

# Mother Nations and the Persistence of “Not Here”

BY DINA GEORGIS

*Le but de cet article est de comprendre l'imaginaire et le rôle psychique de la mère dans la construction de la nation. L'auteure examine comment l'intériorité façonne les identités nationales et comment on se réfère à la psychanalyse dans les narrations historiques et culturelles.*

While nationhood and identity are key to Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies, the field of is now at a crossroad, bringing various theoretical traditions into tension with economic and sociological theories. Feminist theory and psychoanalysis are two theoretical frameworks that have been introduced to postcolonial studies in the last decade but have entered the field independently of one another. The Frantz Fanon renaissance<sup>1</sup> of the last decade has foregrounded the relevance of psychoanalysis to the field. Simultaneously, many feminist thinkers have taken up postcoloniality in terms of its relationship to gender and sexuality,<sup>2</sup> but the scope of this scholarship has been primarily ethnographic and socio-political. And while psychoanalytic thought is beginning to get introduced to questions of nationhood and gender, the area of study has hardly been exhaustive.<sup>3</sup>

Established in feminist postcolonial studies is that embedded in the formation of the nation, especially colonized nations, is a maternal and feminine trope. Indisputable is the idea that imperial power has been forged through gender (and class) relations. Most studies, which have predominantly employed a discursive analytic, have pointed out that inherent in many colonial narratives, is a sexual and gendered subtext. Specifically, colonial explorers and travelers' account of the land was routinely inflected with overtones of maternal femininity and female sexuality. The land, which symbolically is assigned the role of providing nurturance and protection for its people is not only female but also invites imperial intervention, rescue, possession, or rape because it falls short of its responsibilities. As a symbol, however, the female body has not only been deployed to sustain western fantasies of imperial domination of the “third world,” it has also been deployed to sustain nationalist regimes within nation-states. Nationalist discourses have configured the land as pure and maternal, devoted, and sacrificial, yet vulnerable. The land and the maternal figure, often conflated, are the sites of reparation from western corruption. Also circumscribed as the site where authentic culture is reproduced, the nation must rely on the mother not only

to transmit culture and tradition to her children, it depends on her allegiance to tradition to uphold the integrity of the nation.

This article, however, will not rehearse these arguments; instead, it will look at how gendered constructions of nations are phantasmatic<sup>4</sup> because they are psychically constituted. I would argue that the success of nationalist movements and racist colonial strategies has been built on our psychic attachment to the phantasmatic nation.

Hence, the central concern of this article is to understand the imaginary and psychic role of the mother in the making of the nation.<sup>5</sup> It is also concerned with how interiority shapes national identities and how psychoanalytical concepts are relevant to cultural and historical narratives. By bringing the work of Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott (who both write extensively on the psychic and symbolic role of the mother) to postcolonial questions on national attachment and community, as they are raised in Dionne Brand's *In Another Place Not Here*, this work will offer a psychoanalytic reading of how the nation comes to be constituted through gender.

Questions of national attachment and community run through the entire narrative of Brand's novel. *In Another Place Not Here*, which is divided in two sections, “Elizete, beckoned” and “Verlia, flying,” is about love between two women and between two nations. Each woman tells her story from her perspective. The stories parallel each other and narrate each woman's relationship to her mother, the land, and lovers. Their lives however are opposite in many ways: Elizete who grew up in the Caribbean and worked the fields for as long as she can remember is in a loveless and abusive relationship with a man when she meets Verlia who has lived in Toronto most of her life and is middle class, intellectual, urban, and lesbian. The women nevertheless connect and in that connection their past opens up before them as do their ties to the nation. But for both Elizete and Verlia, their ties are to two places: to the Caribbean and to Canada. Their relationship to each

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other explodes their ambivalences to both places. For postcolonial subjects, attachments to two, rival national mothers if you will, have meant fraught identifications and the re-formation of the national symbolic. Brand's story demonstrates the impossibility of living psychically in one place because the pull and hope of "another place" or another mother haunts postcolonial subjects. This work will, therefore, read the novel through psychoanalytic concepts that are relevant to the maternal relationship because it assumes that our connection to places has resonances with a maternal symbolic.

For Melanie Klein the maternal relationship is the central figure in the formation of our phantasmatic origins and symbolic relations. Despite traditional mythology about the maternal relation, at the core of a child's imaginary relationship to the mother are phantasies of violence and hate. Klein suggests that our psychic structures are configured by violence; the mother is the object who allows us to gauge and work through its terror to achieve love.

Since the nation is imbued with a maternal symbolic, it also is a violent formation. All beginnings are then violent, be it the subject or the collective. And furthermore, all beginnings are maternal. Hence, the maternal nation, which is the symbolic projection of mother as provider and nurturer, psychically functions as that which gives us care while simultaneously, since mother always fails, threatens to take it away. Our identification and love for the nation is therefore riddled with terror, violent disidentification, and subjection.

#### **The mother-nation and the maternal symbolic**

The mother, most would agree, is a cultural emblem of abundant or unconditional love and self-sacrifice. Symbolically, the nation comes to stand for the mother. In her essay, "Love, Guilt, and Reparation," Klein says the following about the relationship between mother and country,

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By a gradual process, anything that is felt to give out goodness and beauty, and that calls for pleasure and satisfaction, in the physical or the wider sense, can in the unconscious mind take the place of this ever-bountiful breast, and of the whole mother. Thus we speak of our own country as the "motherland" because in the unconscious mind our country may come to stand for our mother, then it can be loved with feelings which borrow their nature from the relation to her. (1948a: 333)

Klein's claim suggests that the meaning we give to our nations must be understood in terms of the maternal relationship. For Klein the mother is an important figure because not only is she a symbol from which other objects borrow their nature, she is, prototypically, the first object in the world to which we attach and as such she is our first symbolic relation; moreover, she provides the conditions for symbol formation. To achieve love then is a complex process. According to Klein, the development of the ego in relation to the mother and to other objects, such as the nation, is a process that involves hate, guilt, and reparation. To appreciate this achievement and its impediments, we have to understand what is at the heart of Klein's instinct drive theory, namely our phantasmatic relation to the world.

Love, as we come to know it, is the outcome of the struggle between the death drive and the life drive. The two instincts are mutually inseparable and in arbitration from the beginning. Directed inwardly, the aim of the death drive is self-destruction. However, as Klein explains:

In order to escape from being destroyed by its own death-instinct, the organism employs its narcissistic, or self-regarding libido to force the former outward, and direct it against its objects. (1948b: 250)

To hate its objects, the child performs what Winnicott calls "dramatized fantasy" (89) wherein the child turns inside out and projects its destructive compulsion. However, terrified by its destructive and sadistic impulse, the infant anticipates retaliation from its object.

Klein describes infant anxiety as the phantasmatic outcome of the death drive and the foundation of symbol formation. Although phantasy emanates from within, it "offers a commentary on instinctual life and links feelings to objects" (Mitchell 23). Sadistic phantasy in relation to the mother is the child's primary object link. The child desires to devour its mother. The sexual organs, which stand for the mother, are what the child seeks to destroy; as such, they become the focus of the child's anxiety. To master this anxiety, the ego must "make other equations" (1948c: 220). Toys and play, are the new objects of the alternative equations and thus the alternative objects of a child's sadistic phantasies. Because they stand in for the mother, they are the symbolic link to the outer world and form the basis of a child's interest in new objects and symbolic formation. Through play and practice, the child learns to "[make] good in real life what has been hurt in fantasy" (Winnicott 89) and develops a loving relationship to his or her mother. However, if a child's destructive impulses are impeded by strong censures the child cannot bring into phantasy the sadistic relation to the mother's body. Premature defenses against sadism follow and the ego ceases to develop a phantasy-life and a relation with reality. The development of the ego requires affective relations with the objects around it so that its sadistic

impulses are allowed to express themselves in sadistic phantasy. The absence of sadistic phantasy and anxiety precludes the child's development of love towards the mother, and eventually other external objects.

For Klein, anxiety is the necessary component of symbol formation and the precursor for existence in the social world. In fact, if a child's sadistic phantasies are curtailed such that not enough anxiety is expressed, as in the case of the psychotic, there is limited symbolic formation, including language (Mitchell 21). Both Klein and Winnicott emphasize aggression in the development of symbol formation. Winnicott's position on aggression is that "it is not something to be cured; it is something to be noted and allowed for" (91). Nevertheless, aggression must also be harnessed and sublimated and for Winnicott this is achieved by providing "a good enough" environment in which the mother plays a critical role. (101) The "good enough" mother allows her child to develop its symbolic relationship to the world by setting up the conditions that would enable the infant to express its sadistic phantasies while simultaneously reining in its aggression in order that he or she recognizes that the world is not for it to destroy. Her care can only be "good enough" because it is contradictory and frustrating. Failure and ambivalence then mark an infant's relationship with the mother.

So far I have established that the mother plays a central role to symbolic formation, both at the level of language and social relations. She is paradoxically our link to our internal world, in that she is the object of our phantasies, but because of this role she provides the conditions that allow us to work through our connection to her and links us symbolically to the external world. The mother then brings us into a very specific relationship with the world and in this sense, as Klein claims, that a country "can be loved with feelings which borrow their nature from the relation to her" (1948a: 333). She functions as the object that incites symbol formation and is a symbol for other relations such as our relation to our country or nation. She is the first teacher of interpersonal relations and as an idealized figure of love and sacrifice she reproduces the idea of a nation symbolically. But the nation does not just resemble the mother symbolically it has similar functions. It replaces the mother as the object that provides protection and, as a phantasy of collective identity, the nation is the glue that connects us to others.

Our attachment to the nation, however, like our attachment to the mother is imbued with difficulty and struggle. For if the mother produces and characterizes the nation, then all that is embodied in her phantasmatic role must also belong to the nation. As such it is not inconceivable that our attachment to the nation would also be inflected with frustration and sadistic phantasy. If we agree with Winnicott's formulation, expressing aggression toward the nation would be an achievement. Perhaps, the problem with most of our nations is that they do not provide the conditions for their subjects to express aggression. But

like the mother, the nation is never enough, only "good enough." A mother's success in mediating the child's ability to sublimate its aggressive phantasies is always an incomplete project. The relationship with the mother marks both a failure within her and within the child; the child must abandon its aggressive impulses for her and thus fails it own self. She, on the other hand, encourages the child's aggression against her but cannot possibly meet his or her sacrifice with enough love. Since we are susceptible to subjection and seeing failure, perhaps colonial domination has left national subjects feeling that their nation has been less than good enough. Hence, when a seemingly better mother comes along, we are susceptible to her in the sense that we will subject ourselves to the conditions of a new mother and in the hope that she will prove to be a better one.

### Home and the persistence of "not here"

In Brand's *In Another Place Not Here*, persistent attachment and ambivalence to two nations is evident in the stories of Elizete and Verlia. In fact, their persistent attachment begets persistent ambivalence. "Not here" for the two women is to the Caribbean and to Canada. Bruised by difficult maternal relations, they search for the good breast in the nation. The women, however, hover psychically between two places wherein neither is good enough. Each place renders them hungry for the other. Elizete and Verlia, in different ways, expect that the nation offer them consolation and rescue from their tired and beaten souls. Instead, they find refuge in each other, even if it is for just a brief period. Unable to meet their demands, the nation, their mothers, and love fails them; love is ephemeral, home is impossible, and identity is fraught in all places. However, while Elizete comes to recognize failure and persistently lives her life, Verlia's unsatiable longing for *another place* destroys her.

Failure and violence from the beginning pervades the lives of both women. It comes from within the fraught histories of their internal worlds and from the external circumstances of the geographies in which they occupy. In the narrative, various worlds collide: the past and the present, the lives of the two women, and two national histories. Doubleness, in fact, permeates the entire narrative. The story, which chronicles the histories of two women and their relationship to their mothers and to each other, is also an account of their individual struggle with loss and displacement within and in between two nations. Doubleness also structures the narrative. The story of their childhood

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maternal relations is set underneath the story of their love relationship, which is in turn entangled by their exile. The parallel narratives, although opposite in many ways, mirror one another in that the violence and loss of their early displacement at home reflect their national displacement.

In *Another Place Not Here*, the nation stands for the mother and the mother stands for the nation. In the absence of her unknown mother, Elizete looks to the samaan tree to take her place. "A samaan" she tells us, "is a tree with majesty and I think of this samaan as my mother. She wave from afar and the sun pass through she, and she was my keeper. Until the woman I was given to come home from the field the samaan tree was my mother" (17).

The tree is a significant symbol at several levels. Transplanted from somewhere else, the tree is not indigenous to the Caribbean. It was one of many trees and other wild life that was brought in from places like India during European colonialism. In Arabic, Samaan is a common forename that originates from the word *samaa*, which means to listen. The Arabic name is not surprising given Arab and Islamic influence in India. The tree itself grows very large, expands widely at the top, and spreads out at the bottom in a web of roots. Elizete not only looks to the land for maternal protection and a listening ear; the tree she attaches herself to represents both cultural hybridity and the interference of colonization on the land. Having made its roots now in the Caribbean, the landscape of the country is permanently changed. The land, like Elizete, has more than one mother and "here" has been a different place for a long time. The nature of the people's attachment to the land thus embodies the wounds of colonization. Nevertheless, Elizete turns to the land for comfort as she turns to her less than good enough mother for the same.

Although Elizete turns to the land, she is forced to keep her distance from it. When she was old enough "to boil water and not catch the house on fire," (17) Elizete was made to work the field. She learns all about the plants because she is close to them, but she doesn't know their names. Elizete's mother couldn't pass on the names of the plants to her because her mother before her didn't teach her. This mother, as opposed to the categorical mother who facilitates her children's relation and attachment to the symbolic world including the land and the nation, is unable to do that for her daughter. She does, however, offer an explanation. She says,

when she great-great-great-ma come here she was grieving bad for where she came from. And when she done calculate the heart of this place, that it could not yield to her grief, she decide that this place was not nowhere and is so she call it. Nowhere. She say nothing here have no name. She never name none of her children, nor the man she had was to sleep with

and she never answer to the name that they give she which was Adela. (18)

In a state of mourning for the place she came from, and lost to a life of slavery we can safely assume, this woman cannot attach to a new place. Her alienation is expressed through her refusal to bestow language on the land. Since language gives meaning to things, the word Adela chooses to refer to the land is "nowhere." Elizete remarks, "with that [name] none of the things she look at she take note of or remember or pass on" (19). Nowhere implies that the land can't be recognized as a place, and any meaning that could be attached to it is foreclosed. Her descendents inherit the legacy of loss, alienation, and being in "nowhere." And when one is living in nowhere, "elsewhere" or "another place" becomes something for which one yearns.

Adela then refuses to stand for the new nation. In her insistence not to teach the names of the plants, she declares that she is not of this place and that her body does not represent its order. Also, in this refusal, she disengages herself from reproducing the symbolic order of the country. She cannot be symbolically associated with the land and cannot be complicit with her children's attachment to it. The new land is not a place she can represent. Elizete, nevertheless, longs to know the names of plants because she is sure there are meanings behind them. She says, "I know their face. I know there is names for things but I can not be sure of the truth of them" (19). Adela could not hide the face of the land and she could not hide her own face from her children. Her descendents, despite her efforts, are thus attached to both her and to the land that is their home. Elizete knows the samaan tree and she knows by name the great great great grandmother of the woman they gave her to. Even though Adela did not give her enough, it was enough to want more. In Elizete's address to her foremother, she says, "Adela, the samaan tree was my mother. She spread and wave and grow thicker. Is you I must thank for that. Where you see nowhere I must see everything. Where you see all that emptiness I must fill it up" (24). In between all the emptiness, Elizete is "determined to love this [place] and never to leave" (25).

But Elizete does leave. Even though she is determined to love her home, she dreams of leaving. Elizete longs for another place despite the fact, as she says, "I didn't have nowhere in mind except *not here* (my emphasis)" (9). But the "not here" she wants to escape is the oppressive conditions of her life. "Not here" is a psychic space. The life that was given to her left her not wanting "nothing big from the world" (4). She never fought for anything and she couldn't know her wants because they were hammered down to silence. Between the abuse from the woman they gave her to and then from the man they gave her to she settled for emptiness. "Not here" is a refusal to settle for the life she was given and the history she has inherited. Haunted by the "trans-generational haunting" (Rose) of

her foremothers', who because of their displacement and loss could not provide her with the conditions to form symbolic attachments to her country, her assertion for "not here" is against living in a place that you think of as "nowhere."

Although Elizete wanted to love her country, her capacity to develop her love was undermined by the historical conditions of her life, her foremothers, and the phantasies of her country. When Verlia enters her life, she is no longer able to repudiate the desire for living and loving, nor was she able to contain her ambivalence toward her mother, her man, her nation, and her lover. Referring to Verlia, she remarks, "She open me up like any morning" (5). And describing the effect that Verlia had on her life, she says, "I see my chance out of what ordinary, out of the plenty day when all it have for a woman to do is lie down an let a man beat against she body.... And it wasn't nothing Verl do or say or even what Verl was or what Verl wanted...." (4). Verlia provided her with the one condition for opening her life that neither her mother nor Isiah, the man they gave her to, could give her. "Is nothing that draw me to [Verlia] but that and the way she want nothing from me and the way she brand new and come from another life" (10).

Elizete could love Verlia because she had the freedom to hate her. And she did hate her. She hated her for her freedom and her privilege. "I could not help but think that I was the one who would carry the sack into the sea and out, I was the one ploughing the sand, I was the one going to stay and she was playing because she could leave this island anytime. For this I had to find hatred for she" (77). Hate was not a word she ever used to describe either Isiah or the woman they gave her to. In Verlia she "achieves" hatred for them. She remarks,

I take [Verlia] for everybody—my mother, the samaan [the country], and Isiah and the woman they give me to ... I wake up in the night and ... think the flesh I lay down next to is all I hate." (76)

In this capacity, Verlia comes to stand in for the symbolic mother with whom she achieves ambivalence not only for the mother who gave her birth but for all the figures in her life with whom she had symbolic maternal attachments, including her country, but fall short.

Leaving the violence behind her, Elizete goes to Canada, the place where Verlia goes to when she leaves her mother country. In Canada, however, Elizete does not find the freedom that Verlia's middle class life represents to her. When she arrives, she is abandoned to the streets without shelter, she is hungry, and passers by look away. Here she is reduced to giving up her body for drunken strangers. In this country, the walls are seamless and encompassing. There is freedom and plenitude for some but not for all. She remarks, "Here there were many rooms and no place to live. No place which begins to resemble you" (63). In

Canada, Elizete sees how her identity is back home. Yet, she says, "if she could recognize something it would be alright." At home she was looking for names to things that felt meaningful. Here she's looking for meaning in things that have names. Recognizing lack in all places, Elizete's resigned expectation of her new home is that it be "good enough." "Here she began to love whatever held everyone still, like heavy rain or snow storms or bus strikes" (67) Looking for things to love allowed her to survive the nagging persistence of not here and the memory of another place. Hence, when the nice social worker with the salary and the luxury to romanticize home tells her to "Go home, it's not a place for us" (110), Elizete rhetorically asks herself, "She know anything about cane, anything about Isiah, anything about Verlia *flying off a cliff* (my emphasis)?" (110).

In Canada, Elizete stops dreaming of an *other* place because "Rescue would be too much to ask of anywhere" (71). And yet she persistently lived even though death seemed to make more sense. In the narrator's words,

She wanted to go off to another life. This one had just about run it down. She did not know why her body kept going, why it insisted on surviving. (107)

Verlia, however, kept dreaming until she could dream no more. As a child, she dreams so much she is uncertain what events were actually happening.

She dreams that she is running so fast she cannot see her legs ... she dreams that she is in the ocean swimming ... she dreams that she is laughing ... she dreams big fish everywhere." (128)

Her dreams however are not completely her own because her mother has her aunt read them for *wey wey* and share them with the family. Her family "who held grief in mouthfuls" (123) and did not know "how to protect her or themselves or find enough food to eat" (122). But although Verlia dreamt, she never slept. Verlia was unable to "remember ever sleeping soundly or without fear" (121).

[She] fell into dreams when she was tired from listening for the hesitation in the frog's throat ... that her dreams were fitful, frantic, squeezed into breaths of exhaustion and they were fought for between sleep and caution ... that she was trying to get away from them, trying to wake up in another place. (129)

Verlia chose *another life* so that she could sleep and never wake up. She found freedom from fear by *flying*.

While Verlia's presence *beckons* Elizete to live and survive through struggle, Elizete's presence in her life beckons her to die and rest. Verlia finds life exhausting. As an adult, she only slept when nothing was happening. She

couldn't love Elizete for long because her love for the people compelled her to devote her life to the work of "the struggle" and "the Movement." For that higher love, she walked away from two women. She falls for Abena because she admires her revolutionary spirit and then leaves her because she is "Not enough" (111). Elizete knows that in the end she was also not enough for her lover. But of course nothing was enough for Verlia. "Enough" only existed in her imagination and as Elizete points out, she "was sure of what she make in her own mind and what she make didn't always exist" (7) She believed that in Canada she could be the kind of "Black girl that is dangerous. Big mouthed and dangerous. That's what she came here for" (157). So she joined the Brotherhood and then the Brotherhood let her down. At the island, she wanted to free the field workers from the hands of exploitative landowners and imperialism.<sup>6</sup> It didn't happen, so she left flying off the cliff. She believed that she would love Elizete forever. But this also didn't happen. Love did exist for Verlia but she walked away from it for another place.

Before Verlia walked away from Elizete, Elizete was that other place she arrived at to get away from her life in Canada. The Caribbean, however, was not just any other place it was her homeland. Disillusioned with what brought her to Canada in the first place she remembers the tamarinds and the poui tree (193). The sight of a woman, who she had seen last one day at work, made her miss the motherland. But what symbolizes home and the land for Verlia is the tired and vulnerable body of a black woman. When she makes her return to the Caribbean she is renewed and invigorated by the expectation of belonging to a new movement. She meets Elizete in the cane field. Limbs scarred from working the land her entire life, Elizete is both "earthbound" (202) and a reminder that the struggle must continue. She resembles the woman Verlia had seen last in Canada before she came. They, like all mothers, are both strength and weakness.

Verlia never thought she would want to go back home. She hates nostalgia and sentimentality (182). She did not want to look back, only forward to a new life. When she moves to Canada at 17, she wants to sleep and wake up to a new life and be there for good (134-135). But when she arrives to this new country, her aunt, and new mother, "doesn't bother to name any of the landmarks" (137), she feels that she is a "liability" (137) to her, and she and her family are the only Black folk in Sudbury. When in Toronto, she doesn't look back at Sudbury and when she returns to the Caribbean, the only place she ever looks back at, she forgets Canada and wants to live in Elizete's room forever (201). Verlia only remembers what is necessary in the moment. When she first arrives to Toronto, she says to herself, "This is where I'll live. This is where I'll make my life. This is who I'll forget. This is what I'll remember" (197). And yet, her whole life is tortured by her inability to forget. Unable to rid herself of her childhood fears, her days are persistently sleepless. Verlia goes

flying off the cliff because she cannot cope with her memories and her loneliness. Wanting to be "straddled" by Elizete's "wayward legs" and liking "the weight of her, solid and permanent against her," "Verlia awoke feeling lonely" (201). In Elizete she saw hope for a new life. She wanted Elizete to give her both meaning, a reason to live, and safety in the world. The narrator says,

*She knew she was safe with a woman who knew how to look for rain, what to listen for in birds in the morning, a woman who loved to feel her face melting in the sun in the morning through a window. She needed a woman so earthbound that she would rename every plant she came upon. She needed someone who believed the world could be made over as simply as that ... and simply doing it.* (202)

But of course no woman, no mother, no nation could fill these shoes for Verlia. Elizete, herself motherless and looking to know the names of plants, is unable to rename every plant for Verlia and introduce her to a new symbolic by which to live. Verlia also resents the fact that Elizete needs to be rescued and insists that she cannot do that for her. "I am not a man," she declares, "I cannot take care of you like that" (72). But for Elizete, Verlia was her "grace" and it is because of this grace that she felt she could begin the work of rescuing herself. Verlia was "like a drink of cool water" (3). She awoke in Elizete a thirst that she didn't even know she had. And yes she did want more of that cool water.

Verlia and Elizete were symbolic mothers for each other. But each woman had a different relation to the maternal. Verlia wanted Elizete to embody the good breast to obliterate badness. And while badness was in the world, she could not sleep. Elizete cherished the taste of the good breast, welcomed its grace and with this grace she survived the contradiction of love and hate. Elizete's achievement is her recognition that there is no "other place," there is only "here," and that every "here" is a violent place for which love is possible.

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Although this work does not contest the branch of postcolonial feminism which suggests that the gendered nation is a patriarchal construct, a psychoanalytic reading of the gendered nation forces us to think differently of how patriarchy gets interpolated onto the nation. The patriarchal nation privileges the maternal and the feminine while simultaneously debasing it. If we agree with Klein that the nation stands for the mother and our relationship to the mother or the maternal figure is one that involves the violence of both attachment and ambivalence, we can see how our attachment to it can render us susceptible to its subjection and to sadistic phantasy. A psychoanalytic reading of the nation also challenges our inclination to

romanticize or idealize the maternal symbolic or demand from it the impossible.

In *Another Place Not Here*, Brand demonstrates the complexity of our relationship to the nation. Her protagonists project a maternal symbolic to the nation but this symbolic is constituted by a multiplicity of factors. Inside the nurturing, protective nation is sexism, racism, nationalism, poverty, and nauseous privilege. Furthermore, our relationship to all these things involves difficult memories, anger, and ambivalence while simultaneously having attachment, fond memories, and nostalgic yearnings to these very things.

The novel also illustrates both the failure and success of living in the tension of these contradictions. In Verlia, love cannot tolerate ambivalence and hate repudiates all attachment. Her love, however, inevitably reveals ambivalent “slippages” (Bhabha) when *here* is no longer enough, either because it is too colonized, too racist, or too apolitical. The post/colonial condition exacerbates our inclination for not *good enough*, especially when *another place* seems to offer a promise of better love. Elizete however is beckoned to hate when she meets Verlia. As she tastes love, she begins to hate all that life has taken away from her, a mother, a country, a home, and a lover. Elizete’s story can be perhaps be read as a story of what it means to come into love.

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<sup>1</sup>For studies on Fanon see Gordon *et al.*; Reed; and Seyki-Otu.

<sup>2</sup>Among these studies are works such as McClintock; Stoler; Yuval-Davis.

<sup>3</sup>Among these studies are works such as Fuss; McClintock; Rose; Spivak.

<sup>4</sup>In this paper, all references to “phantasy” are Kleinian. For Melanie Klein, phantasy is not a wish fulfillment or a dream but as Juliet Mitchell explains, it “describes the human being’s vast elaboration through perceptions and experience” (22) of biological instincts and drives. Phantasy links our drives, or our internal world, to the external world vis a vis an imaginary connection. I will expand on how this happens in the body of my article. As a child develops, however, the content of his/her phantasies changes. In other words, an infant’s primary phantasmatic relation to his or her mother, usually the first external object an infant encounters in the world, undergoes a complicated process which transforms the configuration of the relationship. Similarly, the phantasmatic nation is also an imaginary relationship shaped by psychic processes. Again, this point will be made clearer in the body of the paper.

<sup>5</sup>The central role of the mother is of course not categorical, but prototypical since she is the primary caregiver and, as

a result, the cultural signifier of nurturance. The maternal, in this sense, has symbolic significance both on subjectivity and sociality.

<sup>6</sup>Although Brand leaves the place where Elizete lives and Verlia comes to is left nameless, the events of the revolution allude to Grenada at the time of the American invasion against the People’s Revolutionary Government and the assassination of Maurice Bishop in 1983. The revolution, which had popular support from workers and farmers and a socialist vision, fought against U.S. imperialism. Verlia’s story ends in the battlefield refusing to surrender at the hands of the U.S. military and commits suicide by “flying off the cliff.” The namelessness of the land and the revolution is not incidental. Brand is likely suggesting that this struggle is not an isolated one, nor is Verlia’s attachment and defeatist response to the “failure” of the revolution unusual.

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## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### In the Village

Those crones know a thing or two.  
They read signs the way  
farmers calculate clouds,  
sailors decipher sunrise and stars.

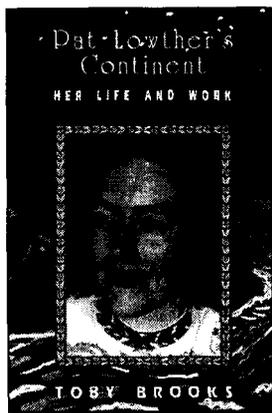
Even barren, Tia Juana senses  
the neighbor's child hides sudden breasts,  
Pedro follows her home from market....  
Just before the birth, she is there.

When my mother lay down for a nap—  
she never slept in the afternoon—  
and I went to wake her for supper,  
Dolores followed me toward the bedroom.

From the far side of the threshold  
she knew: *La senora esta muerta*.  
I, facing age, must still learn to decipher  
tea leaves, new lines on my palm, your eyes.

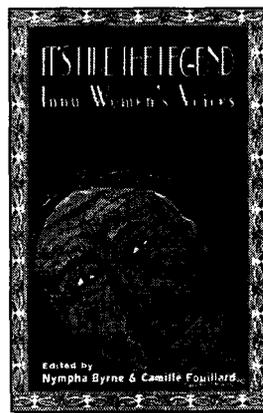
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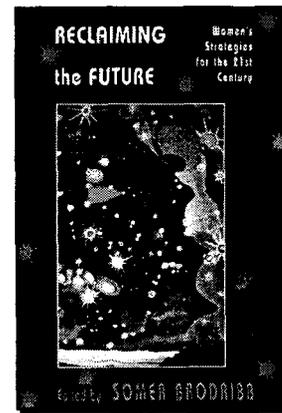
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