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DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„The Significance of Race, Gender, and Class to Identity Formation in Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* and Andrea Levy's *Never Far from Nowhere*"

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:	A 343
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:	Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Betreuer:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Rudolf Weiss

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Univ.-Prof. Dr. Weiss, who has been the most competent, uncomplicated, and good-humored supervisor a student could hope to find. This thesis would not have been possible without his guidance and expertise.

Furthermore, I am grateful to my friends who have provided assistance in numerous ways. In particular, I would like to thank my close friend Katharina, whose informal advice has been indispensable, as well as my partner Tobias, who sheltered me from distraction during the composition of this thesis and has been an invaluable source of personal support.

Last but not least, I am greatly indebted to my parents for their continuous encouragement, patience and generosity. I cannot thank them enough for their moral and financial support throughout my time at university.

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1. Introduction

Coming of age is a difficult process, which involves diverse and sometimes painful experiences and requires certain adjustments to society. Not surprisingly, therefore, this process has been a prominent theme in literature for a long time. In post-Enlightenment Germany, novels dealing with a hero's struggle to reconcile self and society came to be understood as a separate genre: the *Bildungsroman*. Since then, it has been recognized that a literary preoccupation with identity formation is neither particularly German, nor particularly masculine. Bildungsromane have been written by and about men and women from various cultural and social environments, treating a wide array of issues.

While coming of age is generally a difficult process, the nature of the difficulties involved is context-specific and crucially influenced by an individual's social positioning. The privileges and disadvantages ascribed to differences in race, gender, or class affiliation, among others, as well as the intersections of such markers of differentiation affect individuals in all stages of life, but may assume special relevance during a person's formative years. Clearly, the task of positioning oneself in society is particularly complicated for those who are multiply marginalized. It is even more complicated for those who are additionally deprived of a community sharing similar experiences, and live in an environment that constantly asserts their difference.

What are the challenges encountered by a Black girl whose white-identified mother forces her to attend an all-white school where her teachers doubt her intelligence, partly as a result of her working-class background? How difficult must growing up be for a Native girl who is apprehended from her biological parents to be raised by racists, and labeled a liar when relating her abuse? The protagonists of the heavily autobiographical Bildungsromane *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree* find themselves in those and numerous equally burdensome situations. Despite the differences in the novels' settings and the characters' backgrounds, the works display a number of striking similarities in their depiction of the protagonists' struggles towards

creating viable self-identifications. By juxtaposing two sisters' different experiences of racism and divergent reactions in seeking assimilation and developing ethnic pride, respectively, the novels further enhance the heroines' sense of isolation and provide multifaceted portraits of young women's identity formations within largely hostile social environments.

As supported by an extensive discussion of the Bildungsroman genre, both texts can be understood as postcolonial continuations and modifications of the literary tradition. They depict processes of Bildung that are crucially determined by the complex interplay of markers of difference in the characters' self-identifications and their identifications by others. These forms of social positioning in the narratives are analyzed employing the sociological framework of intersectionality. In examining the protagonists' self-reflections as well as their interactions with others on various social levels, an intersectional approach is utilized to explore the significance of the social categories of race, gender, and class to the protagonists' identity formation.

2. Two Contexts, Two Pairs of Sisters – Two Comparable Stories?

While *In Search of April Raintree* is set in Manitoba and describes the identity formation of two Métis sisters, the protagonists of *Never Far from Nowhere* are the daughters of Jamaican immigrants in London. Thus, the contexts of these two texts appear radically different at first. The narrators' introductions of themselves and their respective sisters on the novels' first pages, however, reveal a significant commonality. April Raintree describes her family as follows:

> My father, Henry Raintree, was of mixed blood, a little of this, a little of that, and a whole lot of Indian. My sister, Cheryl, who was eighteen months younger than me, had inherited his looks: black hair, dark brown eyes which turned black when angry, and brown skin. There was no doubt they were both of Indian ancestry. My mother, Alice, on the other hand, was part Irish and part Ojibway. Like her, I had pale skin, not that it made any difference when we were living together as a family. (Culleton Mosionier 11)

A strikingly similar description is provided by Vivien Charles on the opening pages of *Never Far from Nowhere*:

> We were sisters and we looked alike. We had the family resemblance passed down from our father's side. A large nose and correspondingly large ears, but somehow not out of place. [...] But I had a light skin – a high colour. In a dim light I could be taken for Italian or Spanish. Olive was darker. Black. The Caribbean legacy. Our parents were from Jamaica. [...] The Caribbean legacy left me with fair skin and black wavy hair. And Olive with a black skin, a head of tight frizzy hair streaked with red, and green eyes. (Levy 1-2)

The fact that both novels feature two sisters whose physical appearance distinguishes them from each other is crucial to the narratives and explains for their comparability. In juxtaposing two characters who would appear to have the same background and opportunities but whose personal development within their respective social environment is crucially determined by their skin color, the novels employ the form of the double Bildungsroman to offer a powerful critique of the complex ways in which race, gender, and class intersect in the identity formation of ethnic minority characters.

2.1. In Search of April Raintree

2.1.1. The Canadian Métis

The term Métis refers to persons of mixed European and Native ancestry in Canada. Providing a more precise definition is, however, difficult since scholars, provincial governments and Métis organizations vary in their application of the term, which may "convey [...] a sense of cultural identity and [...] a quasi-legal status" (Foster 21). With reference to an individual person's ethnicity, however, their self-identification as Métis is clearly crucial, but this has not been an uncomplicated matter throughout Canadian history.

The Métis' origins can be traced back to unions between European traders and Aboriginal (mainly Cree and Ojibway) women in the Great Lakes area from the sixteenth century onwards (Douaud 1-4, Smulders 77). The Métis as a distinct people, living in communities and identifying themselves as an ethnic group, however, did not emerge until the 18th century, when New France was conquered by the British and disapproval of racial miscenegation increased (Brown 137-140). The establishment of the US-Canadian border in 1794 fostered Métis migration further west to Red River, where by the early decades of the 19th century they constituted a dominant social and economic force, hunting buffalos and trading extensively with the North West Company as well as enforcing their own laws (Frideres 38, Brown 141-144). During this period, the Métis flourished and began to consider "themselves as 'the true Natives of Canada' [...], 'the only ethnic group indigenous to the continent' [...], and 'the first Canadians' [...]" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 77). In the 1860s, their leader Louis Riel even implemented a provisionary government, and in 1870 his negotiations with the Canadian government prompted the passage of the Manitoba Act, which granted the Métis an allotment of 1,4 million acres of land (although it simultaneously served to legitimize their exclusion from the Indian Act) (Smulders, *Proper Word* 78).

Over the next few years, however, new amendments were added to the Manitoba Act, and the Métis were deprived of the land they had been promised. In addition, European settlers proceeded westwards and persecuted the Métis, triggering their dispersal (Brown 141-145). In 1885 these developments culminated in the Northwest Rebellion, the Métis defeat in the Battle of Batoche

and the subsequent execution of their leader Louis Riel. Having "lost their land, their status, and their pride" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 78), the Métis predominantly

> turned fringe dwellers who, gathering outside White communities in shanty towns, or along roads and railways, were then known as the 'road allowance people'; this label quickly became associated with the traditional image of a beaten people, connoting alcoholism, fights, prostitution, jail sentences, etc.
> (Douaud 10)

In the face of such stereotypes and the biased representations of the insurrection on the part of the white majority, many descendants of the once proud Métis were reluctant to apply the term to themselves far into the 20th century (Brown 142-144, Lussier). It was only in the 1960s that a renewed Métis nationalism began to take root, leading a young generation of Métis to identify positively with their heritage and prompting the foundation of a number of organizations aimed at promoting Métis rights and culture (Brown 143). The 1980s even saw what some historians refer to as a Métis Renaissance (Brown 145) and in 1982, the passage of the Constitution Act finally provided the Métis with official recognition as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples (Smulders, *Proper Word* 77).

Despite these recent positive developments, the Métis' history of deprivations and dispersals as well as the white mainstream society's persisting negative stereotypes still have considerable effects on Métis communities and individuals. Like numerous Native peoples in North America, the Métis are affected by severe social problems such as elevated rates of suicide, alcoholism and violence (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait), which are prominent issues in *In Search of April Raintree* and other contemporary works of Métis literature such as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*. The portrayal of the challenges Canadian society imposes on the Métis and the promotion of Métis cultural pride through writing as well as other forms of cultural production can thus be considered invaluable contributions to combating stereotypes and facilitating Métis solidarity.

2.1.2. Plot and Narrative Technique

In Search of April Raintree is the story of the two Métis sisters April and Cheryl. Born in Manitoba in the 1950s, they are removed from their parents, Henry and Alice, and separated from each other at an early age to be raised in foster homes when their parents' alcoholism is discovered by the authorities as a consequence of their infant sister Anna's death. The sisters' experiences in their respective (white) foster homes range from loving care to brutal verbal and physical abuse. While their parents refrain from attending the scheduled family meetings after four years, April and Cheryl enjoy their infrequent visits and remain in contact through letters. Despite their sisterly bond of affection, April and Cheryl's relationship in their formative years is increasingly complicated by their different attitudes to being Métis. While April's light skin color enables her to pass for white and she is determined to assimilate into white society, Cheryl is proud of her Métis heritage and resolves to become a social worker. After April's marriage with the white upper-class Bob in Toronto fails, she returns to Winnipeg, where – being mistaken for Cheryl – she is brutally raped and discovers that her sister has become a prostitute and alcoholic. Finally, Cheryl commits suicide and, partly as a result of that tragic event, April comes to identify with the Métis. On the novel's last pages it is revealed that Cheryl had a young son, whom April intends to raise.

The novel's first-person narrator is April Raintree, who at the age of 24 recounts her life from her early childhood up to that age. Thus, *In Search of April Raintree* is an auto-diegetic narrative, in which there is some narrative distance between the narrating self and the experiencing self. Cheryl's perspective is revealed through her letters to April, her journal and dialogue. The story time covers approximately twenty years and the narrative is chronological, with the exception of Cheryl's journal entries, which April reads only after her sister's suicide. First published in 1983, *In Search of April Raintree* largely follows realist conventions and contains countless autobiographical references.

2.1.3. Beatrice Culleton Mosionier

Beatrice Culleton Mosionier was born on August 27, 1949, in St. Boniface, Manitoba. Like her novel's protagonists, she grew up in foster homes as a result

of her parents' alcoholism. She attended George Brown College and Banff School of Fine Arts and worked as an accounting clerk and bookkeeper in Toronto and Winnipeg before becoming the head of Pemmican Publications, Inc. In addition to her first and best-known literary work *In Search of April Raintree*, Culleton Mosionier is the author of the juvenile novel *Spirit of the White Bison* (1985) and the novel *In the Shadow of Evil* (2000), as well as the play *Night of the Trickster* and the film-script *Walker* ("Beatrice Culleton"). Her motivation to write *In Search of April Raintree* was initiated by her family history:

> Before I began writing, I lived happily enough in white society, and I had nothing to do with native people or native issues. [...] When I was fourteen one of my sisters committed suicide and in October of 1980 my oldest sister committed suicide. That's when I decided to write a book; there had been two suicides in my family, the rest of my family members were alcoholics, and we had to be raised in foster homes. I wanted to know why: Was it because we were natives?
> ("Beatrice Culleton")

The act of writing, then, as Culleton Mosionier explains in an essay, was "therapeutic" (*Special Time* 248). Having previously attempted to assimilate into white Canadian society, much like her character April Raintree, the author's personal experience triggered her identification as Métis and her urge to process the tragic events in her life through writing.

Given the fact that "Métis literature can hardly claim any tradition" (Klooss 205), and with the exception of Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed* (1973) contemporary literary production by Métis writers was virtually nonexistent, it appears striking that Culleton Mosionier filled a gap of which she had been unaware. When asked by Andrew Garrod whether she had felt that she "had a story to tell that hadn't been written – that perhaps Canada, and maybe beyond Canada, need[ed] to know what the Metis experience [was] like", Culleton Mosionier responded that due to her lack of interest in Native concerns, including literature, she had not even known "what was out there" (87). It must have come as a surprise to her then, that *In Search of April Raintree* has been extremely successful in Canada. It was reprinted numerous times, has been taught in universities and a revised version, entitled *April Raintree*, was produced for high school use. Therefore, the novel has been considered as

"mark[ing] a shift in the accessibility and circulation of Métis and other minority self-writing narratives" (Bar-Shalom 114).

2.2. Never Far From Nowhere

2.2.1. The Jamaican Diaspora in Great Britain

While the first Jamaicans certainly migrated to Britain much earlier, massive immigration to the 'Mother Country' is generally considered to have begun in 1948 with the arrival of the MV Empire Windrush, carrying almost 500 Jamaican men, many of whom had served in World War II. Due to the labor shortage in post-war Britain, most of these men as well as the tens of thousands that followed in the 1950s and early 1960s, had been recruited as workers by companies such as the British Hotels and Restaurants Association or London Transport (Lima, *Pivoting* 59). Since those who immigrated before Jamaica achieved independence in 1962 were British citizens, they could settle without any legal restrictions and the poor condition of the Jamaican economy caused many to leave their country of origin at the prospect of a better future (Foner 5-10). In most cases, however, these hopes were soon disappointed as Jamaican and other West Indian migrants "came to work in jobs traditionally of low status and low pay" (Lima, *Pivoting* 59).

Furthermore, they were unprepared for the racism they encountered in Britain. For racial relations in Caribbean societies have been characterized by what is sometimes referred to as "pigmentocracy" (James 239) or "shade-consciousness" (Foner 30). During almost two centuries of slavery in Jamaica, people were classified according to their skin color (along with other phenotypic traits such as hair texture). Light-skinned slaves were preferred and given certain privileges by their masters and thus came to consider themselves, and to be considered by others, as superior. A similar pattern of associating shades of skin color with prestige was discernible among the free colored population during the times of slavery as well as after its abolition in 1838 (Foner 26-27). Thus, throughout colonial times, people's specific phenotypic traits were intrinsically linked with their social class. With Jamaican independence this concept became more "symbolic" but was not entirely abandoned, for as

upward social mobility among Blacks was facilitated, those who gained access to higher education and achieved economic success came to be "thought of 'as if' they were white" (Foner 34). In Britain, however, the Jamaican immigrants' racial status was perceived quite differently:

> In the 'Mother Country' no regard was paid to the complex hierarchy of shades by the 'host' society: the pattern of racism which the Caribbean migrants experienced here did not correspond to the pigmentocracy which they left behind in the Caribbean. They were regarded monolithically as 'coloureds,' 'blacks,' 'immigrants,' and even 'wogs' with no reference to differential shades.
> (James 239)

This difference in attitudes to racial identity may also become a source of generational conflict, and it certainly does in *Never Far from Nowhere*. For the members of the second generation of British Jamaicans, having spent their entire lives in Britain, tended to adopt a rather different value system.

The commonly known race riots of the second half of the twentieth century had a large impact on the way Blacks were perceived by the majority, but partly as a result of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States which inspired the younger generations of marginalized groups in Britain (cf. Wambu), they began to carve out spaces for themselves. In the 1980s,

> this shared sense of objectification was articulated when the racialized disempowered and fragmented sought empowerment in a gesture of politicized collective action. In naming the shared space of marginalization as 'black', postcolonial migrants of different languages, religions, cultures and classes consciously constructed a political identity shaped by the shared experience of racialization and its consequences.
> (Mirza 3)

At the same time, "Britain and its institutions started to open up to Black Britons" (Wambu, par. 25) and Black British cultural production flourished. In literature, writers of West Indian origin such as George Lamming or Samuel Selvon had been successful since the 1950s, but the 1980s saw not only an increasing number of female writers but also a broad acceptance of Black British works of literature:

> [I]t is with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which won the 1981 Booker McConnell Award that this new wave made its greatest impact. It announced a literature that would look back to its source, but would be far more self-confident about its own position in Britain. It wouldn't be marginalised as 'Black', 'Commonwealth' or any other kind of literature

that put it at the edges. It would be a fully fledged member of the broad range of British writing. (Wambu, par. 24)

Thus, Black Britons had begun to move from the margins to the center, a trend which in literature was continued by such well-known authors as Caryl Phillips, Hanif Kureishi, Joan Riley, and Ben Okri, to name but a few. While racial discrimination is of course still an important issue, "[t]he people of the Windrush, their children and grandchildren have played a vital role in creating a new concept of what it means to be British" (Phillips, par. 9).

2.2.2. Plot and Narrative Technique

The protagonists of *Never Far from Nowhere*, first published in 1996 as Andrea Levy's second novel, are the two sisters Vivien and Olive, who as daughters of Jamaican immigrants grow up on a council estate in north London in the 1960s and 1970s. After their father's death, they are raised by their mother Rose and attend a school where they are the only Black girls. As a teenager, Vivien becomes involved with a clique of skinheads, but distances herself from them after a violent incident. However, she continuously attempts to conceal her Jamaican heritage, telling her first boyfriend, for instance, that her family is from Mauritius. Olive, as opposed to that, identifies quite strongly as Black British, an attitude that is clearly connected to her darker skin and her frequent experiences of racism. Vivien pursues a higher education and is admitted to an art college at the end of the novel, while Olive's life takes a radically different course. She gets pregnant as a teenager and her marriage to her daughter's father fails. Dependent on welfare, she finally abandons her attempts at establishing a life in London after being wrongfully accused of marihuana possession by racist policemen and resolves to 'return' to Jamaica.

Never Far from Nowhere is a first-person narrative, with the chapters alternating between Vivien's and Olive's narrations. Although Vivien's chapters are significantly more extensive, both Vivien and Olive must be considered auto-diegetic narrators and the novel occasionally deploys multiple focalization, as certain incidents are narrated from both sisters' perspectives. The plot progresses fairly chronologically, with some analepses and prolepses. Like April

Raintree, the narrators appear to be in their early twenties, recounting their lives up to then but focusing almost exclusively on their teenage years.

2.2.3. Andrea Levy

Andrea Levy's father and his twin brother emigrated from Jamaica on the MV Empire Windrush in 1948, and her mother followed her husband six months later. Levy was born in London on March 7, 1956, as the youngest of four children[1] and raised on a council estate near Arsenal ("Andrea Levy"; Lima, *Levy*; Levy, *England*). In her essay "This Is My England", Levy describes the experience of growing up as a second generation British Jamaican as follows:

> I was educated to be English. Alongside me – learning, watching, eating and playing – were white children. But those white children would never have to grow up to question whether they were English or not. I was embarrassed that my parents were not English. One of the reasons was that no one around me was interested in the country my parents came from. To them, it was just a place full of inferior black people.

Furthermore, her parents were reluctant to discuss their Jamaican origins and issues of racial identity, being, as Levy stated in an interview with Blake Morrison, in denial of the fact that they were Black: "And because I'm not very dark my parents hoped that nobody would notice." She attended Middlesex Polytechnic, where she studied textile design and weaving, and after her graduation in 1978 became a woven textile designer, working for employers such as the wardrobe departments of the BBC and the Royal Opera House (Lima, *Levy*). Levy did not take an interest in fiction until at the age of twenty-three she read *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French and subsequently became inspired by the works of African-American writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, "but [those] left her hungry for books that would illuminate her own experience of being born black and English" (Hickman).

In the aftermath of her father's death in 1987 and her first visit to Jamaica in 1989, during which she gained more information on her family history, Levy finally decided to attempt writing the fiction she had been looking for herself

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[1] Like Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, Levy has two older sisters and an older brother, and while it would be extremely far-fetched to assign any significance to this parallel, it is an interesting coincidence.

(Lima, *Levy*). These attempts were immediately proven successful with the positive reception of her first novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), which was followed by *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). For her fourth novel *Small Island* (2004), Levy received the Whitbread Book of the Year award as well as the Orange Prize for Fiction, and her most recent work *The Long Song* (2010) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize ("Andrea Levy").

2.3. Different, Yet Similar

Despite the different contexts in which the novels were conceived, they share a number of similarities beyond the fact that they both deal with a pair of sisters whose different physical appearance has an impact on their development as they come of age. First of all, the author's biographies reveal various parallels, for instance the fact that they both turned to writing relatively late in their lives and, at least partly, in reaction to their personal experiences. It is therefore not surprising that both writers draw heavily on autobiographical material in their composition of characters and themes. The protagonists' – as well as the authors' – formative years are characterized by their position as representatives of a minority not only in terms of society at large but also in their immediate social environment. They are almost exclusively surrounded by whites, and their difference from the respective mainstream societies is primarily conceived of as racial rather than cultural. Alienated from their ethnic roots and subject to both individual prejudices and institutional racism, Vivien and April strive for assimilation and even racial passing, which is clearly not an option for their darker-skinned sisters, who come to identify themselves as Black British and Métis, respectively. This contrasting of two female protagonists struggling with a racist society in their formative years justifies both novels' generic classification as postcolonial female double Bildungsromane. This, however, clearly demands further explanation.

3. The Bildungsroman – An Indefinable Genre?

3.1. General Definitions and Debates

The question as to what constitutes the genre of the Bildungsroman and which criteria accordingly justify a novel's classification as Bildungsroman has been a matter of controversy among literary critics. There is general consent concerning several historical facts, for instance that the emergence of the genre can be traced back to late eighteenth century Germany and that Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) is to be considered its "prototype" (Buckley 12). Furthermore, it is undisputed that the term was first used by Karl Morgenstern in his 1820 lecture "On the Nature of the Bildungsroman," which particularly emphasized the didactic aspects of the genre, i.e. the *Bildung* of the reader:

> We may call a novel a *Bildungsroman* first and foremost on account of its content, because it represents the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion, but also, second, because this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel. (654-655)

In addition, Morgenstern recognized that the Bildungsroman was not restricted to a German context but that examples could be found in "a number of national traditions" (Boes 648). Despite Morgenstern's coinage, however, the term became established only much later through its application by William Dilthey (Hardin xiii-xiv), who in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (*Experience and Poetry, 1906*) defined the Bildungsroman as a kind of novel focusing on a young protagonist

> entering into life in a happy dream, seeking kindred spirits, finding friendship and love, but now also encountering the struggles of hard reality and thus maturing amidst the many experiences of life, to find himself, and to ascertain his true task in the world. (qtd. by Minden 119)

While contemporary definitions of the term tend to include female characters and to substitute "identity" for "true task in the world," they frequently remain very general. Chris Baldick, for instance, defines the Bildungsroman as "a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (27), while M.H. Abrams describes it as dealing with

> the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world. (193)

In the light of those general definitions it does not seem surprising that critics such as James Hardin have objected to the "imprecise use of the word to categorize virtually any work that describes, even in the most far-fetched way, a protagonist's formative years," and asserted that the Bildungsroman constitutes "a type of novel more talked about than understood" (x).

Providing a narrower definition capable of invoking broad consensus, however, proves difficult. Jeffrey Sammons, for instance, argues that any novel classified as a Bildungsroman should

> have something to do with *Bildung*, that is, with the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity. (41)

Although this may be an appropriate stance with reference to historic German Bildungsromane, Mark Stein rightfully claims that "to limit the bildungsroman genre to particular ideological concepts of education is bound to exclude texts on ideological grounds" (24-25). Furthermore, while it is important to Sammons that any Bildungsroman operates within this humanistic ideology, to him "it does not much matter whether the process of Bildung succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not" (41). This assertion touches upon another contested issue, i.e. the fact that the post-Enlightenment ideal of a perfect equilibrium between the individual and the social is in itself "an utopian notion" (Minden 119), and has not been satisfactorily resolved in any of the novels commonly classified as Bildungsromane, including *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre.* Thus, if the achievement of such harmoniousness is on the one hand considered, as it frequently is, the ultimate goal of a Bildungsroman, but is on the other hand never fully accomplished, the question arises as to whether the genre itself is even meaningful. Among those who argue that it is not is Marc Redfield, who in *Phantom Formations* denies the Bildungsroman any conceptual value, referring to it as a "pseudo genre" (qtd. by Stein 23).

Given the vast number of texts from various social and historical contexts that are commonly understood to be Bildungsromane, however, it does not appear fruitful to abandon the concept merely on the basis of a very narrow definition of the term. An obvious solution to this problem would be to disassociate novels dealing with the formative years of their protagonists from the humanist notions frequently regarded as implicit in the term *Bildung* by introducing new generic labels. While some critics prefer alternative terms such as novel of formation, novel of apprenticeship, novel of development, novel of adolescence or coming-of-age novel, none of these fully encompasses the connotations invoked by the term Bildungsroman, as Christoph Schöneich argues. Furthermore, he asserts that the term has become so established in Anglophone literature studies that its factual prevalence alone justifies its continuity, and that terminological accuracy does not by necessity generate profound insights (58).

Perhaps then, it should simply be acknowledged that at least with reference to Anglophone novels, the term Bildungsroman has acquired different meanings from those associated with German post-Enlightenment literature. Critics have pointed to the fact, for instance, that the German subcategories of the genre, such as Entwicklungsroman, Erziehungsroman, and Künstlerroman, "have been far less rigid" in British literature (Buckley 13) and that "the emphasis in English Bildungsromane [...] is on activity" rather than reflection (Hardin xxv). Another frequently observed aspect is that "the English Bildungsroman [...] is more concerned with social mobility, with class conflict, than is its German counterpart" (Hardin xxiv; cf. Alden 2), and that non-German Bildungsromane in general tend to emphasize their protagonist's social circumstances (Minden 122). Considering such differences, it is difficult to detect any value in retaining the notion that a Bildungsroman should incorporate the humanist ideals of 18th and 19th century Germany.

Defining English-speaking Bildungsromane, then, is not a straightforward matter either. Two attempts at providing a set of the genre's characteristics shall be described in further detail, the first being Jerome Buckley's very influential outline of "a typical Bildungsroman plot" (17), which is based on his analysis of several English Bildungsromane from different literary periods. According to Buckley, the hero of a Bildungsroman is usually a "child of some sensibility

[who] grows up in the country or in a provincial town" (17) and whose development in this setting is limited by his father's narrow-mindedness – although Buckley also stresses that the protagonist "more often than not will be orphaned or at least fatherless" (19) – as well as inappropriate educational facilities. This leads him to move to a city, where his

> direct experience of urban life [...] involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. (17-18)

Thus, Buckley regards "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (18) as the essential constituents of a Bildungsroman and claims that to be classified as such, a novel must not deviate from his outline in more than three of these aspects. He further emphasizes that Bildungsromane are usually "strongly autobiographical" (23), written early in the respective author's career and as a result of their creator's youth and lack of "perspective" often end ambiguously (23-24).

While Buckley's attempt at providing a detailed description of a Bildungsroman's primary characteristics clearly deserves appreciation, the features he proposes remain far too restrictive. It is therefore not surprising that his outline has been the object of severe criticism, for instance by Pin-chia Feng, who claims that

> Buckley's definition blatantly upholds the idea of the bourgeois *status quo* and supports the reproduction of existing social structures and values in relation to class, gender, and race. While proposing generalized themes for the Bildungsroman, Buckley's model is nevertheless limited to the Victorian chronotope [...]. (5)

Furthermore, the objective of proposing a typical plot outline for an entire literary genre appears utopian and it would indeed be very surprising if anyone could provide an outline that was applicable to Bildungsromane from all literary periods and contexts.

Christoph Schöneich, therefore, focuses on British Bildungsromane written after 1945 and suggests a set of thematic criteria that do not adhere to a particular conception of plot. For him, the main characteristics of a Bildungsroman are

"Figur", "Suche/quest", "Welt", "Zeit", "Plot", and "narrative Selbst-Entwürfe".
First of all, he attaches great importance to the protagonist's high degree of
self-awareness, which includes his/her[2] ability to evaluate own attitudes and
behavior and to critically reflect on them (87). Secondly, he stresses the
centrality of a "quest" for psychic and social identity (89), and of "Welthaltigkeit",
by which he means that a Bildungsroman necessarily incorporates elements of
the social novel and that the relationship between the individual and society is
characterized by complexity and contradictions (90-91). According to
Schöneich, the narrative needs to cover a time span of several years and while
focusing particularly on the protagonist's adolescence should expand into
his/her adulthood (93). Furthermore, he asserts that Bildungsromane usually
possess a chronological structure and that their plots are characterized by
conflicts and crises which contribute to the character's identity formation (94-
95). As opposed to Morgenstern or Buckley, he does not consider the inclusion
of autobiographical material a significant aspect (94). Schöneich refers to his
final characteristic of a Bildungsroman as "narrativer Selbst-Entwurf":

> 'Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my
> destination?' Die Antwort auf diese klassischen Fragen der
> Selbstinterpretation nach Herkunft, Zukunft und Bedeutung des Lebens
> gibt sich das Ich in einer Geschichte, die es sich selbst erzählt. Das
> lebendige Bewußtsein fügt den Ereignissen mit der Reflexion über sich
> selbst die Meta-Ebene einer zweiten *quest* hinzu, die sich am Bedürfnis
> sinnvollen (und nicht einfach geschehenden) Lebens orientiert. (95-96)

Concerning the narrative technique of a Bildungsroman, Schöneich considers
both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators possible (96). It should be
added, however, that as Michael Minden points out, there is usually some
narrative distance, because "[t]he Bildungsroman is about subjectivity but is not
itself subjective" (122).

Clearly, Schöneich's approach acknowledges the significance of a
contemporary conception of identity, which critically examines the possibility of
meaningful interaction between the individual and his/her social environment:

> Dieses sozialpsychologische (also Gesellschaft und Individuum
> berücksichtigende) Konzept [der Identität] hat gegenüber dem eigentlich

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[2] Schöneich's study focuses exclusively on novels with male protagonists, which he explains in
terms of its limited scope. He does, however, acknowledge the fact that female Bildungsromane
exist.

> historischen Bildungsbegriff den Vorteil größerer Variabilität und kommt
> ohne umstrittene Kategorien wie ‚Universalität' oder ‚Harmonie' aus. (37)

This detachment from humanist ideals also allows for an interpretation of texts which exhibit what Hardin refers to as the "pervasive pessimism of modern literature," for "[t]wentieth-century novels seldom have a harmonious conclusion, let alone a 'happy ending'" (xx). While it has been argued that the classical examples of the Bildungsroman do not achieve entirely "harmonious" endings either, in modern novels

> [the] clashes with an inimical milieu […] often culminate not in social
> integration but in withdrawal, rebellion or even suicide. Social integration
> in such novels can be achieved only by severe comprise.
> (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 6)

Therefore, Schöneich also distinguishes between the "negative Bildungsroman" and the "anti-Bildungsroman", stating that the former describes a formative process with a negative conclusion, while in the case of the latter any fruitful interaction between individual and society is depicted as entirely impossible from the outset (99).

In general, the characteristics proposed by Schöneich clearly facilitate an interpretation particularly of contemporary Bildungsromane. They should not, however, be understood dogmatically, for it is not difficult to find examples of the genre which do not meet all of Schöneich's criteria. In David Lodge's *Out of the Shelter*, for instance, although the story time covers some of the protagonist's childhood, his development is basically described as occurring in just one summer, yet the novel can certainly be defined as a Bildungsroman. Furthermore, additional aspects must be taken into consideration when discussing female or postcolonial Bildungsromane.

3.2. The Female Bildungsroman

The preoccupation with male protagonists apparent in Buckley's, Schöneich's and many other literary critics' studies is certainly connected to the fact that the classical Bildungsroman has been considered a "predominantly masculine affair" (Minden 122). Despite receiving very little scholarly attention until the second half of the 20th century, however, the female Bildungsroman is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, it has been claimed that its tradition goes back to

late eighteenth and early nineteenth century conduct literature and is closely linked to an increased female middle-class readership in the nineteenth century (Feng 10-11). Yet the first major study focusing explicitly on female Bildungsromane, *The Voyage In*, was not published until 1983, when as a result of the second-wave feminist movement, critical engagement with women's literature had intensified. Literary production itself was, of course, also affected by the changes in women's opportunities in the 20th century, and as the authors of *The Voyage In*, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, argue, this applies particularly to the female Bildungsroman:

> Women's increased sense of freedom in this century, when women's experience has begun to approach that of the traditional male *Bildungsheld*, finds expression in a variety of fictions. Although […] the evolution of a coherent self […] has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction, this assumption remains cogent for women writers who now for the first time find themselves in a world increasingly responsive to their needs. (13)

Furthermore, they criticize that while definitions of the Bildungsroman were adapted to allow for their application to novels from various social and historical contexts, gender was neglected although "the sex of the protagonist modifies every aspect of a particular Bildungsroman" (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 5). The authors argue that a woman's development is fundamentally different both psychologically and socially. For instance, they claim that females are raised to be more community-oriented than men, which causes empathy to be of higher significance than autonomy in female Bildungsromane (10), and that women have been particularly constrained by society, which explains why "female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsover" (7). Furthermore, they observe that protagonists of female Bildungsromane are frequently older than their male counterparts and sometimes perform "a break not from parental but from marital authority" (12). Abel, Hirsch and Langland demand that these differences as well as numerous others be taken into account when studying female Bildungsromane, but at the same time consider their approach continuous with previous expansions of the genre:

> While emphasizing gender differences, our definition shares common ground with the presuppositions and generic features of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: belief in a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one); faith in the possibility of development (although

change may be frustrated, may occur at different stages and rates, and may be concealed in the narrative); insistence on a time span in which development occurs (although the time span may exist only in memory); and emphasis on social context (even as an adversary). (14)

While *The Voyage In* has been criticized for being Eurocentric, the exclusion of women of color is clearly a shortcoming that can be ascribed to numerous feminist studies of the time. Despite "show[ing] signs of the unconscious cultural hegemony of early feminist criticism which centers around white, middle-class women's issues" (Feng 13), the work constitutes a milestone in the study of female Bildungsromane and while the above definition may not be applicable to novels from other social and cultural contexts it can be considered a starting point for further expansions of the Bildungsroman's generic features.

3.3. The Postcolonial Bildungsroman

Just as the last few decades have seen academic recognition of the fact that Bildungsromane may feature female protagonists whose subject formation evolves differently, it has also been recognized that the novels' authors and main characters are not by necessity white Europeans or Americans. The increased interest in postcolonial literatures in recent years has involved the discovery that numerous novels from other cultural contexts focus on a protagonist's identity formation in a similar manner as the traditional Bildungsroman.

Geta LeSeur, for instance, compares a variety of novels by African American and West Indian authors in an interesting study on what she terms the *Black bildungsroman*. According to Mark Stein, this term is inappropriate because "LeSeur sees the 'Black bildungsroman' as antagonistic, as a mode of protest. [...] In the situation envisaged by LeSeur, overlappings with the European genre of the bildungsroman are mere accidents [...]" (Stein, *Literature* 27). LeSeur, however, explicitly claims that Black writers have adapted the European literary form either "consciously or unconsciously, to tell their stories" (21), and while observing numerous thematic parallels she highlights the distinctiveness of the Black variant:

> Protagonists within both forms may share gender, age "provinciality," surrogate parentage, and education. They may also leave home,

> experience isolation, experience debasing or exulting sexual
> experiences, move to the city or enlightened place, change and
> transform […] Yet, for Black children the *incidents* and subsequent
> *responses* are different from those of White children, perhaps because
> the authors (Black/White) use different styles of presentation.
> (LeSeur 19)

In addition to stressing the particularities of literary representation, LeSeur also

emphasizes the historical and sociological circumstances which have inhibited

Blacks, and which consequently inhibit Black protagonists in their development,

stating that "Black children have not flourished like White children" (21).

LeSeur's focus, however, is not so much on the differences between European

(or White) and Black Bildungsromane, but on those between African American

and West Indian novels, whose comparison demonstrates that

> […] the West Indian novelist writes a bildungsroman to recall childhood
> roots and to discover the truth about self and home, while the African
> American novelist tends to use personal experience in order to make a
> viable protest that is almost always about race, slave history, and the
> White establishment. (LeSeur 1)

This may be explained in terms of the fact that African Americans find

themselves in a context in which they are "exiles in their 'own' country" (27),

which clearly distinguishes them from West Indians and in a sense likens them

to the protagonists of *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree.*

In this respect it also appears interesting that LeSeur describes the youthful

characters in the novels she analyzes as frequently trying "to negate their

blackness since it robs them of a recognizable history and a sense of who they

are, and because they are conditioned by a society that denies them

recognition as individuals" (10).

A different approach to the postcolonial Bildungsroman, with regard to both

thematic concerns and cultural context, is provided in Mark Stein's *Black British*

Literature: Novels of Transformation. Stein focuses mainly on contemporary

Black British Bildungsromane dealing with the formation of characters who

belong to the so-called second generation. Referring to Buckley's outline of a

Bildungsroman's structure, he argues that the move from country to city is rarely

found in those novels, many of which feature protagonists already born and

raised in London or other cities, and that generational conflict usually

possesses a cultural component since the characters' parents are immigrants (*Literature* 25). Most importantly, however, Stein regards the "feature of finding a voice and the relationship between the individual and a larger group [as] the main distinction from the traditional bildungsroman" (30). His preference of the term *novel of transformation* derives from the idea that while the novels in question depict their protagonists' identity formation, they also contribute significantly to "the *transformation* of British society and cultural institutions" (*Literature* xiii) through their "performative functions",

> which entails the construction of new subject positions, the re-imagination and redress of the images of Britain including the transgression of national boundaries, the depiction of racism, and, most importantly, the representation, exertion and normalization of black British cultural power.[3] (*Connectedness* 101)

Stein considers the Bildungsroman "a dominant form in black British literature" (*Literature* xiii), which is an assessment Roy Sommer clearly shares. Sommer also discusses Black British Bildungsromane and asserts that many of them appear to be novels of adolescence, because they cover a relatively short time period and do not feature a quest in the sense Schöneich, for instance, has described it. He argues, however, that these novels should nevertheless be classified as Bildungsromane on account of the specific situation in which second generation protagonists find themselves, which involves growing up with parents whose cultural background is different from mainstream society and being subjected to social marginalization and even racism from an early age onwards. Thus, Sommer considers the problems discussed in Black British Bildungsromane to be significantly more complicated than those generally treated in novels of adolescence, because the "Auseinandersetzung mit der Gesellschaft muß nicht erst in einem Quest-Plot erfahren werden, sondern wird bereits im engeren sozialen Umfeld spürbar" (113).

All of these general approaches to the Black and the Black British Bildungsroman are concerned with novels featuring both male and female protagonists, with LeSeur clearly devoting most attention to aspects of gender.

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[3] As Stein recognizes, this is complicated by the "burden of representation", according to which the protagonists are conceived of as representatives of their respective ethnic groups (Stein, *Literature* 30; Sommer 110).

According to her, "Black girls find out very early that the culture's emphasis on physical beauty, color, class, and gender […] places them at a disadvantage" (14), and

> Black women writers […] collectively depict the Black woman's internal struggle to unravel the immense complexities of racial identity, gender definition, and the awakening of their sexual being. (101)

Thus, LeSeur clarifies that the subject formation of a female protagonist of color differs significantly from that of Black men and white women and it cannot be explained simply as an accumulation of racial and gender aspects. In her comparison of several novels by Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston, Pin-chia Feng similarly attempts to examine the typical characteristics of Bildungsromane by "ethnic women" (15). Feng claims, for instance, that as opposed to traditional Bildungshelden "women of color [...] can never easily leave their childhood and adolescence behind" (8), and that they frequently "write about their *Bildung* in a fragmentary way, with repetitive emergences of repressed memories of their racial, cultural, and personal past [...]" (18). While at times Feng appears to be overgeneralizing and not all of her assertions necessarily hold true for all postcolonial female Bildungsromane, some of her claims are highly relevant to the study of *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree*. For instance, she discusses the juxtaposition of two opposed characters (36) and emphasizes the focus on identity formation as a continuous process towards "[t]he 'triumph' of an ethnic woman [which consists in] honestly accepting the contradictory multiplicity within her identity" (24).

3.4. The Double Bildungsroman

Most definitions of the Bildungsroman describe it as focusing on a main character's subject formation. The fact that some novels within the genre, however, feature more than one protagonist has been given recognition in the concept of the *dual* or *double* Bildungsroman. Jerome Buckley was among the first to identify and comment on this structure with reference to *The Mill on the Floss*, which traces the development of a brother and sister (Feng 51). While the authors of *The Voyage In* claim that double Bildungsromane are a common variant in novels focusing on female characters because women are "more

psychologically embedded in relationships" and therefore "sometimes share the formative voyage with friends, sisters, or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists" (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 12), the juxtaposition of two characters can serve different purposes in the double Bildungsroman. Some critics have focused on the ways in which the "male-female double Bildungsroman", for instance, functions as "a critique of the gender dichotomy imposed by society" (Feng 51). In postcolonial Bildungsromane, a similar effect can be achieved by contrasting two characters whose difference from each other consists mainly in their perceived racial affiliation. Analyzing Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, Feng, for instance, claims that the author "weaves the contrasts and comparisons around a pair of black girls to highlight the compounding work of racism as well as sexism and classism on the *Bildung* of black girls" (52), and Stein, with reference to Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, describes a similar pattern:

> *Every Light* has to be considered a *dual Bildungsroman*, following the development of a foil to the protagonist. As in David Dabydeen's *The Intended*, it is the more light-skinned character who is more successful than the peer characters. By introducing the phenomenon of passing, Levy renders the protagonist's social mobility more complex than is at first apparent. (*Connectedness* 98)

Furthermore, Feng argues that the combination of Bildungsroman and anti-Bildungsroman is particularly characteristic of postcolonial female authors, who "cannot envision a successful narrative of *Bildung* without first accounting for the casualties who are 'failures' according to hegemonic standards" (40-41).

3.5. The Postcolonial Female Double Bildungsroman

In the light of the various approaches to the Bildungsroman and the genre's social, historical and cultural variants, providing a unitary definition of the concept appears almost impossible. Plot outlines such as Buckley's and the postulation of particular ideological conceptions remain too restrictive given the wide range of novels labeled as Bildungsromane both by scholars and according to a common-sense understanding of the term. Overly generalizing notions, however, are criticized for being too inclusive and lacking accuracy. An academic engagement with the genre, therefore, appears to demand a flexible

definition which follows some characteristic features without universalizing them and which directs particular attention to contextual variations.

Thus, it seems reasonable to define a Bildungsroman as a novel which focuses on the process of personal development or maturation of its protagonist or protagonists, which is characterized by struggles or clashes between the individual and society, and which includes some conscious self-reflection on the part of the protagonist(s). These themes are usually explored from a certain narrative distance, but not necessarily in chronological order, although this is often the case. The main character's formation frequently coincides with adolescence and requires several years, but the story time may cover a shorter time span and the protagonist may be older, particularly If social restrictions have previously inhibited his/her development.

Furthermore, generational conflict usually features prominently in Bildungsromane, but it may take various forms. For instance, in contexts which demand the interaction of generations from different cultural backgrounds, which is the case in many Black British Bildungsromane, generational conflict is likely to have a cultural component. Similarly, it has been described that in female Bildungsromane the protagonist sometimes emancipates herself from her husband rather than her parents.

Some other aspects which have frequently been suggested as generic features of the Bildungsroman, do not only allow for variation but appear entirely irrelevant. These include, for instance, the protagonist's move from the country to a city or any other kind of geographical mobility on his/her part, as well as the proximity to the author's life. Given the thematic concerns of the genre, it appears likely that the author should draw on his/her own experiences, but the incorporation of autobiographical material is certainly not a necessary prerequisite of a Bildungsroman. Likewise, it does no longer seem crucial for a Bildungsroman to have a 'conclusive' ending – at least not in the sense of a completion of the process of identity formation or achieved harmoniousness between individual and society. By the end of a Bildungsroman, the protagonist should have personally matured to some degree and should have gained some insights into his/her position in society. Contemporary novels in particular do not always end on a positive note, however, and the concepts of the negative

Bildungsroman and the anti-Bildungsroman appear useful in analyzing texts which feature the protagonist's final withdrawal from society.

In the analysis of a particular Bildungsroman, the protagonist's gender as well as the historical, cultural, and social context clearly deserve consideration, and additional aspects become relevant when dealing with female, postcolonial or female postcolonial novels. The protagonists of those texts, being members of socially marginalized groups, face particular challenges in the process of their identity formation, which may be related to their cultural difference from mainstream society – and sometimes even from their own parents – and particularly to their exposure to racism and sexism on various levels. The relationship between the individual and his/her social environment is thus rendered extremely complex and the feature of finding a voice becomes particularly significant. Reading *In Search of April Raintree* and *Never Far from Nowhere* as Bildungsromane reveals how the authors apply and adapt many of the genre's traditional features and add new dimensions to them. Before analyzing those aspects, however, the idea of postcolonialism, the concept of identity as well as the impact of race, gender, and class on an individual's subject formation shall be discussed.

4. Self and Society in Postcolonial Thought

It has been argued that *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree* can be classified as postcolonial Bildungsromane and that the main characteristic of the genre consists in the depiction of a characters' identity formation within a particular social context. But what is postcolonialism? As in the case of the Bildungsroman, the concept resists straightforward definitions. Similarly, identity is a term which can connote a variety of meanings and is increasingly contested as a sociological concept.

4.1. Postcolonialism

Literally, postcolonialism could clearly be understood as simply meaning 'after colonialism.' One of the problems that arise from such a conception is, however, that on the one hand colonialism can hardly be considered a thing of the past except in the very narrow sense that almost all of the countries that were formerly colonized by European powers have officially achieved political independence. Western influence on these territories persists on various levels, perhaps most obviously in cultural and economic relationships, and to such a degree that generally speaking the present condition is more adequately described as *neocolonial* rather than *postcolonial*. Thus, it can be argued that there is "a form of perverseness in taking the label 'post-' for a state which is not yet fully present, and linking it to something which has not fully disappeared" (Childs and Williams 8). On the other hand, the prefix *post-* need not be interpreted as *after* in a chronological sense but can be understood quite differently in some contexts, for instance in compounds like postmodernism or poststructuralism, where it serves the function of "conceptually transcending or superseding the parameters of the other term" (Childs and Williams 4). In cultural and literature studies, therefore, *postcolonial* generally implies "anti-imperialist" rather than "post-independence" (Kreutzer 200).

Postcolonial studies, then, may focus on a huge variety of topics, but according to Abrams, three "central and recurrent issues" can be considered as particularly significant:

> The rejection of the master-narrative of Western imperialism [...] and its replacement by a counter-narrative in which the colonial cultures fight

their way back into a world history written by Europeans. [...] An abiding
concern with the formation, within Western discursive practices, of the
colonial and postcolonial 'subject', as well as of the categories by means
of which this subject conceives itself and perceives the world within
which it lives and acts. [...] [T]o disestablish Eurocentric norms of literary
and artistic values, and to expand the literary *canon* to include colonial
and postcolonial writers. (236-237)

Within Anglophone literature studies, postcolonial approaches can be
subdivided into those which analyze English texts' direct or indirect treatment of
colonialism from a critical, anti-imperialist perspective, and those which are
concerned with the literatures of the former colonies, i.e. texts written by
postcolonial writers (Kreutzer 201). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffins, the authors of
the very influential *The Empire Writes Back,* stress that the most important
features of postcolonial writing in English include "place, displacement, and a
pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity" (9), as well as the

silencing and marginalizing of the post-colonial voice by the imperial
centre; the abrogation of this imperial centre within the text; and the
active appropriation of the language and culture of that centre.
(*Empire* 82)

The question as to which territories or individuals can be considered
postcolonial, however, is not easily resolved. While the authors of *The Empire
Writes Back*, for instance, argue that the literatures of settler colonies such as
the United States or Australia need to be subsumed under the label postcolonial
(2), others have objected to this inclusion, claiming that the literatures of
indigenous peoples within these territories have more in common with "Third
World Literatures" (Kreutzer 211) and that "the condition of internal colonization
[...] is one of the factors which unsettles the claims of white settler colonies to
post-colonial status" (Childs and Williams 12). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have
reacted to such criticism in the second edition of their work by asserting that

the term post-colonial might provide a different way of understanding
colonial relations: no longer a simple binary opposition, black colonized
vs. white colonizers, Third World vs. the West, but an engagement with
all the varied manifestations of colonial power, including those in settler
colonies. The attempt to define the post-colonial by putting barriers
between those who may be called 'post-colonial' and the rest, contradicts
the capacity of post-colonial theories to demonstrate the complexity of
the operation of imperial discourse.
(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Empire* 200)

Similarly, linking postcolonialism to particular geographical regions is
increasingly complicated by the fact that

> the arrival of sizeable populations from former colonies in the imperial
> heartlands creates conditions under which the latter may in some senses
> claim to be post-colonial. (Childs and Williams 13)

Thus, it appears reasonable to refer to *Never Far from Nowhere* as a
postcolonial novel despite the fact that it is not set in a former colony.
Within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, an approach based on
Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity might at first appear to suggest itself for an
analysis of both this novel and *In Search of April Raintree*. Hybridity "commonly
refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone
produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 118-119)
and is in this sense arguably "the primary characteristic of all post-colonial texts"
(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Empire* 182). Bhabha, probably one of the most
widely known postcolonial theorists along with Edward Said and Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak, considers cultural hybridity a crucial element in overcoming
binary oppositions such as "self/other, colonizer/colonized, East/West" by
directing the focus of attention to the "in-between space" and the "double vision"
of, for instance, migrants (Kreutzer 206). He "sees the notion of the border area,
the liminal space, as crucial to post-colonial identity, representing a passage
that sits between fixed identifications" (Childs and Williams 140-141).
Criticism has been directed towards this concept of hybridity for various
reasons. Robert Young is particularly critical of the usage of the term itself,
which in the nineteenth century and beyond constituted a main element in the
discourse on racial miscenegation, which constructed individuals of mixed racial
descent as degenerate and threatening (5). Thus, Young strongly objects to the
contemporary application of 'hybridity:'

> 'Hybrid' is the nineteenth century's word. But it has become our own
> again. In the nineteenth century it was used to refer to a physiological
> phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe
> a cultural one. While cultural factors determined its physiological status,
> the use of hybridity today prompts questions about the ways in which
> contemporary thinking has broken absolutely with the racialized
> formulations of the past. (6)

Floya Anthias, as opposed to that, considers the idea of cultural hybridity as
problematic for two different reasons. According to her, the concept "privileges

the domain of the cultural as opposed to the material or the political [and thereby] loses sight of cultural domination" (*Hybridities* 630). In addition, "it focuses too much on transgressive elements and underplays alienation, exclusion, violence and fundamentalism as part of cultural encounters" (*Hybridities* 630-631). While both Young's and Anthias' points of criticism are certainly justified, the main reason why the concept of hybridity does not appear particularly suitable for an analysis of *In Search of April Raintree* and *Never Far from Nowhere* is that the characters cannot adequately be described in terms of cultural in-betweenness. They have very little knowledge of their parents' or ancestors' cultures and Cheryl's and Olive's assertions that they are Métis and Black British, respectively, have to be considered as political rather than cultural identifications. Therefore, their identity formation can be more fruitfully discussed within the theoretical framework of intersectionality.

4.2. Identity – An Outdated Concept?

Conceptions of identity from a sociological perspective have undergone considerable changes in recent decades. Most significantly, the idea that an individual's identity is a fixed or stable attribute of that person has been replaced by the notion that "what we call 'identities' are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations" (Brah and Phoenix 77), and "they are continually being shaped in their everyday interaction with the social world and thus they are flexible and engaged in a constant, reflexive, process of 'becoming'" (Rassool 189). While this conception has become well-established in academic discourses, it diverges from an 'everyday' understanding of the term and does not resolve the issue of the "exceptional plurality of meanings the term can harness" (Gilroy 98), which includes its usage

> to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the processual, interactive development of solidarity and collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of 'self', a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently 'activated' in differing contexts. (Brubaker & Cooper 8)

Thus, Brubaker and Cooper argue that 'identity' is a term with too large a variety of connotations to apply it as a meaningful tool in social studies, and propose a number of more specific terms to address the issues usually subsumed under the label 'identity' (5). They suggest, for instance, that in many contexts 'identification' is a preferable substitute, because as "a processual, active term, derived from a verb, 'identification' lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'" (14) and draws attention to the agents who identify, although these need not be identifiable since identification can also be accomplished "anonymously by discourses or public narratives" (16). It can refer to "self-identification" and the "external identification" of an individual by others or by institutions (15), which clearly influence each other. Another term proposed by Brubaker and Cooper is 'self-understanding,' which of course constitutes "a subjective, auto-referential term" (18) and thus encompasses only a particular aspect of the meanings of identity, but

> [s]elf-understandings may be variable across time and across persons, but they may be stable. Semantically, 'identity' implies sameness across time or persons; hence the awkwardness of continuing to speak of 'identity' while repudiating the implication of sameness. (18)

Brubaker and Cooper propose several other terms which in particular contexts may serve as replacements for 'identity' as an analytical device. However, it appears reasonable to retain the term 'identity' within the context of 'identity formation,' which refers to the development of an understanding of selfhood and clearly emphasizes the process rather than a projected outcome. It is nevertheless important to note that this development has to be considered as proceeding towards a particular self-understanding which is not necessarily stable, rather than as the acquisition of a fixed identity.

Clearly, the influence of different race and gender identifications from a psychological perspective are also relevant to this process. Frantz Fanon was among the first to provide a detailed discussion of the impact of racial oppression on the self-esteem of Blacks in his influential work *Black Skin, White Masks*, first published in 1952. More recently, psychologists have begun to focus on the effects of both gender and race, as well as the specific situation of people of 'mixed' heritage, within the context of identity formation. Helena Jia

Hershel, for instance, emphasizes the significance of the 'gaze' in the development of children and adolescents:

> The 'gaze' refers to how the child is seen in the eyes of others. The gaze encompasses the respect and consideration, or lack of such respect and consideration, shown the child by people the child considers significant. [...] The parental gaze in childhood focuses on gender socialization and plays a significant role as part of early identity formation. The 'societal gaze' plays a more significant role in adolescent identity formation and is focused to a greater extent on race. (109)

Hershel also identifies exceptions to this pattern, stating, for instance, that "if the determination of how light- or dark-skinned the child is a factor" (113) within the family, racial identification may become relevant at a very early age.

Maria Root, who focuses on the experiences of "Mixed-Race Women," claims that the need for social integration is crucial to identity formation and particularly difficult for individuals whose physical appearance distinguishes them from others in their environment:

> This connection or grounding in one's social environment provides a foundation for positive self-esteem and identity. Many mixed-race people grow up with countless experiences that illogically and unnecessarily set them apart from others. For example, most multiracials have experienced being stared at and asked insensitive questions about their physical appearance (e.g., 'What are you?') [...] Connection is difficult when one is the object of curiosity, pity, or fear. (160)

Thus, race, gender, as well as other social categories of identification critically affect a person's identity formation, or development of a coherent self-understanding, in various ways. The complex connections between such categories and their implications to the social positioning of individuals have been theorized within the concept of intersectionality.

4.3. The Complex Interplay of Race, Gender and Class

In the second half of the twentieth century, with the feminist and civil rights movements as well as the political independence of numerous former colonies and increased migration to Europe, academic concern with categories of social inequality intensified. Initially, both the political movements and scholars focused on categories such as race and gender as though they co-existed fairly independently of each other. While feminists were concerned with combating

the oppression of (white) women and anti-racists with the empowerment of

Blacks, the particular experiences of Black women remained 'invisible:'

> The invisibility of black women speaks of the separate narrative
> constructions of race, gender and class: in a racial discourse, where the
> subject is male; in a gendered discourse, where the subject is white; and
> a class discourse, where race has no place. It is because of these
> ideological blind spots that black women occupy a most critical place – a
> location whose very nature resists telling. (Mirza 4)

It was in the 1980s that women of color began to draw attention to the fact that

the problems they faced differed significantly from those addressed by white

feminists, and postulated adequate representation of their situations as well as

political action that would be responsive to their needs. Along with their claims

came the recognition in academic discourses that race and gender needed to

be studied in relation.

4.3.1. Categories of Difference

An apparent difficulty in studying race is that it constitutes "an elastic category

that can be easily defined and manipulated because of its lack of specificity or

biological evidence" (Childs and Williams 189). While it has long been

recognized that race is a social construct rather than a biological fact, the

concept is of abiding relevance to post-colonial theory because of its

significance in the justification of imperial control particularly in the nineteenth

century as well as the fact that it is still "used as the dominant category of daily

discrimination and prejudice" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Empire* 207).

Thus, the reality of racism, which may be defined as "a set of postulates,

images (and [...] practices) which serve to differentiate and dominate […] by the

essence that they posit" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 15), accounts for the fact that

race is still considered an important social category. Similarly, gender "relates to

the way in which sexual difference is represented and organized" (Anthias &

Yuval-Davis 101), and it has been noted that both racist and sexist discourses

propose differences between certain groups which come to be perceived as

'natural' and function to subordinate and marginalize the 'Other' (cf. Anthias &

Yuval-Davis 109). These processes are closely linked to class membership, as

the

supposedly natural differences in capacities and needs on the basis of
gender or of ethnicity or race then come to enter into economic relations
as legitimizers of inequalities in class position.
(Anthias & Yuval-Davis 113)

Class discourse is constructed differently from race and gender discourses
because it operates based on a notion of "individualized" capacities: "There is
no given population that these capacities are seen to have their origin in, rather
it is the capacities that are seen to construct the category" (Anthias & Yuval-
Davis 17). Social mobility based on individual competencies is therefore
possible, although commonly "[p]eople are born into an economic class or have
it thrust upon them through operations of market mechanisms which are largely
indifferent to their moral qualities or identity" (Sayer 2.4). Thus, there are
differences in the social construction of race, gender, and class, but these
categories influence each other in complex ways and frequently "so much so
that the subjective experiences of these tend to be inseparable" (Sayer 2.1).

4.3.2. Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is primarily concerned with "the way in which
different social divisions inter-relate in terms of the production of social relations
and in terms of people's lives" (Anthias, *Translocational* 10). It was developed in
1989 by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who in her article "Mapping the
Margins" focuses on the multiple oppression of Black women, particularly in
relation to political and legal discourses on violence against women of color.
Crenshaw's main argument is that the experiences of women of color are
excluded from but affected by both anti-racist strategies, which strive to
downplay the patriarchy within Black communities, and "feminist concerns
[which] often suppress minority experiences" (1258). She thus argues that the
identities of Black women need to be understood as constituted by the
intersection of various forms of oppression, which are conceived of as
multiplying rather than additive:

> [I]ntersectionality emphasizes the ways in which, like a chemical
> reaction, differentiated dimensions of identity are altered by their co-
> interaction with one another, such that any one identified element (say,
> racial ascription) influences and conditions the operation of any other
> (say, gender status). (Ross 38)

Thus, while social categorizations such as race and gender previously tended to be treated as separate, even though they were seen to be experienced simultaneously, intersectional approaches established "the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality," and have "emerged as the primary theoretical tool designed to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity" (Nash 2).

A major advantage of intersectionality as opposed to additive models therefore consists in its focus on the differences between members of social groups and the rejection of homogenizing and essentialist views of subjectivity (Ludvig 246). Furthermore, the concept encourages analysts to "ask the other question," as Mari Matsuda explains:

> When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?' Working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and non-obvious relationships of domination, helping us to realize that no form of subordination ever stands alone. (1189)

Several difficulties arise, however, in the empirical application of the concept, because if everything intersects, "the axes of differences cannot be isolated and desegregated" (Ludvig 246). Leslie McCall has investigated intersectional methodology and distinguishes between three approaches to studying intersectionality, which she refers to as anticategorical, intracategorical and intercategorical complexity (1773-1774). While anticategorical studies generally reject the categories themselves, and emphasize their social construction as well as the mechanisms by which boundaries between groups and individuals are established (1773), intercategorical approaches are primarily concerned with explaining the relationships of inequality among groups, which necessitates their retaining of categories (1785). Intracategorical complexity conceptually combines those two, and studies conducted in this tradition "tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection [...] in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups" (1774). They take individuals as their starting point, who represent the specific dimensions of categories, for instance, "an Arab American, middle-class, heterosexual woman is placed at the intersection of multiple categories (race-ethnicity, class, gender,

and sexuality) but only reflects a single dimension of each" (1781). Thus, intracategorical approaches are capable of dealing with the complexity of intersecting categories by focusing on individuals:

> Personal narratives and single-group studies derive their strength from the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups. Whether the narrative is literary, historical, discursive, ideological, or autobiographical, it begins somewhere, and that beginning represents only one of many sides of a set of intersecting social relations, not social relations in their entirety, so to speak.
> (McCall 1781-1782)

It should nevertheless be noted, that even in the case studies of such single groups at particular intersections, a considerable "range of diversity and difference *within* the group" (1782) is usually revealed.

In addition to the methodological challenges of studying intersectionality empirically, Jennifer Nash identifies and attempts to resolve three further difficulties with the theoretical concept. These consist in

> the use of black women as prototypical intersectional subjects, the ambiguity inherent to the definition of intersectionality, and the coherence between intersectionality and lived experiences of multiple identities. (4)

First of all, Nash criticizes Crenshaw's and other scholars' preoccupation with Black women for failing to acknowledge differences within this group relating to other categories such as sexuality or class (7-9), and for having "obscured the question of whether *all* identities are intersectional or whether only multiply marginalized subjects have an intersectional identity" (9). Whereas intersectionality is clearly devoted to highlighting various forms of oppression, the fact that some individuals and groups are privileged "along particular axes" (10) and subordinated along others should not exclude them as subjects of intersectional analyses. Therefore, Nash postulates that "intersectionality scholarship must begin to broaden its reach to theorize an array of subject experience(s)" (10) and to "analyz[e] race and gender *both* as co-constitutive processes and as distinctive and historically specific technologies of categorization" (13).

While Nash's points of criticism clearly deserve consideration in intersectional studies, Floya Anthias claims that intersectionality should not even be considered a theory but merely a "heuristic device" (*Translocational* 11).

Whether it is regarded as a theory or a device, however, intersectionality has been crucial to Anthias' development of the concept of "translocational positionality."

4.3.3. Translocational Positionality

Floya Anthias is a sociologist who has conducted empirical studies focusing on the experiences of young Greek Cypriots living in Britain, which have revealed that

> [w]hilst it is commonly thought that young people from minority groups are 'between two cultures' or alternatively, able to produce hybridities, what most of the Cypriot youngsters experienced was an 'in-between' location vis-à-vis being White and being Black, rather than a cultural in-betweenness. (*Translocational* 13)

This appears particularly relevant as it clearly holds true for the protagonists of *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree* as well, but also because such findings have led Anthias to challenge the dominant conceptions of hybridity and identity more broadly. For instance, Anthias criticizes the fact that the second generation has frequently been "analyzed in terms of a so-called identity crisis, sometimes referred to as the 'between two cultures' approach" (*Translocational* 9), and the strong emphasis on cultural conflict implicit in such theories "because there are as many commonalities between cultures as there are differences" and because "culture is not 'fixed': culture adapts and changes in different contexts" (*Translocational* 9).

She raises similar concerns with regard to the way the concepts of "group" and "identity" are generally understood in academic discourses:

> The problem of groupism [...] in discussions of identity refers to the assumption that identity derives from being a member of a group. A group is conceived of as a thing rather than as something hailed or being 'made'. [...] Groups are seen as homogeneous: gender, class and other categories are also seen as groups instead of processes or social relations. (*Translocational* 9-10)

In coherence with the concept of intersectionality, Anthias also stresses that "[d]ifferent identities co-exist within a person" and demands recognition of the "performative aspect" of identities (*Translocational* 10). To direct the focus of attention away from groups and towards social spaces or locations, she has

"introduced the terms 'translocation' and 'translocational positionality' to aid in specifying a form of intersectional analysis" (*Translocational* 11):

> [P]ositionality is the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice). The notion of 'location' recognizes the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. [...] The term 'translocational' references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization. (*Translocational* 12)

Thus, Anthias' concept emphasizes the contextual and performative aspects of social positioning and also recognizes that intersectional subject positions may be contradictory in the sense that a person may be marginalized on some levels and privileged on others (*Translocational* 13). The idea of translocational positionalities therefore appears to be a valuable conceptual tool contributing to the study of intersectionality.

With regard to *Never Far from Nowhere* and *In Search of April Raintree*, the concepts of intersectionality and translocational positionality clearly facilitate an understanding of the influence of race, gender, and class on the characters' identity formation. Since they are all women of color, they would appear as the "prototypical" subjects (Nash 4) of an intracategorical approach to intersectionality. The differences between the respective pairs of sisters, however, contradict homogenizing assumptions on 'Black women' and reveal the complex interconnections between the various forms of subordination and privilege as well as the significance of the external identification within their environments to the locating and relocating of their social positioning.

5. Self-Reflection and Identity Construction

The most significant aspect of *in Search of April Raintree* and *Never Far from Nowhere* clearly consists in their juxtaposition of radically different forms of identity construction. While Vivien and April strive for assimilation into white mainstream society, which is facilitated by their physical appearances, their respective sisters develop politicized notions of ethnic pride. The characters' dissimilar self-understandings develop in dialectic interplay with their social environment and are therefore almost inseparable from the subsequently discussed interpersonal relationships in which they position themselves and are positioned by others. The present chapter, however, aims at highlighting the self-reflexive aspects of identity formation and the transformation of the characters' self-understandings in the course of the narratives.

5.1. Racial and Social 'Passing'

The fact that individuals living within racist societies may attempt to conceal non-European parts of their heritage that mark them as racially 'Other' appears understandable. An obvious reason for stressing the aspects of one's physical appearance that are associated with whiteness, particularly in the case of females, rests in the general conception of beauty. As Debbie Weekes argues, "[t]he historical association of Whiteness as a yardstick of beauty has become internalized not just by Black women but by Black men also," and therefore "has strong implications for Black women in terms of appearing attractive to males" (115). Focusing on the context of Black Britons, Weekes further explains how women's attempts at altering their physical appearance to conform to the dominant ideal of beauty have been subject to severe criticism:

> [W]ith the redefinition of Blackness in the 1960/70s, Afro hairstyles became associated with political change and Black self-knowledge. Artificial straightening of hair, bleaching of skin with creams, processors, hot combs, etc., which were equated with White definitions of womanhood were rejected. It then follows that women who continued to ascribe to these processes were perceived as victims of self-hatred [...]. (116)

While society's strong emphasis on beauty and its association with 'white' features clearly exert a significant amount of pressure particularly on adolescent

girls and young women, the motivations for concealing 'racial' markers may be far more wide-ranging.

When people whose physical appearance allows them to do so, hide their non-white ancestry entirely, i.e. 'pass' for white, this act is usually closely linked to a desired social mobility:

> [W]hile the act of passing involves a primarily 'racial' action – namely, the vacating of one racial subject position for another – this very act contains an inseparable economic component. (Belluscio 16)

According to the dominant understanding of identity as a fixed attribute, "passing means to conceal a unitary, essential, and ineffaceable identity and substitute it with a purportedly artificial one" (Belluscio 9). As Anthony Appiah rightly notes, such a perception of racial identities differs significantly from that of 'ethnic' identities:

> Someone who refuses to do anything with the fact of their Irish-American descent – who fails to acknowledge it in any of their projects – is not generally held to be inauthentic, is not held to be being unfaithful to something about him or herself to which they ought to respond. So far as I can see, by contrast, African Americans who respond in this way [...], [i]f they can pass [...] will be thought of by many as being not merely inauthentic but dishonest. (79)

This difference in perception is clearly related to the issue of social mobility, since "from the perspective of a dominant race, passing is deception, an attempt to claim status and privilege falsely" (Ginsberg 9). The fact that racial passing is even possible, however, unsettles the construction of race as a category, for "when 'race' is no longer visible, it is no longer intelligible: if 'white' can be 'black', what is white? Race passing thus not only creates [...] a *category crisis* but also destabilizes the grounds of privilege founded on racial identity" (Ginsberg 8).

Literary accounts of "a character['s] attempts (successfully or not) to shed all overt evidence of racial difference and imperceptibly enter mainstream society" (Belluscio 13) have been analyzed under the label 'racial passing narratives,' particularly in African American contexts. While neither *Never Far from Nowhere* nor *In Search of April Raintree* can actually be classified as passing narratives, both contain elements likening them to such texts.

5.1.1. 'Like a real white person'

The significance of racial passing to a character's identity construction is probably most obvious in the case of April Raintree, who consciously resolves to conceal her Métis background at an early age:

> [...] I could pass for a pure white person. I could say that I was part French and part Irish. [...] And when I grew up, I wouldn't be poor; I'd be rich. Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. It meant having to take all the crap white people gave. Well, I wasn't going to live like a half-breed. When I got free of this place, when I got free from being a foster child, then I would live just like a real white person. (Culleton Mosionier 46-47)

Thus, April concludes that passing for white constitutes her only option of evading her subjection to racism and escaping poverty (cf. Bar-Shalom 119). She desires an upward social mobility which she is convinced can only be achieved by denying the Native parts of her ancestry and assimilating into white mainstream society.

Significantly, April develops this plan while staying at the extremely abusive foster home of the DeRosier's and immediately after she has learned that her parents are alcoholics. Notwithstanding those circumstances, however, the passage also reveals how the child has internalized the various racist stereotypes to which she has constantly been exposed and the racial shame she has developed as a result. It is not surprising that she has unquestioningly accepted these 'facts' given the lack of any positive role models that might enhance her perspective on being Métis and prove the stereotypes wrong. April's assimilationist stance is severely criticized by her sister Cheryl, who has developed a radically different self-understanding and considers April as being dishonest. Furthermore, Cheryl is clearly aware of the fact that the conscious decision to pass for white

> however understandable on the individual level, has far more momentous implications than the decision of a white wannabe to 'go Native': every member of a minority group who abandons that group makes it more likely that cultural traditions will vanish. Identity for Native people is not just a personal decision [...].
> (Fee, *Identity* 215-216)

Regardless of these implications, April begins – and throughout most of the ensuing narrative continues – to follow, as Wolfgang Klooss puts it, a "formula of destruction," which consists in "social prejudices -> adoption of alienated value structures -> racial shame -> ethnic selfdenial" (218). In her negative evaluation of Métis and Native people in general, April also continuously fails to "recognize the role of power in constructing her belief in the superiority of white culture or in the creation of the demoralization that is all she can see of Métis culture" (Fee, *Upsetting* 171), and stubbornly holds on to her conviction that "[t]he Indian people did allow themselves to be treated like children" (155). Statements such as this also reflect her refusal to believe anything but that she is the 'master' of her own fate, for clearly "April's insistence on determining her own identity is deeply liberal in political orientation" (Zwicker, *Limits* 326). There are brief moments in the novel, however, when she begins to question this rationale, for instance when her despair in the face of the abuse she is exposed to in her foster home overwhelms her and she resolves to run away:

> I bet all those girls who ended up on skid row just wanted freedom and peace in the first place. Just like me. I'd had good intentions about my life. But here I was, forced to go out into that world, unprepared and alone. With only a Grade Ten and no money. (Culleton Mosionier 79)

Immediately after she has begun to empathize with those who have not been given many chances in life, April is 'rescued' from her foster home by a new social worker and resumes her plans of passing for white. It is only after she has been brutally raped that April begins to reconceptualize her self-understanding as a Métis: "When the shameful identity as 'squaw,' as the racist's Other, [is] forced on her by rape, her sister's support help[s] her to begin to come to terms with a positive self-identity as Métis" (Fee, *Identity* 225). This is a difficult process for her, as the following passage indicates:

> It would be better to be a full-blooded Indian or full-blooded Caucasian. But being a half-breed, there's just nothing there. You can admire Indian people for what they once were. They had a distinct heritage, or is it culture? [...] And the white people, well, they've convinced each other they are the superior race, and you can see they are responsible for the progress we have today. [...] But what have the Métis people got? Nothing. Being a half-breed, you feel only the shortcomings of both sides. You feel you're a part of the drunken Indians you see on Main Street. (Culleton Mosionier 142-143)

Despite her attempts to overcome the racial shame she has been feeling all her life, April is still unable to see "anything positive" (143) about the Métis and "the ideology of 'full-bloodedness' makes April think that the identity she has best claim to is 'nothing,' although, in fact, it puts her in a position to make choices" (Fee, *Identity* 212). For some time April ponders on her attitudes towards being Métis: "Still, I continued to weaver back and forth as to just how I felt about being a Métis. It was part of me. I was part Indian. But so what?" (160). When it is revealed during the trial that Cheryl was the intended victim of the rapists, however, April once again seizes the opportunity to conceptually distance herself from Nativeness:

> From April's perspective, 'she' was not raped – Cheryl was, and implicitly, deserved it – so April no longer has to accept the imposition of Nativeness on her and can overcome her sense that she somehow deserved this degradation. When she thought that she had been raped because her attackers saw her as Native, she had begun to think of herself differently [...]. Now there is somewhere else to place the blame: on Cheryl and Nativeness. (Fee, *Identity* 221)

Thus, April, "too tempted by the chance to escape what she still sees as a negative identification" (Fee, *Identity* 225), blames her sister for the rape and only identifies herself as Métis as a result of Cheryl's suicide.

5.1.2. A Mauritian from Islington

In *Never Far from Nowhere*, Vivien as opposed to April does not consciously attempt to pass for white and generally avoids reflecting on her racial identification altogether. The fact that she alters her physical appearance by artificially straightening her hair, while primarily a result of her mother's adherence to the concept of pigmentocracy, may be considered an attempt at concealing her 'ethnic' heritage:

> My hair was a lie. It wasn't really straight. It shouldn't have hung down my face like it did. It should have been frizzing up around my chin. Olive and me straightened our hair. My mum said people would think it was naturally like that. When me and Olive were young it was a big secret, going to the hairdresser's. (Levy 43)

While this "lie" is initiated by her mother, Vivien refuses to tell even her closest friends that her hair is not naturally straight. When asked directly, however, Vivien usually admits that she has Jamaican origins. It is only when she first

meets Eddie, who later becomes her boyfriend, that she actively engages in a kind of 'ethnic' passing, telling him that she is from Mauritius: "I wanted to be from somewhere he would be interested in, not just prejudiced against" (Levy 136). Thus, Vivien attempts to avoid a possible exposure to racism by denying her ethnic background, which might have been more credible if she had chosen a country of origin about which she had at least some knowledge. Nonetheless, Eddie believes her until Olive enlightens him:

> '[Our mum]'s not from Mauritius, she's from Jamaica, and so's our dad for that matter.' Olive laughed. 'She's ashamed – she's ashamed we're from Jamaica.'
> 'I am not.'
> 'You are. Why did you say they were from Mauritius then, wherever that is?' Olive poked me in the back with her finger. 'She don't want anyone to know we're black.'
> 'Shut up, Olive,' I snapped. I'd never heard her use that word before. I mean I knew we weren't wogs or coons but I never thought we were black. (Levy 171-172)

Clearly, Olive is right in asserting that Vivien is ashamed of her Jamaican heritage. What is particularly interesting regarding this passage, however, is Vivien's reaction to the label 'black,' which she immediately associates with pejorative terms and thereby reveals the negative connotations she ascribes to the word. The fact that she has never considered herself as Black is certainly also linked to her mother's refusal to think of herself and her family as Black and Vivien's pronounced desire to 'fit in.' While she is definitely aware of the fact that her family is of partly African descent, Vivien probably associates the term 'Black' with people whose physical appearance more unambiguously reveals this aspect of their heritage. Furthermore, her statement indicates the lack of consideration Vivien generally devotes to her racial identification, despite the fact that she is frequently asked about her origins as a result of her physical appearance.

While Vivien's lie concerning her ethnic heritage is motivated by her awareness of the prejudices against Jamaican immigrants and her internalization of racism, class affiliation is of little relevance in this particular context. The desire for social mobility, however, strongly influences Vivien's thinking, and is apparent, for instance, in her repeated claim to be "getting on with [her] life" (Levy 268, 276) once she has begun to attend art college, where she is surrounded by

peers from an upper middle-class background. It is significant that within this environment Vivien attempts what might be considered as 'social passing,' when telling her roommate that she is from a more 'posh' area in London:

> I was about to say Finsbury Park, but I looked at Victoria's immaculate red-painted fingernails, her tight, well-fitting jeans with a gold belt running through the loops, her soft pink shirt opening low down her breasts, the delicate gold chain round her neck and gold and pearl stud earrings and said 'Islington.' (Levy 246)

Intimidated by Victoria's clothes and jewelry, which serve as markers of class affiliation, Vivien opts for concealing her working-class background to establish a commonality between the two of them and to avoid being subjected to prejudices. While her motivation clearly resembles that for telling Eddie that her family is Mauritian, it is class rather than ethnicity which appears relevant in terms of Vivien's positioning within the given context.

While April throughout large sections of her narrative consciously attempts to pass for white to avoid negative stereotypes and, even more importantly, to achieve upward social mobility, Vivien's primary concern is to 'belong,' which prompts her to conceal aspects of her ethnic and social background that she expects to be evaluated negatively by her respective vis-à-vis.

5.2. Political and Historical Identifications

April's and Vivien's assimilationist attitudes differ radically from their respective sisters' approaches to constructing their identities. Clearly, racial passing does not constitute an option for either of them as a result of their physical appearances, which mark them as racially 'Other' from the perspective of the white mainstream societies. Developing a positive self-understanding that affirms their ethnic heritage proves difficult, however, since they are not only confronted with hostile social environments but also with a lack of contact to communities with whom they might identify.

5.2.1. 'Like olden-day Indians'

Cheryl from an early age onwards identifies herself as Métis, but is faced with numerous challenges. The fact that her first foster mother is Métis herself and

provides her with books on Native history initiates this identification, which is closely linked to the racism Cheryl encounters from her classmates: "Mrs. MacAdams gave them to me to read because no one at school would talk to me or play with me. They call me names and things, or else they make like I'm not there at all" (Culleton Mosionier 43). Thus, the "books help Cheryl to develop the self-esteem necessary to sustain her against the racism inherent in Canadian society" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 85), and this identification with the historical Métis and Natives in general continues to shape her self-understanding as well as her fantasies about her parents:

> Well, I used to think that when Mom and Dad got better and took us back, we could move to the B.C. Rockies and live like olden-day Indians. We'd live near a lake, and we'd build our own log cabin with a big fireplace. [...] And we wouldn't meet people who were always trying to put us down. We'd be so happy. [...] I always think of Dad as a strong man. He would have been a chief or a warrior in the olden days, if he had been pure Indian. I'd sure like to know what kind of Indians we are. And Mom was so beautiful to me, she was like an Indian princess.
> (Culleton Mosionier 83)

The fact that Cheryl does not even know from "what kind of Indians" she is descended as well as her romanticized construction of her parents, which at the same time is deeply gendered in its ascription of beauty to her mother and strength to her father, testifies to her complete isolation from her cultural origins. Cheryl's reliance on books in constructing her identity is thus comprehensible, given her estrangement from her parents and other Métis during her childhood and adolescence, but it is problematic as it lacks any connection to her actual experiences, and she later even comes to "acknowledge[...] herself as unnatural" (Hoy 280) in a conversation with April:

> 'White Thunderbird Woman is an elder. I told her that you were my sister, but in blood only. I told her your vision was clouded, but that when your vision cleared, you would be a good person for the Métis people.'
> 'You do have a unique way of putting things.'
> 'Comes from reading so many Indian books. Actually, most Indians today don't talk like that at all.' (Culleton Mosionier 159)

While she recognizes herself as anachronistic, Cheryl is unable to abandon her idealization of the past, which is an essential element of her personality and influences all aspects of her life. Her

idealistic vision of Indian life fuels both her work at the Native Friendship Centre and her search for her own parents, equally. The personal is deeply political in Cheryl's formulation of identity politics. [...] Cheryl cannot connect the past she dreams about to the present she inhabits. (Zwicker, *Limits* 327)

In addition, this dilemma is not exclusively Cheryl's, but may be read as reflecting a problem shared by many individuals in postcolonial societies, who, as Childs and Williams suggest, face the challenge of dealing "with the painful experience of confronting the desire to discover 'lost' pre-colonial identities, the impossibility of actually doing so, and the task of constructing some new identity on the basis of that impossibility" (14).

5.2.2. 'In the wrong country'

While Olive spends her childhood and adolescence with her biological family in a city which is inhabited by a sizeable number of Caribbean immigrants and their descendants, she is almost exclusively surrounded by whites, or, in the case of her mother and sister, self-identified non-Blacks. Nevertheless, Olive is determined to construct her identity around a politicized notion of Blackness:

I wanted to be black. Being black was not a bad thing, being black was something to be proud of. That I am black, and so is my daughter. [...] But she has a very pale skin. Her dad was a white man. [...] But I tell her she's black. It's a political statement, not just a fact. [...]
I'm sure Mum and Vivien think I go on about colour too much. [...] But they don't know – they haven't lived my life, they haven't gone through what I've gone through. (Levy 8)

Given the lack of contact with others who identify themselves as Black and might share some of her experiences, however, Olive is constantly reminded of being 'different' and this missing sense of community severely complicates her identity formation.

Her general discontent with her life is apparent from the beginning of Olive's narrative when she describes her nightmares: "I'd been having a lot of bad dreams. Frustrating dreams. Like trying to get somewhere but I can't get my clothes on – everything's too tight or falling to bits. Or the bus breaks down. Or I end up in the wrong country" (Levy 6). Clearly, "Olive's dreams symbolize her unhappiness; they convey how unable she is to control the things that make her

unhappy" (Lima, *Pivoting* 64). This frustration at her feeling of powerlessness emerges as a recurrent pattern in Olive's narrative and climaxes in her conclusion that she really is 'in the wrong country.'

5.3. Self-Understandings at the End of the Novels

Neither *In Search of April Raintree* nor *Never Far from Nowhere* provide a conclusive ending in the sense that the protagonists' respective processes of identity formation can be considered as completed. The characters' self-understandings, however, have undergone significant changes in the course of the narratives and the claim that the two novels constitute double Bildungsromane, which juxtapose a positive and a negative Bildungsprozess, is justified by the fact that while April's and Vivien's narratives end on an optimistic note, their sisters ultimately withdraw from the hostile societies in which they have come of age.

This withdrawal from society is clearly more radical in the case of Cheryl, who commits suicide, claiming to have lost her "instinct to survive" (Culleton Mosionier 207). It is of course hardly possible to explain a person's decision to take their own life and even Culleton Mosionier has admitted to having written the novel from April's perspective because she found it difficult to understand Cheryl's actions.[4] As her journal entries indicate, Cheryl's downfall begins with her discovery of "the completely demoralized reality of her alcoholic father" (Fee, *Upsetting* 171): "*All my dreams to rebuild the spirit of a once proud nation are destroyed in this instant. I study the pitiful creature in front of me. My father! A gutter-creature!*" (Culleton Mosionier 198). Clearly, this "encounter robs Cheryl of the pride that her historical research had nurtured" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 94), and is promoted by her feeling of having been deceived and abandoned by her sister. Thus, Cheryl's suicide "can be read as deriving alternatively from a risky reliance on undependable narratives, like the edited story of her parents' merit, or from the exclusion from public discourse of

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[4] As Culleton Mosionier told Andrew Garrod in an interview: "A lot of things were going on with Cheryl that I didn't know – why was she becoming an alcoholic, for example? In writing from April's perspective, the onus of understanding Cheryl implicitly was taken off me as a writer." (90)

positive narratives of the Native present" (Hoy 286), and should probably be read as deriving from both.

Cheryl's death does not only represent the negative outcome of her process of identity formation, but significantly also precipitates the positive identification that marks the end of April's narrative. When April enters her deceased sister's room for the first time, she finds an empty whiskey bottle, which triggers an emotional outburst on her part: "My tears came flooding out, and I continued screaming, 'I hate your for what you've done to my sister! I hate you for what you've done to my parents! I hate you for what you've done to my people!'" (Culleton Mosionier 194). Remembering those words in the morning, April closes her narrative by affirming her identity as Métis:

> As I stared at Henry Lee [Cheryl's son], I remembered that during the last night I had used the words 'MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE' and meant them. The denial had been lifted from my spirit. It was tragic that it had taken Cheryl's death to bring me to accept my identity. [...] Cheryl had died. But for Henry Lee and me there would be a tomorrow. And it would be better. I would strive for it. For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people. (Culleton Mosionier 207)

While this positive self-identification as Métis, which in a sense April has been attempting to achieve since the rape, clearly represents a partial closure of her identity formation and offers an optimistic prospect on her future, it remains problematic for various reasons. First of all, the phrase "accept my identity," appears to suggest an essentializing conception of the term. As Helen Hoy argues, however, April's "final claim to have accepted her identity has less to do with some essence she discovers in herself (or other Métis or Native people) than with her mobilization of the relations, historic and present, in which she finds herself" (Hoy 286). Similarly, Margery Fee's interpretation emphasizes the importance of this sense of community and its value in transcending the Native/white dichotomy that has been a central issue for April throughout her narrative:

> In these last two words — our people — she has opened up a new identity and a new community for herself, opening up the space between the two 'authorized' possibilities — white and the drunken Indian Other, both isolated from any community. She chooses [...] to give her loyalty to a people, a community and a future that stands against the imposition of the dichotomy. What saves this resolution from simply imposing a different, but equally fraudulent dichotomy on the reader is that April has

been through the process of internalizing both the oppressor role and that of the oppressed. (Fee, *Upsetting* 176)

Nevertheless, it seems difficult to be entirely optimistic concerning April's future, given "the shadowy presence of the white lawyer, Roger Maddison [...] as her prospective husband" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 96), and most importantly the tragic fate of her sister Cheryl, who failed as a Métis activist despite being "braver, more articulate, and more creative" (Bar-Shalom 131). April's claim that "[t]he denial had been lifted from [her] spirit" (207) even echoes Cheryl's artificially Native idiom and despite April's good intentions, "[t]he troubled history of Cheryl's Métis affiliation forestalls conclusiveness on April's move onto the same ground" (Hoy 282).

The ending of *Never Far from Nowhere,* however, is even less conclusive. Olive's frustration and feeling of powerlessness reach a climax when she is falsely accused of marihuana possession by two racist (and sexist) policemen and makes the painful discovery that nobody will believe her side of the story, with even her solicitor telling her to plead guilty to avoid further complications: "She didn't understand that I could be innocent. Oh no. I was born a criminal in this country and everyone can see my crime. I can't hide it no matter what I do. [...] I'm black" (Levy 272). Convinced that she will never be accepted in England, Olive thus resolves to migrate to Jamaica:

> But I've decided – I'm going to live in Jamaica. Live in the sun and watch Amy playing on the beaches. I'm going to live somewhere where being black doesn't make you different. Where being black means you belong. In Jamaica people will be proud of me. I've had enough of this country. What has it ever done for me except make me its villain? Well, I won't take it any more. (Levy 272-273)

Clearly, Olive idealizes Jamaica because of her disappointment with England. Her mother, however, is right in asserting that she will not be accepted as a Jamaican simply on account of being Black (Levy 280). Olive lacks any knowledge of the culture or the actual living conditions in her parents' country of origin, and the fact that she was born and raised in London will certainly mark her as different from Jamaicans, even if her physical appearance does not. Since Olive's narrative ends with her resolution to move to Jamaica, it remains unsettled whether she will discard her idea or perhaps return to England after realizing that her image of a carefree life in the Caribbean has been utopian.

Within the frame of the novel, however, her identity formation reaches a negative conclusion as her ultimate disillusionment with English society causes her to dismiss any hopes of establishing a satisfactory life in the 'Mother Country.' Furthermore, Olive predicts that her sister will eventually arrive at the same conclusion:

> Vivien thinks she's escaped, with all her exams and college and middle-class friends. She thinks she'll be accepted in this country now. [...] My little sister thinks she's better than me. She looks down her nose and thinks I've wasted my life. But I know more about life than her. Real life. Nothing can shock me now. But Vivien, one day she'll realize that in England, people like her are never far from nowhere. Never. (Levy 273)

While Olive's evaluation of her sister's arrogance and naiveté is certainly justified to some degree, Vivien's experiences have not given her the impression that she is easily accepted, which is apparent in her attempts to conceal aspects of her ethnic and class background. In the family's last conversation their mother asks Vivien for support in her attempts to convince Olive to stay in England:

> '[...] You tell her Vivien, you the sensible one. Listen to your sister, Olive, she knows where she belongs. [...] Tell her Vivien, tell her where you belong.'
> I looked at the old photograph of Olive and me on the wall. Two little girls with identical yellow bows in our hair and happy, smiling chubby cheeks. But now Olive's arms were folded on the world. [...] And I had grown too big for our council flat, but not sure where else I would fit. Where did we belong? I answered my mum the only way I could. I said, 'I don't know.' (Levy 281)

Maria Helena Lima ascribes Vivien's insecurity to the location: "Not surprisingly, it is only inside their council flat that Vivien is not sure where she belongs by virtue of colour/class" (Lima, *Pivoting* 69). It appears that Vivien's statement, however, is simply triggered by the direct question. Throughout her narrative, she constantly seems to feel out of place by virtue of either race, class, or a combination of both, but generally avoids reflecting on her positioning. When her mother asks her, she is forced to consider her self-identification and to admit that she does not know where she belongs. The novel's last sentences, however, indicate that Vivien has found an answer:

> On the train back to Herne Bay a white-haired old woman wanted to talk. [...]

> 'Where do you come from, dear?' I looked at my reflection in the train window – I've come a long way, I thought. Then I wondered what country she would want me to come from as I looked in her eyes. 'My family are from Jamaica,' I told her. 'But I am English.' (Levy 282)

Clearly, Vivien is still reluctant to admit her Jamaican heritage, but decides to be truthful instead of simply telling her conversational partner what she assumes is the most acceptable answer, which she has done in various situations throughout the novel. More significantly, she finally claims to be English. While on previous occasions Vivien almost apologetically stated to have been "born in this country" (136), this assertion suggests that she is finally beginning to carve out a space for herself in England and is claiming membership to a society that has constantly made her feel out of place. As Lima observes, "there are some readers who will be optimistic about this ending and argue that Levy has managed to reconceptualise Englishness as she claims it for one of her protagonists" (*Pivoting* 70), but the ending of *Never Far from Nowhere* is clearly ambivalent. The fact that Vivien only reluctantly asserts her Englishness in a conversation with a complete stranger after having admitted to not knowing where she belongs only a few days earlier points to the instability of this self-identification.

The two novels thus end with Vivien and April finally beginning to acknowledge their 'ethnic' origins, but while they have developed different self-understandings, it remains difficult to be entirely optimistic regarding their future perspectives. Since identity formation cannot be separated from the social relationships within which an individual's positions are negotiated and renegotiated, it is crucial to examine the processes that lead to Cheryl's and Olive's withdrawal from society and April's and Vivien's conditionally permanent positive self-understandings in context.

6. Family Ties – A Source of Identification?

Identity formation begins within the context of the family and the parental gaze is crucial to the development of a child's self-esteem. Clearly, however, generational conflict, particularly during adolescence, is not unusual. It has been argued that it constitutes a prominent theme in most Bildungsromane, and in postcolonial novels frequently involves a cultural conflict. In *In Search of April Raintree* and *Never Far from Nowhere* this set of problems takes special forms, as in the case of the former the protagonists are removed from their biological parents to be raised in foster homes and in the case of the latter their mother's worldview appears to be largely at odds with their actual experiences outside of their home. Similarly, sibling rivalry may not be an uncommon component of most sisters' relationships during their formative years, but is rendered particularly complex in the novels mainly as a result of the protagonists' radically different self-identifications.

6.1. Generational Conflict

6.1.1. Rose Charles – A Jamaican in London

Vivien's and Olive's mother Rose was born and raised in Jamaica and followed her husband to London as a teenager. The novel makes it apparent that her attitudes differ significantly from her daughters', partly as a result of her socialization within a different cultural context and her unwillingness to reconsider their validity, or as Olive cynically describes it: "She got the world sorted out, aged nineteen, somewhere on a ship between the Caribbean and here. She sorted it out and that's the way it's going to be" (Levy 8). Olive's frustration with what she perceives as stubbornness on her mother's part and Vivien's confusion concerning her racial identification are induced by the circumstance that their mother still adheres to the idea of 'shade prejudice' prevalent in her country of origin:

> My mother didn't believe in black people. Or should I say, she tried to believe that she was not black. Although she knew that she and my dad were not the only people who came over from Jamaica in the fifties, she liked to think that because they were fair-skinned they were the only decent people who came. The only ones with 'a bit of class'. And she believed that the English would recognize this. (Levy 7)

Thus, Rose grew up in a society where on account of being light-skinned she was probably really considered as belonging to a higher class than most of the people surrounding her, and while Vivien's and Olive's experiences demonstrate that her belief in the advantages associated with a lighter complexion holds true to some extent in Britain as well, this is far from being comparable to Caribbean 'pigmentocracy.' Her attempts at concealing racial markers in her daughters, for instance by having their hair straightened, clearly influence the way the girls come to perceive themselves, which particularly complicates Olive's identity formation, as her physical appearance renders her unable to conform to this kind of maternal pressure. When Olive begins to identify herself as Black, she is confronted with a complete lack of understanding on her mother's part:

> She used to talk to me about what she thought of the black people here [...] – nothing good of course. But she sat looking in my black face telling me. And I thought if anyone looking at us sitting at the table talking had to describe the scene, they'd say, 'There are two black women talking.' But my mother thought we weren't black.
> 'I'm black,' I used to say when I was old enough to butt in.
> 'Don't be silly, Olive, you're not coloured.' [...]
> 'Well I'm not white, I have to be something.'
> 'You're not white and you're not black – you're you,' she would say [...]. (Levy 7)

Rose equates Blackness with inferiority and therefore attempts to convince her daughter that race is unimportant to her identity in claiming "you're you," which, however, clearly does not relate to Olive's experiences of racism.

It frequently becomes clear in the novel that Rose's self-identification differs radically from the way she is perceived by others. Her refusal to define herself as 'Black,' which she considers an insult, is matched by her reaction to being referred to as 'working-class' – an equally adequate description given her occupation and accommodation in a council estate flat – by Olive's boyfriend Peter: "[W]hen he said that to her, she looked at him like he just spat her face" (Levy 48). Rose's contempt of what she considers 'working-class' also becomes apparent in Vivien's narrative:

> My mum had never been in an English pub. She said they were dirty, loud places, full of gin-soaked working-class people who were free with their bodies. She got her ideas about them from reading Charles Dickens at school in Jamaica. (Levy 88)

When Vivien visits her family for the first time after having moved out, Rose proudly presents her new "hostess trolley" and is serving sandwiches on doilies, assuming that this is what Vivien's friends at college do: "'You still share a house with that daughter of a Sir?' I nodded. 'I hope you make sure you do things right. I hope you don't give the impression that you come from a rough home'" (Levy 279). Rose's behavior thus underscores the impression that her ideas on markers of social class are anachronistic.[5] Furthermore, Vivien's and Olive's mother seems to be making a point of being 'more English than the English,' expressing her preference of tea over rum (Levy 230), for instance. This is clearly related to her dislike of Jamaica and her general reluctance to discuss her family's past, as Michael Perfect observes:

> It seems that all of the information the sisters have about 'the Caribbean legacy' has come from their now-deceased father, since their mother Rose – who, like Vivien, has a pale complexion – does not like to speak about Jamaica at all. She regards the country with much distaste [...]. (Perfect 33)

Thus, Rose's refusal to tell her daughters about her country of origin is clearly responsible for Olive's idealization of the island, and her attitudes to race and ethnicity appear to contribute significantly to her daughters' problematic identity formation. The novel can thus be read as

> insist[ing] on the importance of remembering and speaking of one's own past, however painful a process this might be. Contrary to [Rose's] beliefs, [the novel] assert[s] that to refuse to speak of the past is to make oneself and one's family more vulnerable to crises of identity and to racism, rather than less so. (Perfect 40)

A further set of problems in the family relates to Rose's differentiated treatment of her two daughters. While Olive constantly feels like her parents' scapegoat, being regularly beaten first by her father and after his death by her mother, Vivien appears to be everybody's darling. Clearly, Olive's account of her parents' unjustified violence towards her is most likely exaggerated, but the descriptions of their family life in Vivien's narrative largely confirm the impression that Olive is punished more severely: "I spent most of my evenings

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[5] There is also a certain irony to Rose's concern about Vivien's impression on her roommate, given Victoria's mood swings and habit of smoking marihuana excessively, which appear to reflect her idea of establishing herself as an eccentric artist.

watching [my mother] chasing Olive round the flat, shouting and flailing her arms" (Levy 42). It is not entirely clear whether Olive's behavior provokes her parents' anger or whether they vent their wrath on her, but the latter reason seems to apply from her perspective. Olive remembers being beaten by her father as a child "for no reason," and laments his favoritism to Vivien over her: "He never hit Vivien. Not once. If anyone had to be hit, anyone had to be shouted at…oh, he saved it up for me" (Levy 38). While Olive in her adolescence begins to stay out longer to avoid confrontations with her mother, this is exactly what provokes Rose:

> I dreaded coming home, I just knew I would get such grief. When I thought of my mum all I saw was this big contorted angry face with slit eyes, fat cheeks and a mouth open with a pink tongue flapping furiously. That's all I could see. I couldn't remember what she looked like when she smiled [...] She worried about me she said, it wasn't safe outside. Well it wasn't safe inside, either. (Levy 39)

This monstrous image of her mother is certainly not shared by Vivien, whose relationship with Rose is nevertheless far from harmonious. While Olive receives a lot of negative attention, Vivien feels mostly neglected: "My mum was…not uninterested, just tired" (Levy 42). When Vivien is accepted at art college, her mother appears unimpressed and fails to understand the significance of her daughter leaving home, and Vivien has to persuade her to accompany her on the first day:

> My mum looked at me like both my ears had just dropped off, when I asked her, 'Do you want to come down to my college with me?'
> 'What for?' she said, startled. [...]
> 'Because, Mum, leaving home for the first time is a rite of passage.'
> 'Oh yes,' she said quietly, frowning a little, 'a passageway.'
> (Levy 236-237)

The day before Vivien is leaving, however, her mother tells her that she will not be able to go with her because she has to work, which Vivien interprets as a lack of concern:

> 'Of course I care about you, but I have to work. I have you on my own, you know. I don't have anyone to help me. If your dad was here…'
> 'What's that got to do with it?'
> 'I don't know what you children want from me.'
> She never loved me.
> 'I just want you to be like everybody else's mum.' [...]

> 'I try me best, but you children, you live a different life. Come.' She put
> her hand on my shoulder but I shrugged her off. (Levy 239)

Nowhere in the novel are the generational conflict and its cultural component as a lack of understanding between first and second generation immigrants more apparent than on those pages. Vivien is disappointed because her friends' parents take their children's graduation and passage into college life very seriously, whereas her mother fails to recognize the importance of those events on account of her different socialization. Vivien wants Rose to behave like other parents, which she clearly cannot, and Rose herself even admits to not understanding her children, who "live a different life." While Vivien refuses to put herself in her mother's position and acknowledge the hardships of her life as a single parent – and grandparent – who maintains two jobs to support her family, she may be right in asserting that her mother uses work as an excuse to avoid accompanying her to college, because she is afraid she would feel out of place there: "'I don't know these people, Vivien. I don't know what to say. You don't need me there [...]'" (Levy 239).

Furthermore, Rose does not only treat her daughters differently, she also appears to have different aspirations regarding their futures. She is immediately fond of Olive's boyfriend Peter and enjoys his visits, because she seems to consider him a replacement of her deceased husband (Levy 69), and her reaction to the news of Olive's pregnancy is surprising:

> '[I]t wasn't [bad], except that she didn't care. After all those times of
> being shouted at, the names she called me, the 'You'll come to no good.'
> [...] All the keeping me in to keep me safe. After all that, I got pregnant at
> seventeen without being married, every parent's worst nightmare, and all
> she could say was, 'I thought she was getting fat.' I mean, bloody hell.
> (Levy 65)

Peter's intention of marrying Olive, however, seems to be sufficient in fulfilling Rose's expectations of her daughter: "'But you have a good man there Olive – there's not many that would marry you'" (Levy 66). Apparently, Rose is content with Olive becoming a wife and mother, or at least with the fact that a white man has agreed to marry her, and their relationship improves during the pregnancy: "I began to get on with her. We had something in common now. We were both mothers, at least I nearly was. She was looking forward to the baby, I could tell"

(Levy 74). As Lima rightly observes, however, Rose's positive attitude to Olive's pregnancy may be read as indicating

> the link that motherhood forges, that tie that patriarchy wants us to believe binds daughters to mothers naturally and seamlessly, but a more cynical view would account for Rose's satisfaction in that Olive may be contributing to the family's whitening. (Lima, *Pivoting* 65)

Rose clearly has a different plan for Vivien, fearing that she might get pregnant as a teenager as well and disapproving strongly of her first boyfriend Eddie, whom Rose does not consider a "decent boy" (207). This could certainly be ascribed to the fact that Peter has left Olive, and Rose's concern might be seen as a result of this negative experience. Such a reading is contradicted, however, by the circumstance that Rose still approves of Peter after the break-up:

> He's not that bad. Not many men would care if they saw their children. They just have children all over the place and don't give a thought. But he's an English man, he's decent. He want to see little Amy. [...] I think if you fix yourself up a bit, get your hair done nice and put on some good clothes, I think he might come back to you. [...] All men stray, Olive. They have big ideas and women turn their head. They're weak. But he's your husband Olive, whether you like it or not. [...]' (Levy 210)

While Rose considers the facts that Peter is English and demonstrates an interest in his child sufficient proof of his decency, she clearly has higher aspirations for Vivien. Furthermore, the passage impressively demonstrates her attitudes to gender roles and marriage, suggesting that men are unfaithful 'by nature' and that it is a wife's duty to accept this fact, as well as to facilitate her husband's return by improving her physical appearance. It is certainly not surprising that Olive is infuriated by this suggestion. Another indication of Rose's views on gender roles, is provided in a conversation on Vivien's further education: "You have a good head on your shoulders, Vivien. Not like that sister of yours. You want to get a good job – a teacher or a nurse" (Levy 99). Thus, Rose admits to believing in Vivien's superior intelligence and opportunities, but immediately limits their scope in suggesting two traditionally female professions. While she clearly thinks that Vivien, as opposed to Olive, should attempt to achieve more than being just a wife and mother, she does not seem to believe that as a woman she can strive for being anything other than a teacher or nurse.

Thus, the generational conflict in *Never Far from Nowhere* is characterized by Rose's differential attitudes towards her daughters and severely complicated by the fact that her views on issues of race, class, and gender, which she has developed within a different time frame but significantly also within a different cultural context, are inconsistent with the lived experiences of Vivien and Olive. Furthermore, her refusal to provide her daughters with any information on Jamaica or their family history does not only render them incapable of comprehending their mother's thoughts and actions, but also enhances their feeling of exclusion as they are perceived as different from other English people, but lack any knowledge of their cultural origins.

6.1.2. Imaginary Parents and Foster Homes

Despite their physical absence throughout most of the narrative, April's and Cheryl's biological parents have important functions in their daughters' identity formation. Since the girls are at pre-school age when they are removed from their parents' care by social workers, following the death of their infant sister Anna, only April has vivid memories of their family life, which are characterized by her descriptions of her parents drinking what she believes to be "medicine" (Culleton Mosionier 11), excessive parties during one of which she even finds her mother in bed with another man (14), as well as the general impression that she is largely responsible for taking care of her younger sister despite being only six years old herself (13). The fact that this section of the novel is narrated from the perspective of the young child is clearly problematic since

> the naiveté of the retrospective narrative tends to confirm middle-class readers' assumptions about the unfitness of Aboriginal parents while deflecting questions about the decision of social workers to apprehend children rather than to support families through other forms of intervention. For April, as a six-year-old, sees the effects of her parents' dependence on alcohol but not the reasons for it.
> (Smulders, *Assault* 44)

While Henry and Alice's alcoholism certainly impairs their parenting skills, their behavior may be explained as related particularly to their relocation from a rural community to Winnipeg on account of Henry's tuberculosis, where "[n]o longer self-sustaining, the Raintrees become increasingly dependent on welfare handouts and alcohol [...]" (Acoose 230). In addition, their move to the city

entails being "bereft of the extended kinship network that provided emotional and financial support to families on reserves and in fringe settlements" (Smulders, *Assault* 40). Thus, while the parents' neglect of their daughters and failure to attend the family meetings are hardly justifiable, "Mosionier refrains from depicting Henry and Alice as unequivocally bad parents" (Smulders, *Assault* 44):

> Displaced from a small town to a racist and unwelcoming city by tuberculosis, trying to support two children on welfare, dealing with the death of a sick baby and the apprehension of their other children, the parents' pain and suffering certainly accounts for some of their behaviour. (Fee, *Identity* 222)

These reasons, however, are incomprehensible to April not only as a child, but far into her adulthood. Her first great disappointment concerns her mother's lack of fighting spirit when social workers apprehend her and Cheryl:

> I clung to my Mom as tight as I could. [...] I expected Mom to do the same. But she didn't. She pushed me away. Into their grasping hands. I couldn't believe it. [...] My mother should have fought with her life to keep us with her. Instead, she handed us over. It didn't make any sense to me. (Culleton Mosionier 18)

Clearly, April feels abandoned by her mother because she does not comprehend the situation: "Construing Alice's weakness as rejection, April fails to understand how her mother's powerlessness as an Aboriginal woman cancels her power as an adult" (Smulders, *Assault* 44). She continues to cling to the hope of returning to her parents, however, until she learns that what Henry and Alice have been drinking was not medicine but alcohol. Interpreting her parents' alcoholism as a lack of concern for their children, April dissociates herself from them in a soliloquy: "Well, you lied to us. You never intended to get better. You never cared about us. [...] I hate you both for lying to us. I hope I never see you again" (Culleton Mosionier 46). As her parents refrain from attending the family meetings at approximately the same time, she never confronts them with her rage, which she immediately turns against Nativeness in general. The realization of her parents' alcoholism appears to confirm the stereotypes to which April has been exposed: "It seemed to me that what I'd read and what I'd heard indicated that Métis and Indians were inclined to be alcoholics. That's because they were a weak people" (Culleton Mosionier 46). Thus, April resolves to pass for white as a reaction to her resentment towards

her parents. Despite her anger at having been deceived, however, April does not have the heart to be truthful to her little sister:

> I told Cheryl how our family life had been when we were all together. That is, I told her the good things. [...] Maybe I was lying by not telling her about the drinking and the fights and the dirty children. But then, Cheryl didn't need to know that just yet. I wanted Cheryl to be happy.
> (Culleton Mosionier 49)

Attempting to protect Cheryl from disappointment, April thus promotes her sister's idealization of her parents, which ultimately only aggravates Cheryl's disillusionment when she finally meets her father as an adult:

> *All my dreams to rebuild the spirit of a once proud nation are destroyed in this instant. I study the pitiful creature in front of me. My father! A gutter-creature!* [...] *All these years, until this very moment, I envisioned him as a tall, straight, handsome man. In the olden days, he would have been a warrior if he had been all Indian. I had made something out of him that he wasn't, never was. Now I just want to turn and run away, pretend this isn't happening, that I had never laid eyes on him.*
> (Culleton Mosionier 198)

As April rightly concludes from this journal entry, Cheryl's encounter with Henry "destroy[s] her self-image" (201), and initiates her transformation from an idealistic, self-confident and ambitious young woman to an alcoholic and prostitute, who ultimately commits suicide. Instead of following her spontaneous intuition and running away from her father, what April identifies as her sister's "natural family instinct" (201) causes Cheryl to visit Henry regularly, as well as to allow him to exploit her financially, and as Sharon Smulders suggests perhaps even physically:

> [W]hile the journal is silent on the matter of Henry Lee's paternity, the experience of seventeen-year-old Nancy [a friend of Cheryl's who was raped by her father] reinforces the notion (as suggested by the novel's chronology) that his mother is also a casualty of incest [...].
> (Smulders, *Proper Word* 95)

Smulders' line of argument appears comprehensible, but it is nonetheless difficult to believe that Cheryl's loyalty towards her father would extend beyond a rape, particularly as her spirits do not seem to be entirely broken at this point in the narrative. There can be no doubt, however, that her identification with her father contributes significantly to Cheryl's adoption of an extremely negative

self-understanding: "*I walk along Main Street. This is where I belong. With the other gutter-creatures. I'm my father's daughter*" (Culleton Mosionier 205). Clearly, April's and Cheryl's relationship with their biological parents cannot adequately be described in terms of a generational conflict, due to Henry's and Alice's absence throughout their daughters' formative years. Nevertheless, they fulfill important functions in April's and Cheryl's processes of identity formation. April's discovery of her parents' alcoholism from her perspective confirms the racist notion that all Natives are 'gutter-creatures' and thus fosters her racial shame and resolution to pass for white, which characterize her self-understanding throughout most of the narrative. Cheryl, by contrast, constructs her identity in relation to an idealized image of her parents, the destruction of which precipitates her downfall.

A further set of problems regarding their parents' absence from April's and Cheryl's lives concerns

> their estrangement from their origins, for they, like many other Native children separated from their parents and taken into the care during the so-called Sixties Scoop, are denied the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage as well as their familial history.
> (Smulders, *Proper Word* 81)

Thus, like Vivien and Olive, whose mother refuses to share with them any information on their country of origin and family history, April and Cheryl are deprived of any sources of ethnic identification as they are raised in predominantly white foster homes, and this lack of knowledge and of a sense of community is depicted as similarly problematic as in *Never Far from Nowhere*. The various foster homes to which April and Cheryl are taken prove to be inappropriate in assisting the girls' development of positive self-images, although for different reasons:

> Initially, April is culturally dis-placed with the Dion family [...], while Cheryl is culturally mis-placed with the MacAdams who, albeit with good intentions, encourage the belief that she is Métis [...]. April is dis-placed because she is dis-located from her culture of origin, while Cheryl is mis-placed with a Métis family whose intentions are good but shaped by the boxed colonial constructs of Native identity. (Acoose 230-231)

While the affectionate care April receives from her first foster parents, the deeply religious French Canadian Dions, quickly helps her to overcome her feeling of being "an outsider" (Culleton Mosionier 30) and she even begins to

address them as "Maman" and "Papa" (34), the fact that April is of Métis heritage is completely ignored within this setting. This clearly contributes to April's confusion regarding her racial identification as a child: "I thought now I was rich, too, just like those other white kids" (24). Apparently, April believes to be white on account of her light complexion and does not only become "culturally malnourished" (Acoose 230), but also remains entirely unprepared for the racism she encounters subsequently at the DeRosier family. At one point adequately describing her position within this foster home as "just like Cinderella" (40), April is continuously exploited as well as physically and mentally abused. The racist component of this maltreatment is constantly apparent and she is thus "forced to inhabit stereotypes that violate her sense of self" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 82). Upon April's arrival, she is immediately unsettled by her new foster mother's pejorative designation: "Mrs. DeRosier had said 'you half-breeds.' I wasn't a half-breed, just a foster child, that's all. To me, half-breed was almost the same as Indian" (38). Apparently, April has been exposed to racist stereotypes before, even though they were not directed towards her, since "[i]ronically, she shares with the DeRosiers the erroneous assumption that all people of Native ancestry are alike" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 82). This constant exposure to verbal abuse clearly facilitates April's development of racial shame and her ensuing decision to pass for white. As opposed to her sister, Cheryl is initially placed with a Métis foster mother, with whose encouragement she "begins to construct an identity by un-packing the antiquated colonial boxes, which contain romantic notions of Indians and Métis" (Acoose 231), which proves problematic as Cheryl cannot connect this identification to the social reality she inhabits.

Despite the fact that Henry and Alice are clearly not capable of attending to their daughters, the novel severely criticizes the children's apprehension, particularly as it secludes April and Cheryl from the Métis community. Cheryl once expresses this feeling of being an outsider during her childhood in a conversation with April: "I've always felt so out of place, living with whites, surrounded by whites" (Culleton Mosionier 100), and even after she has met her father, she is convinced that being raised in white foster homes was not a viable alternative: "*Those people weren't our flesh and blood. They weren't even our race*" (200). Therefore, while the narrative does not literally depict a

generational conflict, the protagonists' traumatic experience of being removed from their parents as well as from the Métis community, and their racial and ethnic difference from their respective foster parents constitute predominant forces in complicating their identity formation.

6.2. The Relationships Between the Sisters

Given the facts that there is such severe generational conflict in *Never Far from Nowhere* and that April and Cheryl are each other's only close family members, the general lack of support and understanding from the parental generation might be assumed to bring the sisters even closer together. While it seems that they could derive strength from encouraging each other, the opposite is clearly the case. In the course of both narratives, the sisters' relationships deteriorate almost constantly, which is mainly the result of their radically different identifications in terms of racial and ethnic affiliation.

As children, Vivien and Olive are clearly engaged in various conflicts, which are, however, depicted as the inevitable clashes between siblings and ascribed to their difference in age: "Three years is a long time in sister years. [...] She was my big sister. I was her bloody little baby sister – annoying little sod sister – get out of my room sister – you get on my nerves sister" (Levy 1). Vivien appears to admire Olive and to strive for her approval in the beginning of the narrative, and while Olive perceives Vivien as naïve and childish, she also feels protective towards her, for instance, abandoning her plans of moving out after their father's death: "I couldn't leave then, not straight away. I felt sorry for Vivien, leaving her with Mum. She was only young – still playing with her bloody dolls" (Levy 38). Clearly, their relationship is continuously strained by their parents' differential treatment of the two girls, for while Olive is jealous of the favoritism with which Vivien is treated, Vivien is in turn jealous of the attention Olive receives.

In their adolescence, however, the sisters' lack of understanding for each other assumes an additional dimension, particularly when Vivien gets involved with a clique of skinheads:

> 'Vivien!' Olive had shouted when she saw the [black and white Prince of Wales check] skirt on my bed. 'What's this?' She held it out in front of her like it had a bad smell. 'Since when have you been a skinhead?'
> 'I'm not,' I protested, 'I only borrowed it.'
> 'I've seen everything now,' she went on, oblivious to me, 'I've seen everything. But I never thought I'd see the day when my own sister would turn into one of them.' (Levy 44)

Clearly, Vivien's desire to assimilate without reflecting on her 'friend's' racist attitudes is inacceptable to Olive, who is a victim of racism and thus feels betrayed by her sister.

Similarly, April's and Cheryl's affectionate relationship as children is increasingly impaired by their development of different racial identifications. Initially, the sisters are extremely close, and the fact that they rarely see each other does not only preclude any sibling rivalry, but even seems to intensify their mutual affection. Their progressive alienation from each other begins, however, when April fails to understand her sister's positive self-identification as Métis. Presenting her sister with a book on Louis Riel for her birthday, Cheryl proudly claims: "He's a Métis, like us" (Culleton Mosionier 43). This statement startles April, who has accepted the dominant opinion of Riel as "a crazy half-breed" (42), and even causes her to doubt her sister's intelligence: "I just about fell off my chair when I heard that. [...] But here was my own sister, with brilliant grades, saying such idiotic things" (43). This misunderstanding "spells the first dent in the so-far-perfect relation between the sisters" (Rigal-Cellard 28):

> In fact, it is April's shame about being Métis, measured against Cheryl's respect for it, that constitutes the earliest recognition of irreducible difference between the girls. Put more abstractly, race becomes a constitutive element of their gendered identity early on, and their different identifications are particularly charged because they are articulated in a systematically racist society. (Zwicker, *Limits* 326)

Despite their different attitudes to being Métis, April's and Cheryl's mutual affection outweighs their differences during their childhood. This is apparent, for instance, when Cheryl during the brief period in which she stays at the DeRosiers' with her sister, is beaten by the headmaster for criticizing her history teacher's depiction of Natives, and apologizes only when threatened with a separation from her sister (Culleton Mosionier 54). April immediately returns this act of solidarity when Mrs. DeRosier cuts Cheryl's hair as an additional

punishment for her disobedience at school, and April's confrontation of their foster mother results in her sharing the same fate (55):

> I actually pushed her hand away from my hair. I think we would have had a fight except that she used the threat of separating Cheryl and me for good. [...] There I was, the big, protective sister going out to avenge the humiliation of my little sister, and I came back, myself properly humbled. It all seemed ridiculously funny, and I started to laugh. Cheryl joined in. It was good to laugh defeat in the face. Heck, our hair would grow back. (Culleton Mosionier 55-56)

While in a sense their affection for each other contributes to their vulnerability, as both sisters give up their resistance only for fear of being separated, they also draw strength from sharing their problems. Furthermore, the fact that the girls are 'scalped' constitutes a violation that is related to both race and gender. As Agnes Grant observes, the cutting of hair is closely associated with colonization:

> Hair was a particular preoccupation of European colonizers; dominant groups have long performed rituals which involve shearing the hair of subordinates. Cutting hair is found to be a key part of rituals of cross-cultural domination all over the world. (Grant 242)

Given the significance ascribed to physical beauty particularly among girls and young women, which is clearly also perceived as being represented by long hair, having their hair cut off is certainly worse for April and Cheryl than it would be for boys, who would not have to fear becoming the subject of ridicule for being almost bald. Nevertheless, the fact that April and Cheryl share this humiliating experience enables them to laugh at their situation instead of despairing.

At this point in the narrative, however, April has already resolved to deny her Métis heritage as soon as possible and is struggling with the impossibility of incorporating her sister into this scheme of life:

> What about Cheryl? How was I going to pass for a white person when I had a Métis sister? Especially when she was so proud of what she was? I loved her. I could never cut myself off from her completely. And she wouldn't go along with what I planned. I would never even be able to tell her what I planned. [...] Well, I had a long time to figure that one out. (Culleton Mosionier 47)

April fails to find a satisfactory solution for this problem, however, and therefore continuously attempts to 'hide' her sister from most of her social contacts,

notably when she talks Cheryl out of joining her at her boarding school
(Culleton Mosionier 84). After Cheryl graduates from high school and moves in
with her, April avoids meeting her in the proximity of her workplace (94), and
even begins to feel uncomfortable when being seen with her in public:

> I'd go out with Cheryl and Nancy to nice restaurants and treat them to
> suppers. I began to notice what being native was like in middle-class
> surroundings. [...] Sometimes, I'd overhear comments like, 'Who let the
> Indians off the reservation?' Or we'd be walking home, and guys would
> make comments to us, as if we were easy pickups. [...] Instead of feeling
> angry at these mouthy people, I just felt embarrassed to be seen with
> natives, Cheryl included. (Culleton Mosionier 98)

Clearly, April has been entirely unaware of the racism her sister encounters in
everyday situations and the fact that these comments are uttered in "middle-
class surroundings" confirms her in her belief that upward social mobility is
severely complicated by a non-white appearance. Furthermore, the intersection
of racism and sexism is apparent in this passage, for as the phrase "easy
pickups" indicates, Native women are considered more readily available than
white women. Instead of turning her anger at the racists, however, April
chooses the easier option of disassociating herself from her sister and avoids
being seen with her in public.

A similar scene in *Never Far from Nowhere* depicts Vivien's reaction to a
chance encounter with her sister at the market, where she is talking to two of
her 'skinhead' acquaintances: "'Over there – that wog with that white bloke – I
hate that, I fucking hate that.' [...] I saw Olive and Peter walking towards us. I
turned my back and pretended to look at the cauliflowers" (Levy 81). Clearly,
there is a gender component to this racist remark as well, since it is the
interracial relationship rather than the Black woman's presence in general that
is criticized. More importantly, however, Vivien reacts in the same manner as
April, choosing to deny her sister instead of confronting the person who insults
her, which would entail revealing her own racial heritage.

While Vivien, however, for the most part does not consciously attempt to 'hide'
her sister from her friends on account of her physical appearance – although
she does refuse to let Olive visit her at college for reasons of class affiliation
(Levy 269) – April's expressed desire to pass for white constantly clashes with
her affection for her sister. When she marries a wealthy man and moves to

Toronto, she even regrets having invited Cheryl for Christmas (Culleton Mosionier 104) and is relieved when her mother-in-law disinvites Cheryl from most of their social gatherings (106).

Despite April's ambitions to conceal her aspirations of assimilating into white society from her sister, Cheryl is well aware of April's feelings:

> 'April, I have known how you felt for a long time. And I decided that I was going to do what I could to turn the native image around so that one day you could be proud of being Métis.' [...] For a younger sister, she was a lot wiser than me in some ways. So, she had known about my shame for a long time. And she never said anything. She just accepted me the way I was, in silence. (Culleton Mosionier 102)

It appears naïve of April to assume that her sister has not seen through her racial shame, given for instance the fact that years earlier, trying to conceal the fact that she had not read the book on Louis Riel her sister gave her, April observed that Cheryl "got the hint because she began staying away from such topics" (Culleton Mosionier 56).

Furthermore, the passages indicate a problem at the heart of the sisters' relationship, namely their lack of communication and even dishonesty. This is a recurrent issue which in addition to April's concealment of her racial shame concerns, for instance, her modified account of their parents and Cheryl's silence on her encounter with her father, as well as her prostitution and the birth of her child. April, however, only recognizes the extent to which the dishonesty between her and her sister has been destructive, after Cheryl has left to commit suicide: "I lie to protect her and she lies to protect me, and we both lose out" (Culleton Mosionier 186). Similarly, Vivien's and Olive's relationship, while not specifically affected by lies, is certainly characterized by a lack of communication which contributes to their failure to empathize with each other. One of their most heated arguments ensues when Vivien has allowed Peter to kidnap his and Olive's daughter Amy, a situation which is rendered possible only by Vivien's unawareness of the fact that her brother-in-law is not granted any visitation rights to her niece (Levy 163-165).

In addition to indicating the lack of communication between April and Cheryl, the fact that Cheryl is aware of April's racial shame is clearly connected to her feeling of being abandoned by her elder sister. While initially expressing her sorrow over April's emotional and physical withdrawal very frankly in a letter,

after April has spent an entire summer jobbing in Winnipeg without even writing to her (Culleton Mosionier 86-87), Cheryl – despite criticizing April's decision to get married – refrains from such an open expression of her feelings when April moves to Toronto. It is apparent to her, however, that April "[s]ubconsciously [...] marrie[s] Bob to get away from Cheryl" (Culleton in Garrod 91), and that this decision "entails selfishly re-enacting the cycle of maternal abandonment" (Bar-Shalom 128):

> If April's mother chose escape in substance abuse over a painful and perhaps fruitless struggle to regain her children, April at first chooses a linguistically and psychologically numbing escape to majority culture over the difficulty of re-assuming responsibility for her younger sister.
> (Bar-Shalom 128)

This abandonment contributes to Cheryl's vulnerability and is repeated when April learns that Cheryl has prostituted herself, because "during the brief period between the rape and the final revelations of the trial when April is tentatively thinking of herself as, if not Native, at least as suffering like one, the sisters bond" (Fee, *Identity* 222). Following the revelation at court, however, April blames her sister for her rape: "I just couldn't look her straight in the face, not at that moment. [...] All because Cheryl insisted in going out of her way to screw up her own life. And thus, screwing up mine" (Culleton Mosionier 167). Clearly, April's inability to forgive her sister ultimately contributes to Cheryl's decision to commit suicide: "Cheryl, in part, kills herself because April abandons her emotionally" (Fee, *Identity* 223).

The relationship between the sisters in *Never Far from Nowhere* similarly culminates in a situation in which Olive feels forsaken by Vivien, "when, in the final stages of the novel, Olive is arrested by racist policemen and falsely charged with possession of marijuana" (Perfect 34). Despite Olive's attempts at clinging to her image of herself as "a strong black woman" (Levy 270), she is so unsettled by this event, that she begs Vivien to let her stay with her in Canterbury for a while, which Vivien blatantly refuses:

> 'No you can't,' I said. 'There's no room.' [...]
> 'That's so bloody typical of you. You little cow, you're so selfish, all you think about is yourself. What's the matter, do you think I'll be embarrassing? You make me sick, Vivien. You make me really sick. I knew you'd say that, I don't know why I asked.' [...]

> 'Just leave me alone – just leave me alone Olive! I don't want you here – don't you understand – just leave me alone!' (Levy 270-271)

Clearly, Olive would not ask her sister for a favor if she was not desperate, and she rightly ascribes Vivien's callousness and lack of compassion to her sister's fear of being embarrassed, which overrides her sense of family.

In both of the narratives, the disintegration of the respective sisters' relationships climaxes in heated arguments. These final dialogues between the protagonists are characterized by accusations on the part of Cheryl and Olive, which demonstrate striking similarities despite their different situations.

For instance, both blame their sisters for having achieved social mobility based on their denial of their racial identifications and for considering themselves superior as a result:

> '[...] You're a snob. You have double standards. You were so shocked when they said I was a hooker. Well, look at you. How did you buy this house, April? [...] You prostituted yourself when you took Bob's money, that's how. You never loved that man. You loved his money. [...] Yeah, your kind makes me sick. Big white snobs who think they're the superior race. [...]' (Culleton Mosionier 179)

While Vivien has only begun to climb the social ladder through a college education rather than marriage, Olive similarly accuses her of snobbery: "'[...] I feel sorry for you because you don't know who you are any more. [...] You've changed, Vivien, you're just a little snob now. [...] You don't know what real life is like. You've had it so easy [...]'" (Levy 277). Thus, in addition to accusing her of being a "snob," Olive considers her sister naïve and believes she has more experience of life than her. This assertion, despite being motivated by Olive's jealousy of her sister's success, is true to some extent, as Vivien herself even accepts – but does not admit – during the argument: "I could feel the prickling sensation in my nose that warns of tears. Because she was my big sister and she was right. I had changed, I could feel it. I wanted so much from life now. I'd got big ideas" (Levy 277). The claim to "know what real life is like" also resonates in Cheryl's accusations of April: "'[...] Because in reality, you know fuck all. I'm the one who knows what life is really all about. Me. That's who. I got the answers. [...]'" (Culleton Mosionier 180).

While Cheryl takes her own life following this last argument with her sister, her suicide note is reconciliatory, and April gains an understanding of her motivations through reading her journal. She resolves to raise her sister's son and to continue Cheryl's life-task, but this does not seem to cancel the fact that her behavior has been one of the causes for Cheryl's suicide and that they parted in conflict.

In the case of *Never Far from Nowhere*, as opposed to that, there is reason to hope for the sisters' reconciliation. In claiming that "[i]t is with some irony that a dialectically structured novel ends with the two narrators unable to speak to, or empathize with, each other" (34), Michael Perfect appears to overlook that there is a hint of the sisters' solidarity and understanding during their last interaction in the text, when their mother asks Vivien to assist her in talking Olive out of moving to Jamaica:

> Where did we belong? I answered my mum the only way I could. I said, 'I don't know.'
> Olive smiled at me for the first time. (Levy 281)

Thus, Vivien's final confession of not being sure where she belongs pleases Olive and suggests that they are not entirely incapable of empathizing with each other.

The relationships between the sisters as well as between the protagonists and their (foster) parents are therefore significantly influenced by different identifications regarding race, class, and gender. These differences are closely interconnected with the social environments in which the protagonists position themselves and the relationships they entertain outside their immediate family influence their identity formation in equally significant ways.

7. Interaction with the Wider Social Environment

An individual's identity formation always occurs in dialectic interplay with his/her social environment. Particularly during adolescence, relationships outside the family become increasingly important to the ways in which people position themselves within their society. Clearly, this is a more challenging process for individuals who are marginalized on account of certain markers of social difference, such as their race, gender, or class affiliation. For the protagonists of the two novels, who are multiply subordinated as a result of the intersection of those categories of oppression, the construction of positive identifications is additionally complicated by the fact that they are largely excluded from a community sharing their experiences. Their friendships and love relationships, as well as their interactions with representatives of social institutions and complete strangers provide numerous examples of how they are constantly reminded of being considered as 'different,' most apparently in terms of race, the gender- and class-specific aspects of which are nevertheless readily identifiable in most contexts.

7.1. 'Belonging' Among Peers

The desire to have friends and to be accepted among a peer group is a quintessential social feeling that is particularly influential in adolescence. Clearly, any markers of social or personal difference from one's peers, such as an individual's physical appearance, religious beliefs or sexual orientation, for instance, are likely to interfere with a person's ambition to 'belong.' Since the protagonists of the novels are almost exclusively surrounded by whites, their racial distinction from their peers certainly contributes to Olive's and Cheryl's social exclusion and encourages their respective lighter-skinned sisters' attempts at assimilation.

The significance of 'fitting in' is perhaps most obvious in Vivien, who befriends a clique of skinheads early in her narrative. During her first direct encounter with members of this subculture at a youth club, she is reluctant to be in their company: "[Olive] told me, and I read in the *Daily Mirror*, how skinheads behave. Going round in gangs and beating people up. Leaving them for dead.

[...] But here I was now in a room full of them" (Levy 14-15). Vivien's friend Carol, however, whom Vivien accompanied to the youth club, refuses to leave and pressures Vivien to stay, reminding her not to "be such a spoiler" (Levy 17), and the two of them thus become members of the skinhead clique, even though Vivien continues to feel uncomfortable in their presence: "I did everything like everyone else did. Except that I didn't speak. [...] I wanted to stay unseen. Because they all hated wogs. And I had nothing to say" (29). It seems that the skinheads' attitudes to Vivien are equally ambivalent, for while they apparently do not identify her as Black and accept her as a part of their group, there are clear indications that she is still an outsider on certain levels:

> 'Someone'll ask you out one day,' Linda said, nodding at me sympathetically. They all felt sorry for me.
> 'It's because you're shy,' Carol explained.
> 'Where'd you come from?' Pam asked.
> '[My parents] came from Jamaica,' I said.
> 'Yeah, but you're not coloured like them others,' Linda said.
> I didn't answer.
> 'You're different from them, Viv, you're not really a darkie.' Carol giggled.
> 'You're one of us.' She put her arm round my shoulder. 'You look Spanish or Italian anyway.'
> 'Do I?' I smiled.
> 'Oh, yeah – nobody would know,' Carol said and my friends nodded.
> (Levy 87-88)

This dialogue establishes a strikingly explicit connection between Vivien's racial background and her attractiveness to males. The declaration of the fact that none of the boys in their clique have demonstrated an interest in Vivien is immediately followed by a question on her ethnic origins, clearly suggesting that her lack of suitors is caused by her perceived racial difference. Her friends' assurance that she is light-skinned enough to be considered a member of their peer group constitutes a weak attempt at comforting her, but is nevertheless successful, as Vivien's smile suggests. While the assertion testifies to their racist attitudes and appears extremely insulting in its implication that the physical features ascribed to Vivien's non-white ancestry mark her as inferior, she appears to share the underlying assumption that her racial difference constitutes a reason for shame.

The absurdity of the skinhead gang's ambivalent attitudes towards Vivien is impressively demonstrated when a Black boy flirts with her at the pub, which

causes the male members of her clique to attack him physically and thus initiate what culminates in a huge fight (Levy 91-93), for which her 'friends' blame Vivien:

> 'That was your fault,' Pam said when we got outside. [...]
> 'Johnny couldn't stand that coon talking to one of his women.'
> I wanted to hit her. I wanted to run my nails down her face. I was shaking.
> 'What are you going on about?' I shouted.
> 'What's it gotta do with 'er?' Carol yelled, and pushed Pam's shoulder.
> [...] 'He started it,' I said.
> 'Only 'cause he couldn't stand to see you with that wog.'
> 'You shouldn't have talked to him,' Linda butted in [...]. (Levy 94)

Apparently, while the boys themselves do not want to date Vivien on account of her 'Black' features, they still treat her as a possession of theirs, as clearly indicated by the phrase "one of his women," and attempt to 'protect' her from the Black boy against her will. This does not only demonstrate their incomprehensible attitudes to racial difference, but also their dubious views on women as objects, which are shared by Vivien's 'friends' Pam and Linda. In the face of their absurd accusations, however, Vivien finally decides that she does not want to belong to their clique at any price and with Carol's support begins to distance herself from them after the incident (Levy 104).

When Vivien and Carol qualify for taking A-levels, however, they are suddenly surrounded by middle-class girls, and class affiliation becomes a more salient feature of distinction than race. At first, Vivien is even reluctant to attend the sixth form, fearing that she will be an outsider: "I wanted better things for me. But A-levels meant going into the sixth form at school, and the sixth form was full of A-stream girls. Posh girls who came from nice homes and [...] spoke Latin" (Levy 100). These 'posh' girls' social difference from Vivien and Carol is signified by their distinctive clothing style: "They all wore tight cotton T-shirts with bell sleeves and scoop necks. Everyone had rows of beads except me and Carol" (117). Furthermore, they speak a different variety of English, which Vivien attempts to adopt in order to 'fit in:' "'My name's Georgina,' she said to me one day, in a voice that needed the corners of your mouth to be stitched up to get the accent right. I said 'I'm Vivien,' as posh as I could, but I knew she knew" (116). Despite Vivien's fruitless attempts at concealing her working-class background, she befriends Georgina and her clique, which entails the closure of

her friendship with Carol, who begins to consider her a "snob" (146). While Vivien continues to downplay her lower-class background in the company of her new friends and remains aware of her difference from them, they readily include her and she increasingly feels that she 'belongs.' Upon entering college, however, her consciousness of being different from her fellow students becomes highly significant:

> There was no one in my group who was from a dilapidated council estate, who liked to eat Mother's Pride white sliced loaves and was more than used to washing all their clothes by hand. [...] There was no one who looked around themselves every morning and wondered how they got there. How they managed to be living in a flat that was nicer than one their parents could provide, with a woman who could rustle up something called a lasagne and got upset when she remembered that her father wouldn't let her have a pony when she was young. (Levy 260)

While Vivien is clearly also critical of her peers, considering them spoiled when they lament such 'problems' as not having a washing machine in their apartment or not having had a pony in childhood, she is eager to 'fit in' and thus engages in what could be considered an attempt at 'social passing:' "I'd let people believe I was from Islington – one of the big houses near Gibson Square. My father was an engineer, I'd say, my mother's in catering. I went to a grammar school. I let them make up the rest" (265). Thus, while in the beginning of her narrative Vivien has attempted to downplay her racial heritage, she later attempts to conceal her working-class background. In her desire to 'belong,' however, she continuously feels like an outsider, which she only openly admits on the very last pages of the novel.

While Vivien's acceptance among her peers is based on her efforts to assimilate in terms of race and class, Olive is denied the hope of finding acceptance early on. Despite her protests, her mother makes Olive attend an all-white grammar school: "And no black girls. All white. So I knew if I got in that straight away I'd be odd. I told Mum that there were no black girls, but she just smiled and said that that was good" (Levy 24). Olive's concern is justified, however, as she describes having only one friend at school, and feeling excluded by the others on account of her physical appearance and class background: "My best mate at school, Maggie, was like me. She didn't make jokes about wogs or coons and then say 'Sorry Olive, I don't mean you, you're all right,' in some prissy little posh voice. She lived in a council house, not a

very nice place" (26-27). This feeling of being an outsider among her peers certainly influences her decision to leave school prematurely, and the fact that Olive becomes pregnant and stays at home with her daughter soon after that, renders her almost incapable of socializing with others later in the narrative. Her hope of befriending a neighbor when she has moved out of her mother's apartment is quickly destroyed as she identifies the woman as a religious fanatic:

> Then a black woman moved into the flat upstairs. Charmaine. She had a little boy a few years older than Amy. [...] I thought we would be able to take it in turns babysitting and maybe even go out, the two of us, down the pub or to the pictures or just sit together talking about things. She was only a bit older than me. I went up to see her on her first day to say hello. The first thing she asked me, was 'Have you let the Lord into your life, Olive?' Then she went on for about an hour on how the love of Jesus Christ had saved her [...]. (Levy 242)

While in her adult life this encounter basically constitutes Olive's only effort at establishing a friendship, she clearly does not have many opportunities, given her situation as a single mother without any financial resources. Insofar as her role as the primary caretaker of her daughter is gender-specific and the shortage of money certainly related to class affiliation, her social exclusion results mainly from her intersecting subordination as a working-class woman. In *In Search of April Raintree*, Cheryl is similarly excluded by her classmates as a child, and even describes being bullied on account of her racial difference: "They call me names and things, or else they make like I'm not there at all" (Culleton Mosionier 43). This changes when Cheryl begins to attend university, where according to April "[s]he quickly accumulate[s] a number of friends, both white and native" (93). In addition, she increasingly surrounds herself with other Métis and Natives she encounters at the Winnipeg Native Friendship Centre, among them her close friend Nancy, who later even takes in Cheryl's son to raise him. Thus, while she is an outsider in her predominantly white social environment as a child, in her young adulthood Cheryl establishes a circle of friends within the Native community, as April realizes during her funeral: "Most of the people who came [to the funeral service] were Indian or Métis. [...] They gave me an insight into Cheryl's past by the glowing remarks they made about her" (193).

Clearly her sister's popularity appears striking to April, who does not have any friends herself at the end of the narrative and has certainly never considered befriending Natives. One of April's early childhood memories relates to her experiences of going to the park with her sister:

> There were two groups of children that went to the park. One group was the brown-skinned children who looked like Cheryl in most ways. [...] But they were dirty looking and they dressed in real raggedy clothes. I didn't care to play with them at all. The other group was white-skinned, and I used to envy them, especially the girls with blond hair and blue eyes. They seemed so clean and fresh and reminded me of flowers I had seen. [...] I imagined that they were rich and lived in big, beautiful houses [...] But they didn't care to play with Cheryl and me. They called us names and bullied us. (Culleton Mosionier 16)

Thus, April observes a connection between the children's skin color and their social background, but is clearly too young to comprehend it. Furthermore, it appears very unlikely that her association of the white children with "flowers" and her assumption of their wealth are only based on their neat appearance. She has probably been exposed to racist stereotypes in other contexts and become aware of the class differences associated with race. Her claim that the brown-skinned children "looked like Cheryl" also implies that she herself identifies with the white children, whom she resembles in terms of her physical appearance, an impression that is reinforced by her belief to be "rich, too, just like those other white kids" (24) upon arriving at the Dions.

While as a young child April thus desires to belong to the peer group of white children, this positive identification increasingly turns into a negative one in the course of her stay at the DeRosiers, where it becomes more salient for her not to be associated with Natives. Within this setting, her foster sister Maggie verbally abuses her with such names as "Ape the bitch" (48), a gender-specific racist designation by which "she imputes to April a primordial savagery and animal sexuality" (Smulders, *Proper Word* 83). Maggie, however, also turns the children on the school bus against April, who as a result of their humiliations decides to conceal her Métis heritage from her classmates:

> I could hear the DeRosier kids tell their friends that I was a half-breed and that they had to clean me up when I came to their house. They said I even had lice in my hair and told the others that they should keep away from me. They whispered and giggled, and once in a while, they would call me names. [...] Fortunately for me, no one on the school bus was in

my classroom. [...] I remember how relieved I was that no one in my class knew of my heritage [...]. (Culleton Mosionier 42-43)

While she initially only envied white children for their wealth, April begins to internalize the racist stereotypes with which her foster family and their friends confront her and reacts with racial shame as well as the conscious decision to pass for white. As soon as April is 'rescued' from the DeRosiers and taken to a boarding school, she implements her plan of complete assimilation, telling her schoolmates that she is an orphan and talking Cheryl out of joining her at the school: "I made friends with a lot of the boarders. [...] I credited my ability to make friends easily to the fact that none of them knew I was part Indian" (82). When she spends a summer jobbing in Winnipeg, April also befriends some people of Native heritage:

> They were good and bad at the same time. Good in that native girls I saw were beautiful and sure of themselves. [...] Good in their open acceptance of others. Bad in that they went shoplifting, drank liquor even if they were under-aged, and had easy sexual relationships with each other. [...] I felt at home with these new friends but a lot of times, I imagined myself much better than they were. The girls made me think of Mrs. Semple's speech on the syndrome. (Culleton Mosionier 86)

While it seems that April is extremely conservative, given that the 'bad' aspects she describes hardly reflect anything but the usual transgressions of teenagers, her feeling of superiority is comprehensible in light of her reference to the "native girl syndrome," as described by her former social worker. This scenario has clearly induced in April an irrational fear of descending into substance addiction and prostitution, which causes her to refrain from drinking alcohol and entertaining sexual relationships, and which clearly also causes her to be judgmental towards her friends. She does not remain in contact with them after the summer, and when April begins working for a law firm, she only describes entertaining superficial friendships with some of her colleagues, going "to the movies or shopping together" (89).

When through her marriage with the wealthy businessman Bob Radcliff April becomes a part of the 'high society' in Toronto, she "let[s] Mother Radcliff and Bob run [her] social life" (113). She feels like an outsider in the company of these upper-class people, however: "Bob and I had our group of friends, but I felt I had access to them only as long as Bob was with me. [...] I felt that I really

didn't belong" (112-113). As time progresses, April also develops an increasing dislike of their friends:

> All these people lived for one of two things: money or power. They were hypocrites, all of them. Charming to each other when they were face to face, but get them into separate rooms and their tongues could cut like knives. They were such superficial people. (Culleton Mosionier 114)

The realization that the upward social mobility she has desired throughout her life entails being surrounded by people who do not accept her as their equal and whom she disregards, is soon followed by April's discovery of her husband's infidelity. After her return to Winnipeg, there is no further reference to April having any friends, with the exception of Roger.

Thus, the protagonists' experiences with their peers depict a variety of forms of exclusion, ranging from racist offenses in childhood to feelings of inadequacy in terms of class membership. The early assertions of their racial difference clearly have considerable effects on their identity formation, facilitating Cheryl's emotional flight to books on Nativeness and April's internalization of racial shame, as well as Olive's decision to leave school, for instance. Furthermore, despite their attempts at assimilation, Vivien and April experience aspects of class affiliation as interfering with their feeling of belonging, once they have begun to achieve upward social mobility.

The problems arising from their ambivalent relationships with peers remain largely unresolved in the narratives. While Cheryl commits suicide despite her popularity with her friends, April's beginning identification as Métis does not warrant her full acceptance by and feeling of 'fitting in' with a Métis community. Vivien's assertion of her ambiguous emotions towards her 'belonging' is similarly inconclusive, and Olive's resolution to move to Jamaica must be seen as resulting at least partly from her social exclusion. The protagonists' difficulties in establishing positive identifications with their peers and achieving a sense of 'belonging' thus crucially affect their identity formation, and remain salient until the end of the narratives.

7.2. Relationships with (White) Men

In addition to their interaction with family members and peers, the protagonists, as they reach adolescence and young adulthood, also gain various experiences with men, and as a result of their general lack of contact with Black or Métis communities these men are predominantly white. Their partners' multiply privileged social positioning as white, and sometimes middle- or upper-class, males has diverse effects on those relationships, rendering the intersection of aspects relating to gender, race, and class particularly apparent. For instance, the idea of achieving social advancement through marriage, the clashes of different perspectives on gender roles, and the lack of acceptance for 'interracial' couples in society are significant issues that affect the protagonists' relationships and their self-identifications. Furthermore, both novels depict the characters' victimization through forms of sexual violence and exploitation.

7.2.1. Sexual Violence and Exploitation

The rape scene in *In Search of April Raintree* is a highly crucial element of the story and at the same time extremely disturbing in the vivid details of its narration. Immediately after April's return to Winnipeg, she is abducted and brutally raped by three white men, who as it is later revealed have mistaken her for her sister, outside whose apartment they encountered April (Culleton Mosionier 127-132). The importance of the rape to the narrative rests in April's subsequent re-evaluation of her identification as Métis and in the impact of her discovery that Cheryl was a prostitute and the intended victim, on her relationship with her sister. The sexual assault itself is characterized by the intersection of race and gender subordination, as signified by the rapists' designation of their victim as "squaw" (128), "little Indian" (129), or "fucking little savage" (130). As Peter Cumming puts it, the scene is thus "about the rape of a Native woman" (315), and

> it is also about what white Europeans have done to Aboriginal peoples during the history of their contact. As a result, the disturbing graphic detail and the prolongation of the scene become the rape and politicization not only of April but also of the reader. The scene is disturbing because it is meant to be disturbing. (Cumming 315)

During the rape, April is "forced into [...] the identity of the 'squaw' – a figure
created to justify sexual and racial abuse" (Fee, *Identity* 220), and while she is
severely traumatized as a result of having been raped as a woman, she is also
deeply confused about having been raped as a Native woman:

> [...] I began wondering for the hundredth time why they had kept calling
> me a squaw. Was it obvious? That really puzzled me. Except for my long
> black hair, I really didn't think I could be mistaken as a native person.
> Mistaken? There's that shame again. Okay, identified. (146)

The fact that she scolds herself for using the term "mistaken" rather than
"identified" indicates that April is attempting to overcome her racial shame and
beginning to develop an understanding of herself as Métis. As Smulders
observes, however, her concern with the question as to how the rapists
recognized her Native ancestry also testifies to her continuous belief that to
some degree, Natives deserve being victimized:

> Sadly, April, having internalized the racism to which she is subject,
> initially shares her assailants' assumptions about the sexual availability
> of aboriginal women since she questions not the decision to victimize a
> 'squaw' but rather the decision to identify her as one.
> (Smulders, *Assault* 49)

When the question is solved later, April blames her sister for her assault, failing
to understand the reasons for Cheryl's descent into prostitution. Her shattering
disillusionment with their father and ensuing need to provide him as well as
herself with money for alcohol, clearly testify to Cheryl's victimization as a
Native woman – at the hands of Native men. In their last conversation, Cheryl
tells her sister: "Dad took all the money from me. He didn't know where it came
from. He didn't care where it came from. Mark DeSoto. Jack of all trades. Drug
pusher, bootlegger, stealing, breaking and entering, pimping, if it was illegal, he
was in it" (180-181). Her relationship with Mark is also connected to the rape, as
it is his ex-girlfriend Sylvia who incites the rapists to take revenge on Cheryl:

> *'Hey, squaw, I don't share my man with no one. You hear me, bitch?*
> *Especially no squaw.'*
> [...] *'If I'm a squaw, honey, what's Mark? He's as much an Indian as I*
> *am.'* [...] *I give her my coldest stare. I know I've won this round. She can't*
> *match my gaze.* [...] *'You're going to pay for this, Cheryl Raintree.'*
> *(*Culleton Mosionier 202-203)

While Cheryl powerfully defends herself against the conflation of racism and sexism in Sylvia's insult, she soon learns that Mark is a pimp and her journal further describes how he beats her and exploits her emotional vulnerability to force her into prostitution: "*My parents deserted me, April has left me, Mark… is a-no-goddamned-good-fucking-son-of-a-bitch. I have another drink. And another one. Let Mark use me, I don't care*" (204).

While such extreme forms of sexual and racial violence as those committed against April and Cheryl cannot be found in *Never Far From Nowhere*, Olive's narrative also describes a situation in which she is harassed and nearly raped. Having accompanied a man she has met at a club to his apartment, Olive refuses to have intercourse with him, to which he reacts by beating and sexually abusing her (Levy 31). It remains unclear whether there is a racist component to this act of sexual violence, for clearly any white woman could get into exactly the same situation, but the incident could be read as suggesting that Olive is considered more readily available on account of being Black.

7.2.2. Knights in Shining Armor?

The protagonists' relationships with men display a variety of aspects relating to their gendered identifications and their intersection with issues of race and class. All of the men they get involved with are white, with the exception of Cheryl's boyfriend Mark. Characterizing herself as "the kind of woman who might feel smothered by a man after awhile" (Culleton Mosionier 161), Cheryl is described as having only one relationship before Mark, although this may also be due to the fact that the narrator April is unaware of others. During her first year at college, Cheryl dates a white boy named Garth, with whom she breaks up, however, when she realizes that he is hiding her from his friends: "'[...] He didn't want [his friends] to know about me. That goddamned hypocrite. He's ashamed of me'" (94). While it seems that Garth has deep feelings for Cheryl, he is not self-confident enough to confront the social prejudices against interracial couples. This disappointment perhaps accounts for Cheryl's refusal to get involved in relationships with, particularly white, men subsequently.

April, as opposed to her sister, dates several men throughout her narrative, although she is initially reluctant to get close to males, partly as a result of the

fear induced by the "native girl syndrome" speech, and clearly also as a result of her negative experience at the DeRosiers. When the boy her foster sister fancies begins to demonstrate an interest in April (70), Maggie takes revenge by spreading rumors about April having sexual experiences with the two foster boys who also live with them, which result in April's complete social isolation and her abandonment by her only friend at school (73-74).

Thus, April keeps a distance from men: "My first boyfriend wasn't really a boyfriend. [...] We went to the school dances together, but in private, we never got real close to each other. If he had tried to kiss me, I would have ended it right there" (88). When she begins dating Jerry, one of Cheryl's college professors, she is similarly reluctant to make any physical contact, fearing the loss of her reputation as well as a pregnancy: "Good girls didn't do that kind of thing. Furthermore, and more importantly, if things got out of hand and we went all the way, there was the risk of getting pregnant" (95). Although April changes her mind about her celibacy, the discovery of the fact that Jerry is married disrupts their relationship.

Some time later April encounters Bob Radcliff, a businessman from Toronto who proposes shortly after they have met. While she claims to love him (102), it is apparent that her main reason for agreeing to this marriage is the upward social mobility it promises. This is indicated by her dispassionate description of her future husband as "gentle, good-natured, and very considerate" (100), as well as her reasons for rejoicing in her engagement: "I was so happy. From that moment I wouldn't have to worry about changing the spelling of my name[6] because it was now legally April Radcliff" (101). Furthermore, April reflects on marrying a rich man before even meeting Bob:

> If my future were to be successful and happy, I'd have to give the man in my life much consideration. I would not be able to afford to let my heart rule over my head. I couldn't marry for money or I'd be rich but I wouldn't be happy. So I'd have to find someone who was handsome, witty, and charming. (Culleton Mosionier 98)

Although April certainly likes Bob, her decision to marry him is based on his wealth, and the marriage is facilitated by her appearance: "April, through the

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[6] This has been part of April's plan to pass for white: "Raintree looked like one of those Indian names, but if I changed the spelling to Raintry, that could pass for Irish" (Culleton Mosionier 46).

mere chance of her skin colour, is able to use this privilege to marry up, for money; her rapid success reveals how unearned racial privilege actually works" (Fee, *Identity* 224). When April moves to Toronto with her husband, however, her mother-in-law makes her feel that she is not "on her social level" (103), and April's situation as a wife in a sense resembles her experiences as a foster child: "I suppose because of my childhood, it was easy enough for me to play second fiddle to a woman like Mother Radcliff, even to the point of allowing her to run our lives" (104). Thus, as Smulders suggests, "[i]nsofar as marriage, under the auspices of the formidable Mother Radcliff, functions as another foster placement, Mosionier emphasizes how the child welfare system socializes indigenous people to choose dependency" (*Assault* 47). This chosen dependency does not make April happy, but she does not consider abandoning it until she overhears a conversation between Mother Radcliff and Bob's girlfriend, which does not only reveal her husband's unfaithfulness, but significantly also her mother-in-law's racist motivations for disapproving of April:

> 'Didn't you notice her sister? They're Indians, Heather. Well, not Indians but half-breeds, which is almost the same thing. And they're not half-sisters. They have the same father and the same mother. That's the trouble with mixed races, you never know how they're going to turn out. And I would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of little half-breeds! The only reason I can think of why Bob married her after knowing what she was, was simply to get back at me. [...]'
> (Culleton Mosionier 115-116)

April furiously confronts them and immediately initiates her divorce, although she admits to herself that she has been similarly scared of "producing brown-skinned babies" (117). Thus, while actually sharing her mother-in-law's racist attitudes, April appears to be enraged largely as a result of the fact that she is considered a Native, which denies her the ability to live her chosen life as 'a white person.'

After April has returned to Winnipeg, she starts seeing her former employer Roger Maddison. While she fancied Roger when she worked for his law firm, his rude behavior precluded any personal interaction between them (92), but when they meet again, he appears to have changed radically: "This gentle, concerned side of Roger, I had never seen before" (140). April begins to meet Roger frequently after this encounter, but as a result of her rape she feels incapable of

becoming involved in a relationship, which gradually changes, and towards the end of the novel it appears very probable that she is eventually going to marry him. While Roger appears very charming and considerate to April, he is an extremely problematic character in the novel, and Smulders is certainly right in her assertion that

> the limits of Mosionier's activism are suggested at the end of the novel by the shadowy presence of the white lawyer, Roger Maddison, whose professional status as April's former employer and personal status as her prospective husband uneasily recall the intersections of race, class, and gender that have so problematized the question of identity for Métis women [...]. (*Proper Word* 96)

This set of problems clearly also concerns April's adoption of her sister's son Henry Lee, who is likely to experience some of the problems his mother had as a result of being raised by whites, even though April's final identification as Métis may be seen as a reason for optimism. Furthermore, Roger is depicted as dishonest, telling April, for instance, that he has an Ojibway brother: "'I thought it would make you feel like we had something in common'" (176). April, however, is not even enraged by this lie: "I squeezed his arm and shook it, pretending anger" (176). In addition, Roger seems extremely patronizing, telling April that she should "let go" and "let [her]self heal" (172) when he learns about the rape, for instance, or analyzing her relationship with Cheryl (185). While his intentions may be good, it seems that in her reliance on Roger, April is choosing dependency once again, and Peter Cumming's assertion that "Roger Maddison is a mistake" (312) in the novel is certainly justified.

In *Never Far from Nowhere*, both protagonists have relationships with white working-class men, which does not, however, render issues of social class insignificant. Olive is initially impressed with Peter on account of his left-wing political ideas:

> He talked about worker's rights, exploited labour and the right to strike. He was passionate about politics. [...] Then he talked about how black people were exploited and how we should get together with the workers to overthrow all oppression. (Levy 39)

It becomes clear in the course of the narrative, however, that he simply enjoys talking about a revolution that he never becomes active in implementing, and while he at first appears to Olive like "somebody who was going to change the

world" (40), he is only successful in changing her life for the worse. Olive's hopes concerning her future with Peter also seem to reflect a desired social mobility:

> One day he'd pick me up in a car. He'd just bought it and wanted to surprise me. [...] He said he bought it for me – so he could show me a new life. When he said that I knew I loved him. [...] I know this sounds mad, but he was like a knight come to take me away. (Levy 48-49)

The fact that Olive realizes that she loves Peter after he has presented her with a car is not related to material wealth as much as to her general desire to escape her frustrating life as a shopkeeper and "black sheep of the family" (6). Peter appears to hold the promise of a brighter future, although Olive's reliance on him is naïve and certainly contradicts her self-identification as "a strong black woman" (270). She soon discovers another side of Peter, however: "Once we started having sex, that's all he wanted to do" (49). Due to their failure to use contraception, Olive becomes pregnant and Peter agrees to marry her, which entails moving into Rose's apartment, as they cannot afford a place of their own. The wedding ceremony itself is disappointing and "a black fingerprint right in the middle of the white icing of the wedding cake" (85) appears to foreshadow the failure of their marriage. For after their daughter Amy is born, their relationship deteriorates rapidly. Olive is overwhelmed with her full-time job as a teenage mother and Peter fails to demonstrate any understanding: "And one night as she screamed, Peter just kicked my leg really hard and said 'Shut that fucking baby up!'" (98). His self-righteousness and arrogance towards Olive reach a first climax when the couple has a fight about child rearing practices:

> 'You shouldn't go to babies every time they cry, it spoils them. [...]' He said it in the same way as he did when he was explaining his stupid political ideas. Like he'd just read it in a book.
> 'She's only little!' I shouted, and went to go to her. [...]
> And he said 'Don't disobey me.' Like I was kid, like he was my mother. (Levy 113)

Clearly, Peter does not consider Olive his equal and during their next fight, in which she rightly accuses him of failing to look for an apartment and to acknowledge the fact that caring for their child is hard work, he insults her even more fiercely:

> 'You're definitely hysterical.'
> 'I'm not!'

> 'You are. You know what you look like to me? You look like a stupid
> hysterical black cow to me.'
> That's when I went for him. I had had enough. I made a grab for his
> throat. It was like an instinct. He looked surprised. (Levy 125)

The conflation of race and gender in this insult is apparent and it is understandable that Olive considers it unforgiveable and does not bemoan Peter's leaving, when some time later he returns to gather his belongings and to tell her that he is moving in with his girlfriend (141). The fact that Olive does not grant him visitation rights to Amy (149), however, reflects that she is bearing a grudge against Peter, but is justified given his refusal to pay child support. Thus, Olive's formerly considerate and idealistic 'knight' emerges as a failure. As opposed to Peter, Vivien's boyfriend Eddie is an extremely likeable character. His social background is similarly working-class, and Vivien is uncomfortable in the presence of his parents, who do not only seem to object to her being a "college girl" (156) and comment on her "fancy schools" (186), but also fail to conceal their racist attitudes:

> 'You're not English, are you?'
> 'I was born here,' I said as I sipped my drink.
> 'She's from Mauritius,' Eddie said.
> 'Oh...'Ere, Des, that coloured fella at work, where was he from?'
> [...] 'Oh, I know – lovely bloke – never any trouble. [...] He was Indian, weren't he?'
> 'Not him!' Eddie's dad shouted. 'Not the Indian one. That other darkie.'
> (Levy 155)

Eddie himself, however, treats Vivien with the utmost respect, and even helps Olive to obtain a driver's license and to retrieve her child after Peter has attempted to kidnap Amy. As Vivien approaches her graduation, however, her feeling of outgrowing him becomes increasingly obvious. When Eddie accompanies her on a guided visit to the art college Vivien has applied for, she is embarrassed by his behavior: "And in every room Eddie stood at the back making comments [...] which he thought were funny. People laughed at first. Then they only smiled, and by the last room I heard someone whisper 'Who's the oik?'" (Levy 217). On the way home, she accuses him of failing to read books or do anything but "drink beer, play darts and hang around with [his] dad" (219), to which he reacts by bringing a book when he next visits Vivien: "He pushed a book back down into his pocket and made sure I had seen" (228).

Despite Eddie's attempts at keeping up with Vivien, however, she breaks up with him after he has embarrassed her in front of her college friends by enlightening them on Vivien's working-class background and demonstrating his lack of education:

> 'It's so embarrassing. You don't get even simple things.'
> 'You've got so high and bloody mighty, Vivien, since you've been here.'
> 'Don't you want to learn anything, don't you want to get on in life – do something?' [...]
> 'I'm me, Vivien. I can't be anyone else. I can't be all clever or arty. I'm me. So is that good enough for you or not?'
> I looked in his brown eyes. The choice had become my old life or the new. I looked at him and said 'No, it's not good enough.' (Levy 268)

Thus, Vivien's understanding of herself as a social climber, due to her higher education and interaction with middle-class peers, involves a feeling of superiority towards Eddie and motivates her to terminate the relationship. As Andrea Levy has explained in an interview: "I loved Eddie, who's a sweet, lovely guy, but who just couldn't keep up with her. Just being frustrated because you know something else, you've moved on—it can be a quite painful process" (qtd. in Fischer 366).

In their relationships with men, the protagonists' experiences are thus characterized by the significance ascribed to racial difference either by their partners or their respective families and friends. Furthermore, the characters' subordination based on their gender is a recurrent theme in their interaction with males and frequently intersects with issues of race and class.

7.3. Institutional and 'Everyday' Racism/Sexism

While the protagonists' personal relationships with family members, peers, and partners, are highly influential to their understandings of themselves, the social environment in which their identity formation occurs also becomes manifest in their interaction with individuals with whom they are more distantly associated. These include characters who function as representatives of social institutions, such as teachers, social workers, police officers or lawyers, and whose status frequently involves a position of authority over the protagonists. Furthermore, their conversations with complete strangers reveal particularly the darker-skinned sisters' exposure to racism in everyday situations.

7.3.1. Teachers and Social Workers

In *In Search of April Raintree*, April's and Cheryl's apprehension from their parents clearly constitutes a deeply traumatic experience for them, and "Mosionier links the essential abusiveness of the child welfare system to the differences in race and class that grant Euro-Canadian women the authority to take Aboriginal children from their parents" (Smulders, *Assault* 44-45). Before being placed in foster homes, the sisters are taken to an orphanage supervised by nuns, who readily resort to physical punishment and immediately after their arrival cut off April's and Cheryl's long hair, an act which is repeated by their foster mother later, and which "represents their cultural deprivation within the child welfare system and foreshadows later episodes in the novel where defiance of Euro-Canadian authority provokes assault" (Smulders, *Assault* 45). Furthermore, the social workers who are in charge of the children are characterized by a general lack of understanding for their situation, and at times openly racist attitudes. One of the key scenes in the novel is the social worker Mrs. Semple's delivery of her speech on the "native girl syndrome" (Culleton Mosionier 62), after April and Cheryl have attempted to run away from their abusive foster home:

> '...and you girls are headed in the same direction. It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. [...] And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away, or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution, and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes. You'll end up like your parents, living off society. [...] Now, you're going the same route as many other native girls. If you don't smarten up, you'll end up the same place they do. Skid row!'
> (Culleton Mosionier 62)

Refusing to believe the girls' account of their maltreatment at the DeRosiers, the social worker confronts the children with a set of racist and sexist stereotypes. Clearly, she locates the causes for the tragic life stories she describes in a presumed racial disposition, and fails to recognize that the "native girl syndrome" is almost inevitably a self-fulfilling prophecy if people like herself, who are responsible for Native girls' well-being, pigeonhole them.

April, however, immediately understands this causal connection: "I thought if those other native girls had the same kind of people surrounding them as we

did, I wouldn't blame them one bit" (62). The numerous references to the speech in the novel testify to the impact Mrs. Semple's words have had on April and Cheryl. For instance, April refrains from partying with friends, claiming that they "made [her] think of Mrs. Semple's speech" (86), and later discusses with Cheryl their success in exceeding the social worker's expectations of them: "First, you do this and then you do that, and next you do this and next you do that, and she had our whole lives laid out for us. Well, we fooled her" (105). When Cheryl actually finds herself on 'skid row,' she writes into her journal: "*I've gotten into other things I bet Mrs. Semple never even heard of in her old 'syndrome speech'*" (204).

A similar speech is delivered to April by a guidance counselor at school, as a result of the rumors Maggie has been spreading about her:

> 'April, I've heard some disturbing things [...] I know that you're a foster girl, and perhaps that's the reason. You feel a psychological need to be loved. Well, what I'm saying is that you shouldn't be letting Raymond and Gilbert fondle you. [...] I know that you're doing well in your grades, and I want to warn you that a pregnancy would disrupt your life. [...]'
> [...] And had Raymond and Gilbert gotten the same speech? Probably not. Only girls got pregnant. (Culleton Mosionier 74)

Clearly, April is right concerning the fact that the speech is gender-specific and it appears similarly alarming that the counselor simply assumes that April's position as a foster child accounts for her sexually loose behavior, and fails even to ask her if the accusations are true. When April writes an essay about her abusive foster family, however, the counselor and one of her teachers believe her and initiate her 'rescue' from the DeRosiers (76). This example of benevolence on the part of teachers is not matched by any of her sister's experiences with the educational system. Cheryl, as a result of her positive self-identification as a Native, refuses to accept the dominant discourse on colonization, which her teachers consider a "disruptive attitude" (54). Her educators' attempts at silencing her voice include physical punishment, but she refuses to capitulate: "'Giving me the strap isn't going to change the fact that your history books are full of lies'" (54). Cheryl's determination and self-confidence enable her to endure her teachers' punishments, but it is suggested that the educational authorities' attempts at silencing her continue: "I wrote this

one piece in university, but they wouldn't publish it because they said it was too controversial" (153).

In *Never Far from Nowhere*, the protagonists' experiences at school are characterized by their teachers' low expectations of them. Olive describes passing her entrance examination to a grammar school she is not interested in attending, only "to show them that I could, that I wasn't thick" (Levy 25):

> My teacher at primary school said I'd never come to anything because I couldn't stick at things, see them through to the end. He said I gave up too easily – which was rubbish. They were wrong and I showed them. They all looked surprised when I passed and [t]hen they started giving me lectures on how I would have to knuckle down and work hard to keep up with the other girls. (25)

In an interview, Levy locates the reasons for these low expectations of Olive in her class affiliation, and describes her own experiences at school: "I would have to say it was class almost more than ethnicity. I don't know what it is now, but it really was class. You were working class and nobody thought that you could be bright" (qdt. in Fischer 365-366). Clearly, Olive's school career is also negatively affected by the living conditions in her parents' apartment:

> But there was nowhere to do homework at home. I couldn't put my books down for long without someone wanting to sit down or use the table or switch the telly on. And I couldn't go into the bedroom because it was freezing and Mum didn't like us to put on the electric heater for too long. It didn't seem to matter to her that it was my education. (Levy 26)

Her demoralization on the part of her teachers, however, is at least partly responsible for Olive's decision to leave school prematurely. Similarly, upon entering the sixth form Vivien is summoned to the headmistress' office and told that she will only be granted two, rather than three, A-levels and that she needs to take lessons in typing. The fact that her friend Carol shares this experience indicates that their working-class background has influenced the headmistress' decision: "'She thinks we're thick as shit, just 'cause we don't talk like [the other girls]'" (Levy 119). Furthermore, Vivien experiences problems in her performance at school, which she ascribes to the lack of intellectual input at home:

> I had no one to talk to about books. [...] My mum's idea of a good read was *Woman's Realm* and Olive's was a shampoo bottle. Everyone else in my class seemed to understand better than me. Georgina even went to see Shakespeare plays for fun with her mum. But I handed in essays

and my English teacher would shake her head and tell me not to give up my typing lessons. (Levy 214)

Vivien's art teacher, however, is very fond of her work and encourages her to apply for art college: "'You're good Vivien,' he commented, 'your work has a naïve charm. I think you'd like it at Canterbury. [...]'" (212). Thus, Vivien gains access to a higher education despite the obstacles imposed by most of her teachers' low expectations and the lack of parental support, both of which are issues predominantly related to her working-class background.

7.3.2. The Police and Other Authority Figures

In *In Search of April Raintree*, police officers are present during the sisters' apprehension from their parents, but in April's few ensuing encounters with the RCMP, they are generally depicted as friendly and helpful. When April and Cheryl have run away from the DeRosiers, a police officer finds them and drives them to a police station: "I had read about the RCMP. I knew they were good guys and they would listen to us" (Culleton Mosionier 61). Mrs. Semple arrives before April has a chance to talk to the policemen, but the image of them as "good guys" is not destroyed in the narrative. It is therefore surprising that when the RCMP arrive following April's rape, she is convinced that they will blame her for the assault: "[...] I expected that they would insinuate I had somehow provoked the rape. But the two officers were soft-spoken and kind" (134). Her belief that her rapists will not be punished for their offense against a Native woman, as evident in her question "What would I and other 'squaws' get out of my going to court?" (139), is equally proven wrong when the men are actually found guilty at court. The trial clearly also reveals certain problematic attitudes towards women, as the defender attempts to justify the crime by pointing to the rapists' conviction that their victim was a prostitute, and the attorney's summation constructs April as a "poor victim" (168): "I objected to being pointed out like that, and being called that 'poor girl'" (168).

In general, however, both the police and the judicial system are represented as benevolent in the narrative. The opposite is the case in *Never Far from Nowhere*, where the police are depicted unfavorably in Vivien's narrative, for instance when a policeman unreasonably tells her and her friends not to

obstruct the pavement although they are clearly not disturbing anybody (60), or when police officers intervene during the fight at the pub:

> They didn't take any answers. They pointed violent fingers and said 'Shut your fucking mouth.' I'd never heard policeman swear before. Then a young policeman, not much older than Peter, came up to me. He looked straight into my eyes without a hint of kindness. With pure hate. 'Out,' he spat, and moved on. (Levy 93-94)

These instances seem insignificant, however, in comparison to Olive's encounter with two policemen when they stop her on account of a minor traffic violation in Eddie's car:

> 'Look, I borrowed this van from my sister's boyfriend.'
> And he said, 'Oh yeah, what d'you give him then – a ride for a ride was it?'
> I thought I'd heard wrong. 'What?' I said.
> He smiled, then said: 'You got any drugs in the car?'
> I stared at him. 'No,' I said.
> 'That's odd, you niggers usually have a bit of ganja on ya.'
> He said ganja so hard I felt his spittle on my face. So I told him to fuck off.
> [...] 'Get that fucking bag out here and empty it, and keep you dirty black mouth shut.' (Levy 257-258)

They search Olive's bag, suggest that she is a prostitute, designate her as a "lippy nigger bitch" (258), and finally tell her to open the bag again, whereupon they discover a piece of tin foil filled with marijuana. When by the end of their interaction Olive is reduced to tears, begging them to let her go home to her daughter, they arrest her: "'Shut your black gob and get in the car'" (259). Lima's analysis of this key scene suggests that "[w]hen the cops stop Olive for a traffic violation and because she is Black, plant ganja in her bag to take her to jail, it is racism plain and simple" (Lima, *Pivoting* 68), appears to overlook the sexism in the insults. It is not "racism plain and simple," for when the policemen allege that Olive has been "looking for custom" (258) or refer to her as a "nigger bitch," they are clearly abusing her not as a Black person but as a Black woman. It is not surprising that Olive's helplessness in the face of this outrageous injustice overwhelms her, and that she is infuriated by her solicitor's subsequent suggestion to plead guilty (272). As a result of this racist and sexist incident, Olive abandons her hopes of establishing a future for herself and her daughter in England, and resolves to move to Jamaica.

7.3.3. The Unkindness of Strangers

Both novels provide examples of Cheryl and Olive being subjected to everyday racism in the form of verbal offenses by strangers. While their respective lighter-skinned sisters are able to evade such insults, they are constantly reminded of their racial difference and the hostility it entails on the part of many members of mainstream society. As April lacks insight into her sister's daily life for most of the narrative, there are few references to Cheryl's exposure to everyday racism, but these suggest that it is not unusual for her to be insulted:

> Sometimes, service was deliberately slow. Sometimes, I'd overhear comments like 'Who let the Indians off the reservation?' Or [...] guys would make comments to us, as if we were easy pickups. None of us would say anything, not even Cheryl, who had always been sharp-tongued. (Culleton Mosionier 98)

While these comments constitute a new experience for April, it seems that Cheryl is used to them. The fact that she does not react despite her usual quick-wittedness could be read as her being silenced, but might simply suggest that she chooses to ignore them rather than to engage in presumably fruitless confrontations that are unlikely to change racist attitudes.

When April invites her sister to Toronto where they attend her mother-in-law's party, the Radcliffs' friends' reactions to Cheryl are "worse than [April] expected" (106):

> 'Oh, I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you?' one asked.
> 'Women,' Cheryl replied instantly.
> 'No, I mean nationality?'
> 'Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians,' Cheryl smiled sweetly.
> (Culleton Mosionier 107)

While in most contexts, Cheryl positively identifies herself as Métis, she consciously avoids the term in this situation to emphasize the commonalities she shares with the woman who attempts to construct her as Other. As Fee suggests, this reaction reveals the flexibility of social positioning:

> But when her chosen identity – even one she is proud to assert – threatens to limit her, she resists it. She does not take the bait of the exclusionary question, but asserts that the similarities between her and her racist questioner are as important as the differences, and she demonstrates that identity is a tool to use in negotiating ever-changing social relationships, rather than a trap or a fortress.

(Fee, *Identity* 217-218)

In *Never Far from Nowhere*, Olive is similarly depicted as being subject to racist remarks in her everyday life, and even Vivien is aware of this circumstance: "[...] Olive said that one day she met two [skinheads] on the stairs and they stared right at her, in her eyes, and started laughing. Then as she walked by them they said 'Fucking wogs'" (Levy 15). The fact that Vivien does not only remain untroubled by such insults, but even comes to be largely accepted as a member of a skinhead clique testifies to the privileges associated with her lighter complexion. This is also evident in Olive's encounter with Eddie's father, who despite having commented on Vivien's ethnic background, apparently does not consider her as Black until Olive appears on his doorstep:

> He stared at me and I watched his smile fade, the corner of his mouth slowly closing up until he looked spiteful. [...] 'Ooohh,' he said for about five minutes. 'You're Vivien's sister.' He frowned. 'You don't look like her. He never told me you was a–' He stopped himself just in time, but I knew what he wanted to say. (Levy 256)

At the unemployment office, Olive is insulted by a man in a room full of bystanders, none of whom shows any reaction:

> Then this big fat white man came in and stood at the back of my queue and started shouting. [...] I looked at the man and he looked at me. 'What you looking at, fucking coon bitch?' he said. [...]
> I looked around me, but no one was taking any notice. It was like it was just me and him in the room. I kept thinking of all the things I should have said to him. [...] I should have said…but there isn't anything you can say to a white man that's as bad as *coon bitch*. (Levy 178)

This insult again demonstrates the intersection of racial and sexual subordination, and strikingly Olive, who is depicted as self-confident and outspoken in most situations, is silenced by this verbal attack. Her claim that the English language does not provide her with a term for a white male that would match this insult against a Black woman, however, constitutes in itself a powerful critique of the racist and sexist discourse in British society.

The protagonists' experiences in their everyday life, with strangers as well as with the representatives of social institutions, thus demonstrate their marginalization on account of the differences ascribed to them in relation to race, gender, and class, which intersect in various forms. While in many contexts, Vivien and April are privileged due to their physical appearance, which

allows them to evade racist offenses, they also repeatedly experience assertions of their racial difference.

8. Conclusion

In Search of April Raintree and *Never Far from Nowhere* present powerful accounts of the impact the intersecting forces of race, gender, and class exert on ethnic minority women's identity formation in 20th century Canada and the UK. Their juxtaposition of the dissimilar experiences and attitudes of a lighter- and a darker-skinned sister, respectively, growing up in predominantly white surroundings and therefore largely excluded from a community or positive role models with a similar background, creates multifaceted images of the struggles involved in coming of age as a working-class 'woman of color.' Employing the form of the double Bildungsroman and incorporating elements of the passing narrative, the narratives depict whiteness as a dimension of privilege that the respective lighter-skinned sisters attempt to appropriate, and raise complicated questions concerning not only the relationship between racial affiliation and the achievement of upward social mobility, but the interplay of privileges and subordination associated with social categories of differentiation.

The protagonists experience the intersections of race, gender, and class on various levels in their social interaction with relatives and peers, in encounters with figures of authority and strangers, as well as in their relationships with men. In both novels, the relationships between the sisters deteriorate as a result of their different racial identifications and the respective lighter-skinned sisters' attempts at achieving social mobility through assimilation, which is contrasted with and contradicted by the darker-skinned sisters' politicized notions of ethnic pride. The hostility of their social environments, along with constant assertions of their difference and attempts at their silencing, affect the darker-skinned sisters to a far greater extent and influence the ways in which they come to understand and position themselves. The characters' self-understandings, however, undergo significant changes in the course of the narratives and varied experiences lead April and Vivien to a final epiphany, which promises their reevaluation of hitherto assimilationist stances, and their sisters to an ultimate withdrawal from society. These narratives of positive and negative identity formation incorporate and adapt numerous elements of the 'traditional' Bildungsroman, such as the theme of generational conflict, which is characterized by a strong cultural and racialized component in the texts.

On other levels of social interaction, the characters' relationships with peers are overshadowed by the sense of not fully belonging to a group by virtue of race or class, and relationships with white men are frequently complicated not only by the males' personal attitudes, which are at times racist and sexist, but by the challenges imposed on interracial relationships through social pressure. Additionally, the subjection to institutional and everyday racism is depicted as having extremely adverse effects on the characters' identity formation, and frequently intersects with sexism, as in many contexts, the characters are subordinated specifically as Native or Black women.

In thus representing the *Bildung* of minority characters, the texts can also be considered as promoting a kind of intercultural Bildung in their readers. *In Search of April Raintree* was among the first literary texts dealing with the Métis experience that reached a remarkable audience, and since its publication has been widely taught in high schools and universities. Similarly, Andrea Levy has confronted a considerable readership with the experiences of immigrants and their descendants in Britain, and thus contributed to the increasing acceptance of Black British writing as part of the literary canon. Clearly, both texts evoke a high degree of reader identification and represent powerful and nuanced critiques of the marginalization and subordination of the frequently homogenized 'women of color' in Western societies and thus raise awareness of the multitude of challenges faced by those who, in their formative years and beyond, experience the conflation of racism, sexism and 'classism.'

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10. Index

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Identitätsbildung kann ein besonders schwieriger Prozess sein, wenn man wie die Protagonistinnen von Andrea Levys *Never Far from Nowhere* und Beatrice Culleton Mosioniers *In Search of April Raintree* in einem Umfeld aufwächst, in dem man aufgrund sozialer Unterscheidungskategorien wie Race,[2] Gender oder Klassenzugehörigkeit marginalisiert wird. Während ersterer Roman von den Töchtern jamaikanischer Immigranten in London erzählt, handelt letzterer von Métis im kanadischen Manitoba, doch die kontextuellen Unterschiede treten angesichts der zahlreichen Gemeinsamkeiten der beiden Werke in den Hintergrund. Im Zentrum der Erzählungen stehen jeweils zwei Schwestern, die sich durch ein wesentliches Merkmal voneinander unterscheiden: ihre Hautfarbe. Dieses Merkmal wird zum Ausgangspunkt für unterschiedliche Identifikationen, denn in ihrem von Weißen dominierten sozialen Umfeld streben die jeweils ‚hellhäutigeren' Charaktere nach Assimilation, während ihre Schwestern versuchen, sich als Métis bzw. Black British zu positionieren. Durch die Gegenüberstellung dieser unterschiedlichen Identitätsbildungsprozesse können die beiden Texte als postkoloniale Doppelbildungsromane mit weiblichen Protagonistinnen verstanden werden.

Zunächst erfolgt daher eine ausführliche Auseinandersetzung mit der literarischen Gattung des Bildungsromans, denn was einen solchen im Detail ausmacht wird von LiteraturwissenschafterInnen unterschiedlich definiert, und die verschiedenen historischen, regionalen und kulturellen Kontexte in denen Bildungsromane entstanden sind, erschweren allgemeine Aussagen über die Charakteristika des Genres.

Ähnlich komplex gestalten sich auch das Themenfeld des Postkolonialismus und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge zu Identität. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit kommt hier dem Konzept der Intersektionalität zu, demzufolge sich unterschiedliche Kategorien der sozialen Positionierung, wie Race, Gender oder Klasse, in der Erfahrung und speziell auch in der Marginalisierung von Individuen multiplizieren.

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[2] Der Begriff ‚Rasse' evoziert im Deutschen Konnotationen in Zusammenhang mit dem Nationalsozialismus und wird daher vermieden. ‚Race' bezeichnet eine soziale Konstruktion von Unterschieden zwischen Menschen, die die Grundlage für Rassismus bildet.

Auf der Basis dieser theoretischen Erwägungen erfolgt eine vergleichende Analyse der beiden Romane, die in Hinblick auf unterschiedliche Lebensbereiche der Protagonistinnen demonstriert, welche Erfahrungen sie in diversen sozialen Kontexten mit Rassismus, Sexismus, und Klassendiskriminierung bzw. dem Zusammenspiel dieser Formen der Subordination machen, und wie sich diese Erfahrungen auf Bildungsprozess und Entwicklung eines Selbstverständnisses auswirken. Dabei sind zahlreiche Parallelen zwischen den Texten und Variationen ‚klassischer' Themen von Bildungsromanen, wie etwa jenem des Generationenkonflikts, erkennbar. Außerdem wird deutlich, dass die jeweils ‚dunkelhäutigeren' Protagonistinnen schwerer von unterschiedlichen Formen von Rassismus und Marginalisierung betroffen sind, was es ihnen erschwert sich sozial zu positionieren und letztlich ihren Rückzug aus der Gesellschaft, in Form des Suizids bzw. der Entscheidung zur Emigration, im Sinne negativer Bildungsheldinnen entscheidend beeinflusst. Die Erzählungen ihrer jeweiligen Schwestern sind von deren, teils durch die Hoffnung auf sozialen Aufstieg motivierten, ethnischen und sozialen Assimilationsversuchen geprägt, die sie schließlich aber aufgeben. Ihre Bildungsprozesse können insofern als positiv verstanden werden als beide am Ende der Romane ein neues Selbstverständnis konstatieren. Die Gegenüberstellung eines positiven Bildungsprozesses mit einem negativen verdeutlicht in beiden Texten nicht nur die verheerenden Auswirkungen von individuellem und institutionellem Rassismus, sondern ebenso die signifikanten Unterschiede zwischen Individuen innerhalb der oft als homogene Gruppe gedachten ‚Women of Color.'

Sowohl *In Search of April Raintree* als auch *Never Far from Nowhere* sind stark autobiographisch geprägt und haben seit ihrer Veröffentlichung eine umfangreiche LeserInnenschaft erreicht. Indem sie die Vielfältigkeit marginalisierender Erfahrungen und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Identitätsbildungsprozesse von Black Britons und Métis darstellen, erfüllen sie auch die von Bildungsromanen häufig eingeforderte didaktische Funktion in Bezug auf ihre LeserInnen.

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