that

this analysis of Brand's poetics in its political trajectory shows an expansion from local to global.

CONCLUSION

The scope of this study has included the categories of nation, language, identity, race, class, sexuality and gender. Therefore, in my analysis of Brand's political trajectory, it was necessary to observe not only how her *engagé* character is portrayed in each of the mentioned categories, but also how her politics incorporate them in a polyphonic dialogue, in representations of the self and others.

I want to recapitulate the major arguments from my analysis in order to conclude my investigation. Firstly, Brand's origin is from the former British colony of Trinidad, in the southern Caribbean. She lived in her colonized home country for the first 17 years of her life, and moved to Canada in 1970, where she has developed her art as a writer within different literary genres such as poetry, fiction, non- fiction, and film. In sum, the poet's commitment is directly associated with her own diasporic experience, expressing her voice as an act of resistance against all kinds of oppression—from a personal to collective social viewpoints as she affirms in her essay "Notes for Writing thru Race":

> I live in a culture where the dominant forces are still recapturing or repatriating what they perceive as their original cultural ideals, those of the motherland from which they were cast out or that they had to leave to make their fortunes (173).

It is significant to highlight that the poet's discourse claims not only for equality but also accessibility and freedom for all individuals regardless their skin color, sexual orientation, race or gender in society. In this respect, Kambourelli observes in *Scandalous Bodies* that colonized people consciously feel distant from their original place and feel a "lack of sameness vis-à-vis the dominant society" (138).

My analysis was conducted within a theoretical framework that suggested that Brand's discourse results in an empirical truth. I was aware that her poetry had a closer

identification with third world literatures, mainly Latin American and Caribbean traditions than the ones of North America. Kamboureli has pointed out that works from authors like Brand have invited "the reader to consider social, political and cultural contexts that have produced Canadian literature in general and their work in particular"(1). According to Kamboureli, issues such as race, ethnic origin, gender, and ideological affiliation have positioned these authors' works in the "'margins' that the Canadian dominant society has historically devised" (2). But, Brand herself denies such categorization, by saying that her writing is not in any margin of Canadian literature, but in the middle of Black literature, because that was the literature she read and responded to.

Next, we saw that Brand shows her antagonism against any kind of cultural stereotypes. The poet demonstrates the conflict of visible minorities' living experience in Canada, by addressing a discussion of the controversial policy of the Multiculturalism Act. For Brand, "[w]hat multiculturalism does essentially is to compartmentalize us into little cultural groups who have dances and different foods and Caribana. But it doesn't address real power" (qtd. in Kamboureli 40). For some scholars like Hutcheon, the Multiculturalism Act has been responsible for balancing the social tension and cultural richness, and the non-homogenous identity in Canadian territory.

One of the aims of this research was to analyze Brand's position not only as a Black woman and outsider, but to observe the multiple voices expressed in her poetry which incorporates her own life experiences as an immigrant, and her memories of the Caribbean. These voices embody the fears, reactions and rejections lived by other outsiders in Canada. As the poet states in her essay "Notes for writing thru Race":

> [the visible minorities groups] should talk again about the repression of their cultures by this concept of 'whiteness.' [They] haven't been excluded, [they have] been repressed, and [they] don't need access, [they] need freedom

> from the tyranny of 'whiteness' expressing itself all through [their] lives (176).

In chapter I, I discussed Brand's poetry in relation to the legacy of colonization, more precisely, the hostility that her African ancestors have suffered by the dominant culture. The poet, in fact, assumes her antagonism towards the dominant culture appropriating and subverting its literary tradition to express her political viewpoints. She does so by focusing on African and topics of the native Caribbean culture, encompassing the historical issues of forced migration and enslavement, the related themes of home and exile, and colonialism. Her antagonist discourse essentially subverts the canon. I chose the poem entitled "Canto VII" from *Primitive Offensive* because it illustrates most of these issues, recreating relevant historical moments of violence which occurred in Africa, and Caribbean, ironically framed in the traditional forms in *Cantos.*

Then, regarding the Caribbean occupation by the U.S imperialism, Brand moved from Canada to Grenada. The (dis) location was observed by Dickinson as 'spatial paradoxes"— her lived experience *here* in Canada transferred to *there* where she was born (the Caribbean). The innumerable acts of atrocities caused by the U.S invasion is recorded by the tone of Brand's polyphonic voice in *Chronicle of the Hostile Sun.* Her discourse shows "an in-between position" (Kamboureli 139), i.e., the poet voices the struggles of the oppressed (inside the conflict in Grenada), but also outside because of her privileged position toward the others.

No Language is Neutral expands the range of political and social issues, experimenting with plurality of voices. Brand gains national reputation as well as international recognition for her incisive reflections on discrimination and racism against visible minorities and women. The poet uses the language that she grew up with,

exploring the demotic and subverting the dominant language. Doing so, she incisively demonstrates that “no language is neutral.”

Being a black woman, immigrant and lesbian, Brand makes use of a hybrid language which incorporates the notions of racialized and gendered languages. In discussing the poems in the section “Hard against the Soul,” as being her first narration addressing her lesbian sexuality, I centered on the concept of performativity of gender as proposed by Butler. I discussed Brand’s voice in opposition to the patriarchal system in an attempt to illustrate the various kinds of crossings—cross-culture,- racial, -gender, -class and –erotic— as noted by Dickinson.

Still about the notion of performativity, in chapter II, I discussed Brand’s discourse regarding the discrepancies that characterize identity, and culture in Canada around the concept of ‘whiteness.’ The poet shows the controversy regarding the Multiculturalism Act which has framed the Canadian national identity from the point of view of the dominant Anglo/ French cultures. In order to outline my argumentation, I drew Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” as well as Butler’s and Bhabha’s notion of ‘performativity’ which is “applied to the elaboration of gender and cultural difference “(164). The notion of racialized identity refers to how we see ourselves and how others see us which does not express any authentic inner “core” self but is the dramatic effect of performances. I chose some sections from *Land to Light On* in order to conduct my investigation regarding the constructed otherness which depicts individuals who are manipulated and objectified by the dominant system in Canadian society. As I have verified, the poet also appropriates the dominant culture’s self-image of superiority and naïve understanding of the motives of immigration, as classification of non- Europeans—i.e. visible minorities—, as *us*, i.e., different from *them*—the mainstream culture.

The focus of the discussion in *Thirsty* was mainly racism and discrimination. The key character of the book Alan, a dreamer immigrant in Toronto only "wanted a calming loving spot" (14). Alan mirrors the story of many other black people in Toronto whose lives are affected by racism. The poet's gaze is directed to the marginalization of black people and other minority groups who try to make a living for themselves in the city of Toronto and support one another through the collective struggles against discrimination and racism. The poet gives voice to the many other outsiders who have come to Canada and settled in, and cannot stand the painful position of facing intolerance, by affirming: "we live here / but don't think that we're going to live like people here!"(37). Brand's description of Alan dying refers to a relief to thirst. In this way the theme of thirst demands the power of her discourse regarding the rights of marginalized communities, especially black people and women.

Following that, in regard to social, economical, political, physical, environmental and technological factors of society, I proceeded, in chapter III, with a discussion of the most recent book of Brand, *Inventory*. My investigation focused on the preoccupation of the modern era and the media values. Brand's view is a compelling examination of the 21th century, illustrating the global loss, wars, violence, catastrophe, and pain. The victims of these atrocities are those people who have been living, suffering and struggling for change, but Brand does not limit her scope to any a specific group, i.e. any marginalized or ghettoized people because of their race, skin color, class or identity, but encompasses human beings in general.

In recent decades, a large number of publications have discussed the issue of postcolonial literature into which Brand's work is inserted in the academic field. After presenting the poet's writing and the theoretical framework regarding issues of diaspora, (post) colonialism, struggles of minority groups, and Multiculturalism as a political

Act., I hope to have brought some contributions to the study of contemporary Canadian poetry, especially about Brand's poetics of resistance. I have also attempted to position myself expressing my own politics in this thesis. I also expect I can achieve my goals in order to construct a better society against any kind of oppression regarding sexual orientation, class, skin color, gender and race.

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