



Di Halstead, *Dad's a Pom and Mum's Part West Indian* (2002) LED prints, 255mm x255mm

## Hybrid Bodies: the Third Space – “Caribbean Elizabethan”\*

Homi K. Bhabha’s articulation of the third space acknowledges the presence of the hybrid body and enables a “space between” to acknowledge and express cultural mixes. “Caribbean Elizabethan” represents the cultural mix of my heritage and enables a discourse around the hybrid body my heritage represents. As New Zealanders, our heritage is generally mixed, but an articulation of this third space has not been generally present and this has left a void or a severe lack in the discourse of our cultural history and our discourse of the present.

This lack impacted on the lives of my ancestors. My great-grandfather was born in Barbados; he married an English woman in Timaru, New Zealand. Barbados is an island located in the Caribbean Sea, off the coast of Florida. The islands that are located between Florida and Venezuela in the Caribbean Sea are called the West Indies.

Thinking about these islands, Alex Haley’s book and film *Roots*, which came out at the end of the 1970s, came to my mind. The information contained in this film made me aware of the significance of my West Indian heritage and suggested to me how life might have been for my ancestors. In a book called *Postcolonial Knitting*, Jean-Pierre Durix discusses *Roots* in his essay on “Post-Colonial Representations of the Myth of Origin”:

One of the recurring questions raised by post-colonial writers is that of the origins. Any exploration of issues involving identity or memory is linked with this point of reference, with this sense of a fixed anchoring in a fundamental representation. Alex Haley’s *Roots* popularised among African Americans and the wider world this hankering for African origins, which might help to assuage their feeling of having been cut off from their ancestral land. Yet the reality of confronting the continent where the returning descendants of former slaves did not feel at home and were not necessarily made welcome contributed to opening their eyes to the fantasised nature of such roots. The search for origins may lead to a deadlock when these are envisaged as non-problematic.<sup>1</sup>

Searching for my own origin, I learned that my great-grandfather died in Wellington, when my grandfather was only ten or eleven years old and so his experiences and culture were not passed on as they might have been. I began researching, reading and making the Caribbean part of my art practice. I became aware of how little I knew and my attempts to find anything were fraught with difficulties. Admitting that I do not know, and describing this, was an expression of this lack.

My image called *Tracing* (2000) was deliberately made on tracing paper with white cotton thread and pin pricks. The work is vague, indistinct and representative of the little understanding I was given beyond the atlas. Bridie Lonie wrote in the catalogue that accompanied my exhibition also entitled *Tracing*:

Tracing paper is stitched onto a map; the shape is that of the Gulf of Mexico, with archipelagos and its immediate invocation of the diasporas of slavery, and its complex routes through Africa, the Americas and Britain. This stitching is therefore also mapping, tracing is also copying, mimicry and inverted relations. The process draws on women's histories through the associative powers of the thread and the shared rituals of tea drinking.<sup>2</sup>

Descendants of Caribbean people in New Zealand are a very small minority, therefore discussing my cultural heritage feels tenuous and difficult. Without any links to this cultural heritage it felt like a gaping hole. I needed to acknowledge this hole before even attempting to climb out. The notion of Bhaba's "space between" and the representation of the 'hybrid' acknowledge racial mixes and creates a third space for the articulation of one's cultural mix to occur.<sup>3</sup>

Without this articulation I see the absence of Caribbean cultural influence in my family as a lack, an empty space, a cultural loneliness. Rather than coming from a place of knowledge and experience, I am coming from a space of lack with a desire to fill it. Uninformed about my heritage, I was left with an empty space. The information received early in my life was limited to "you are part West Indian". I was afraid to ask if I was from India and should wear a sari at our primary school costume day to celebrate its Jubilee. Instead, I went as a squaw and put a feather in my hair. The unraveling of an identity took time and a subtle awareness of difference: the colour of my mother and grandfather's skin; and a childhood experience of getting an atlas and discovering where the West Indies were located. All I learned was where my great-grandfather came from and that he had probably jumped ship. Homi K. Bhabha believes:

The myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – ...in relation to the colonial stereotype functions to 'normalize' the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with this myth it was perhaps felt 'the less you know the better off you are' – perhaps it was unsafe to discuss my heritage. It was never said either way – it was silent. So silent! And even though New Zealand has people with West Indian descent, the irony was that the man next door was also part West Indian and that his much younger sister was in my class, but that was all that was shared. Silence . . .

In our secondary school art class in the 1970s it was proclaimed that New Zealand was without a culture, and Māori were the only ones that had hope of a culture – and even that, non-Māori were claiming as a way of identifying their ‘New Zealandness.’ Most conversations included sport but that was all. Dance was mostly ‘pop’ dancing, ballroom, ballet and different forms of Celtic dancing with, for example, African dancing being excluded. Suburban New Zealand seemed dead and desperate because little else was discussed. At least I felt that way. The cultures of immigrants were not publicly celebrated or acknowledged. The discourse at this time enabled the disappearance of the many cultures that came to this country. Without any acknowledgment of these many cultures, it seemed as if only a dominant system allowed for certain topics to be discussed or certain forms of entertainment to be enjoyed.

Discourse, as Foucault theorizes it, is a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends.”<sup>5</sup>

My father immigrated to New Zealand in the 1950s from England but even coming from the land of the coloniser, his accent and customs were not accepted and this is an example of what Foucault discusses. There was immediately a disavowal of any former culture. Members of my family told of how fun was made of his accent; and how his ‘different’ farming of land and owning of land as an immigrant was criticised. These forms of disavowal became circular in the sense that both my father and the mainstream New Zealand culture he immigrated to were caught in a web of power endlessly repeated and perpetuated both by the empowered and the seemingly disempowered. The web of power is:

. . . distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior [and] points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds. Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities.<sup>6</sup>

I wonder if it was possible for my father to have avowed his own culture in stronger ways or was it left now for my generation? Thus it was not surprising that New Zealanders did not have a ‘culture’, although, ironically, it had and has a melting pot of cultures! Bhabha compares this disavowal to the lack of Freud’s fetish:

Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (making absence and difference) and metonymy

(which contiguously registers the perceived lack). The fetish or stereotype gives access to an “identity” which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. “This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defense, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence...” and “...the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division...” manifests as “the desire for originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, color and culture.”<sup>7</sup>

My disavowed heritage includes both colonised and coloniser. For example, the islands in the West Indies were colonised by many different European cultures. The British colonised Barbados. My great-grandfather and my mother married people from England in another English colonial country. A post-colonial text describes this as ambivalence, or:

. . . the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are “complicit” and some “resistant”, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject.<sup>8</sup>

My *Uncle Arthur, Ranji Wilson was an All Black* was made in 2002. It is constructed from a number of embroidery frames. Different coloured leather is stretched between the frames and they are placed on the wall in an oval shape. The leather stretched in the embroidery frames is made up of different shades of brown and black; and a white one is included. Old faded labels with experiences of hybridity typed on them are also included.

This series of work discusses my experience of hybridity or the hybrid body, as a New Zealander with an English father and part West Indian mother.

Salman Rushdie in his book *Imaginary Homelands* says:

A creativity which celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs . . . rejoices in the mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the pure. *Mélange*, hotch-potch, a bit of this and that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it.<sup>9</sup>

Here are some words that I have typed on old labels, which quote or describe my hybrid experience:

- Dark people should never wear red
- Coloured
- UNCLE ARTHUR, Ranji Wilson was an All Black, he helped choose the Invincibles and he did not play in South Africa.
- ?????????



- WEST INDIAN
- CARIBBEAN
- Part?????
- ????????
- Olive
- Sallow
- Cream, beige, tan, off white
- A touch of .....
- You're not ?
- You're not part West Indian
- Look at you
- AND look at your daughter
- Black white coloured brown mousy

*Uncle Arthur was an All Black... , [detail] (2002) embroidery frames, leather, suede, vinyl, old packing labels, approximately 1000mm x 70mm*

Elleke Boehmer discusses a similar experience in “Off-White: Creolite and Hidden ‘Difference’ under Apartheid”:

“Relaxed as they are, the friend’s remark catches the girl unawares.  
 -Your skin’s not really white, you know. Not *really*. Not white like ours.  
 Immediately the girl begins to blush.  
 -What d’ye mean?  
 - You know how your name’s funny. And things are different at your house.  
 [. . .] Suddenly awkward, the girl presses her arm against her friend’s.  
 - Look. Same.-  
 - Not.-  
 - White as you.-  
 - No way. Different.-  
 - What colour then?-  
 [. . .] - Yellow probably, - she finally says – Yellow like Javier.”<sup>10</sup>

It was my great aunt Ada who said that dark people should never wear red – she always confused me... so very strict – and she expected correct English – for a black woman who straightened her hair when I knew her... out came these very strong values “of the correct way of being, doing, saying...”

These values spoke to me of the coloniser rather than of my rather carefree New Zealand upbringing in the 1960s and 1970s. New Zealand was then beginning to untie “the apron strings of mother England”, to quote Tim Shadbolt.

The West Indian side of my family was successful: Aunty Ada was a respected public servant; she never married and was the first woman in the health department in New Zealand to head her section. At sport, my grandfather won medals for rugby league. The story is that Uncle Arthur, Ranji Wilson – no one spoke of how he got the name Ranji, it ‘seems’ like an Indian version of Rañgi, a Maori name – was an All Black and got into a fight. Either my grandfather or uncle had to stand down. And my grandfather ended up having to play league instead.

*Bajan Sunrise* (1998) is the first work that I made in an attempt to discuss my West Indian heritage. I found objects to be a way of describing a past that I did not really know much about. I decided to explore the cliché through the souvenir as a way of initiating my research. The tourist market is often the way we present our country to the world. At this time I was looking at the souvenir as a place to initially describe my New Zealand identity, particularly at the way we see the landscape in a postcard. For me tourism is very shallow and can describe a superficial experience and is often the present-day coloniser of land and culture. This enabled me to discuss the ambivalent relationship between the colonised and the coloniser.

Alongside *Bajan Sunrise* I exhibited a series of foldout postcards that I made discussing the nature of the postcard, tourism, the commodification and colonisation of land within New Zealand. The Jamaican sugar cane workers, sugar cover, sunhat, and the knitted doll were pieces that I found in second hand shops that I felt would describe my heritage. A tourist guide discussed how knitted dolls were sold at roadside stalls in Barbados. I photographed these objects, laser-copied them, partially reversed them, and I then scanned the laser copy and played with it in PhotoShop. Creating a shape or symbol that discusses the mix, like a shaker or a cocktail, *Bajan Sunrise* expresses the confusion between black and white. It discusses the exoticisation of a place I have never seen, at the same time suggesting ambivalence, a third space, the space of hybridity.

Janis Jefferies explains:

The concept of hybridity has often been received with suspicion partly because of its association with other fields. [. . .] In the *Turbulence of Migration*, Nikos Papastergiadis gives a wonderful example of what is most often cited as a hybrid: the mule the offspring of two “pure” species – the horse and the donkey. It is a particular infamous example because its own infertility served as a prohibition against mixture. A more complicated view of hybridity contends that all forms of cultural innovation and exchange produces hybridic forms. In other words cultural products and cultures are always in the process of hybridity.<sup>11</sup>

A hybrid cultural exchange presented in *Dad’s a Pom and Mum’s part West Indian* (2002) involve colour photographs of a cup and saucer found in a secondhand shop in New Zealand, but made in England with the title “Caribbean Elizabethan”. I found the yellow one first and a friend found a red and green cup and saucer in another secondhand shop in South Dunedin. The significance of the “Caribbean Elizabethan” title lay in the fact that it described both coloniser and colonised and my heritage. “Elizabethan” is an era but a very British era

and “Caribbean” relates to the fact that New Zealand and Barbados were both colonised by the English and my father came from England. This strong inclination towards the British always puzzled me until someone said that Barbados was very English.

The Martinican writer Edouard Glissant writes that “...merit is to reaffirm the lack of ‘authenticity’ or ‘purity’ of any notion of identity or origin.”<sup>12</sup> This is a very real precept when you come from New Zealand where most people are hybrids of some form or another.

Within the post-colonial field, there are significant differences between regions... [In] the Caribbean, [...] the process of conquest and colonization resulted in massive erasure of formerly existing cultural structures.<sup>13</sup>

The hybridity that resulted can be like a “palimpsest”, which is

[...] the term for a parchment on which several inscriptions had been made after earlier ones had been erased. The characteristic of the palimpsest is that, despite such erasures, there are always traces of previous inscriptions that have been “overwritten”. Hence the term has become particularly valuable for suggesting the ways in which the traces of earlier “inscriptions” remain as a continual feature of the “text” of culture, giving it its particular density and character.”<sup>14</sup>

I make use of the palimpsest in my work through auto-ethnographical references, tracing my ancestry and the passing of generations. But even in passing, in erasure or absence, the marks are still there and I feel a desire to fill a third space, another layer. The

*Bajan Sunrise* (1998) ink jet print, 1270mm x78 mm





hybrid, in my case disavowed, could perhaps be described as the amputee who still feels sensations in a part of the body no longer present.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, talks about a church (the Abbey Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, 1088-1804) in Cluny, France, that had been reduced to rubble after the decline of the vast Benedictine monastic order for which it had been the centre. When this dynamiting was ceased in the late nineteenth century, the village started to realise the value of what they had been destroying. The value in 1997 was that 700,000 tourists went to Cluny. Like the amputee who still 'feels' sensations in his phantom limb, a museum nearby holds the feeling in a virtual church through a 3D-computer recreation on videotape that shows the structure from all angles, while a Georgian chant provides the sound. The museum does for the site that which the church cannot do for itself anymore. The museum allows the visitor to transform the site into its very location. It becomes the key to unleashing the treasure.<sup>15</sup>

The possible analogy with the Caribbean is as the home of many simulated 'amputees'. As its people are from many places and go to many places, they are hybrids with connections from a range of cultures, linked through the feeling that the amputee has even though the limb is no longer there. These connections are what make up the whole. The connections in Adrian Piper's "Passing for White, Passing for Black" explains these disjointed challenges that are imposed on the descendant. Piper describes the challenge she faced with her black ethnicity:

The most famous and highly respected member of the faculty observed me for a while from a distance and then came forward. Without introduction or preamble he said to me with a triumphant smirk, 'Miss Piper, you're about as black as I am'...What I felt was numb, and then shocked and terrified, disorientated, as though I'd been awakened from a sweet dream of unconditional support and approval and plunged into a nightmare of jeering contempt. Later those feelings turned into wrenching grief and anger that one of my intellectual heroes had sullied himself in my presence and destroyed my illusion that these privileged surroundings were benevolent and safe; then guilt and remorse at having provided him the occasion for doing so . . . This turns you into something bogus relative to their criterion of worth, and false relative to their criterion of authenticity. Once exposed as a fraud of this kind, you can never regain your legitimacy.<sup>16</sup>

Adrian Piper although not black to look at, was claiming her heritage and was proud of it. The dilemma of the hybrid makes these kinds of experiences very real. How do you claim to be black when you are not and what are the consequences of being somewhere in between, neither one thing nor another? On the one hand the blessing of being part West Indian enriches my life and on the other hand I am left in an ambivalent state. An absence and a presence are the strongest ways that I can see of describing this. One is left with questions, of how you can truly represent that cultural absence. The body's 'hybridity' is today discussed

. . . with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'third space of enunciation'. Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate . . .<sup>17</sup>

Bhabha suggests:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or "purity" of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity . . . It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.<sup>18</sup>

Being a hybrid does not mean that we lose our identity or that the coloniser is empowered, but rather as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes-

...heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse to the past. [It does] not mean the result is not "authentic" or that it is wholly invented. Rather, I wish to underscore that heritage is not lost and found, stolen and reclaimed. It is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.<sup>19</sup>

The Third Space disempowers the dichotomies and makes room for possibilities. It does not negate what was or what is, enabling a cultural identity that has a future and allows cultural difference and ambivalence.

\* This article is based on a conference paper presented at the *Nga Waka* Art Educators Conference at the College of Education, Auckland (2003) and at the Caribbean Women: Realities and Representations Conference of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies Conference at the University of Wollongong, Australia 2003.

- 1 Jean-Pierre Durix, "Post-Colonial Representations of the Myth of Origin: E.K. Braithwaite's 'Coral'," in Corballis, Richard and Andre Viola, (eds), *Postcolonial Knitting*, (Antipolis: Universitey de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, France, 2000), 171.
- 2 Bridie Lonie, *Tracing: Di Halstead*, exhibition catalogue, (Dunedin: Otago Polytechnic), 2.
- 3 Homi K Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Ferguson, Russell, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, (eds), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, (London: MIT Press, 1992), 79.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* ( London and New York: Routledge 2002), 42.
- 6 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books,1990), 96.
- 7 Ferguson et al., *Out There*, 79,80.
- 8 Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 12,13.
- 9 From Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), 394 as referenced in Janis Jefferies "Midnight's Children: Salman Rushdie and the Translations of Hybridity in the Art Works of Zarina Bhimji, Yinka Shonibare and Hew Locke", presented at the Conference, "Fabrications and the Post Colonial", at Wollongong University, early December 2002,1.
- 10 Elleke Boehmer: "Off-White: Creolite and Hidden 'Difference' under Apartheid," in Collett, Anne, *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing*, No. 1 (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 2003), 62.
- 11 Janis Jefferies, *Midnight's Children: Salman Rushdie and the Translations of Hybridity in the Art Works of Zarina Bhimji, Yinka Shonibare and Hew Locke*, presented at the Conference, "Fabrications and the Post Colonial", at Wollongong University, early December 2002, 4. This paper references Nikos Papastergiadis' *The Turbulence of Migration* (London: Polity Press in Association with Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 182,183.
- 12 Corballis et al., *Postcolonial*, 171.
- 13 Ibid., 174.
- 14 Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 174.
- 15 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 169.
- 16 Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black", in Nicholas Mirzoeff, (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 1998), 353, 354.
- 17 Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 118.
- 18 Bhabha, *The Other Question*, 37.
- 19 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 149, 150.

**Di Halstead** is a lecturer in photography at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. She is a practising artist and has most recently shown her work at the Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin. She exhibits regularly in New Zealand and in Australia.