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Autor:	Kádár, Judit Ágnes
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JUDIT ÁGNES KÁDÁR
(SPORTS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST, HUNGARY)

Clashing Paradigms, Merging Knowledge Archives: Time, Cognitive Paths, and Transformations in Mixed Heritage Southwestern US Fiction

This paper addresses Indigenous versus colonial structures of time, memory, and trauma, and the question of how the linear chronological model of time is challenged by alternative understandings in contemporary writing by Southwestern mixedblood (Euro-American and Indigenous) authors. Blended cultural knowledge archives are available to these writers. Western ways of understanding have proved insufficient and unreliable, while Indigenous cognitive practices (dreams, visions, elders' guidance, following ancient ways) prove helpful. We can observe the psychological processes of turning 'conflicting blood' to 'hybrid potential,' utilizing the multiple knowledge archives and making decisions to prioritize one of these practices over the other(s). A variety of time dimensions appear in mixedblood writing: the Faulknerian "Edenic Past" of the pre-contact Indigenous past and the Colonial Period with its communal experience in the Jungian sense that runs as undercurrent. Recent past and family history form the next layer from which the present is not 'clear-cut,' but serves as a connecting medium over time. The term *Whakapapa* refers to nonlinear time, with relevant figures shaping each story. Central to these texts is the growing awareness of the paradigms, the cognitive opportunities revealed, and the role of language in shaping identity and consciousness.

Keywords: mixedblood; knowledge archives; Southwest; Indigeneity

Mixed heritage identity formulation in arts and literature is a less studied area of American and Ethnic Studies. The discussion of mixed race has certainly been neglected in academia, apart from the social reality of racial mixing and its proportionate growth over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the United States and Canada respectively. While for centuries colonization and racism walked hand-in-hand in public dis-

course in North America, since the 1960s increasing attention surrounds the reality of emerging mixed ethno-cultural and racial identities, while giving and gaining voice have become a new reality. Critical Mixed Race Studies are on the rise, but the sophistication of addressing art pieces or literary texts seems to be stuck in some academic forums at the celebration of mixed race and the otherwise rightful claim for voice and artistic expression. A critical evaluation and appreciation of literary texts on and by mixed race individuals is helpful. Meeting mixed-race people in the Southwest or having academic discussions on such literature equally have given me the impression of a lack of information, of proper approach, and, thus, of an understanding of the psychology of identity negotiation and related social encounters. Although North America is increasingly 'mixed,' a hybrid racial and ethnic population is the majority today.

Hybridity and mixed race are the focal point of increasing numbers of writings, though leading authors like Sherman Alexie, Gerald Vizenor, and David Treuer occasionally object to the discussion of authors' ethno-racial affiliation. In *Ethnic Positioning in Southwestern Mixed Heritage Writing* (2022), I argue that the author's hybrid cultural roots are assets that enable him/her to have a special sensitivity for life experiences that incorporate the blended cultural archives and the often painstaking experiences of being born into a mixed family. My focus here is the unique set of Indigenous and white European origins that integrates the family history of colonizers and the colonized, and especially the psychological processes attached to the personality and identity development that post-colonial novels and visual art pieces depict and reshape. Here my focus is the cognitive paths we can observe and the special time layers visible in recent fiction, with the aim of highlighting the wonderful blend of Western and Indigenous approaches to time. The term 'mixedblood' used here refers to the specific pool of individuals with Indigenous (mostly Pueblo, Navajo, and Cherokee) and Euro-American heritage.

The Southwest of the United States, and New Mexico in particular, is a unique cultural terrain: Pueblo and other Native American and Euro-American blended heritage is widespread in the population and it is inseparably related to colonial history and postcolonial realities, perceptions, narratives, and reformulations of ethno-racial identity. Gabriel Meléndez is an expert on this special regional identity and explains its features in *The Multicultural Southwest: A Reader* (2001): The 400 years of European presence in the Southwest entails a tangible intercultural coexistence, creating a special cultural border zone with an overlay of cultures and crossroads of experiences. It is a region of intense transition,

a place of conflicting memories, where alternative views on the landscape, the natural and human environment, and the lingering impacts of conquest, dispossession, and pure survival have generated “a multitude of voices that impregnates the very air we breathe” (Meléndez 120). The Southwest is a unique ethnocultural arena with exciting cultural encounters and exchange, intertwining family lines, and a profound experience of social mobility. Before the 1980s, mixed-race individuals in the region were mostly stigmatized and excluded from power positions, although some could utilize their bridging and mediating social skills just for the very reason of deep understanding of two or three cultures.

The first book written specifically with a mixedblood focus came out in 1824: Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* and, although James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is not necessarily known for that focus, both it and his *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* (1829) provide mixedblood characters, who are obviously functional bridging persons, without children or much future, as the colonial agenda dictated. A mention of further novels may sound familiar to readers of American letters: Ann S. Stephens’s *Maleska* (1839), Walt Whitman’s *The Half-Breed: A Tale of the Western Frontier* (1846), John Rolling Ridge’s *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854), Bret Harte’s *Gabriel Conroy* (1876), Albert W. Aiken’s *The Indian Mazeppa* (1878), Mayne Reid’s *The Wild Huntress* (1882) and *The White Squaw* (1883), Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* (1884), Sophia A. Callahan’s *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (1891), Edward S. Ellis’s *Scar-Cheek, the White Half-Breed* (1909), and Mourning Dove’s *Cogewea the Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Mountain Cattle Range* (1927). What brought a major change was Darcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (1936), for this was written by a mixedblood author, and it was the first book focusing on a mixedblood protagonist. Most of the texts written by mixedblood authors are usually considered to be ‘Native writing.’ Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1969) and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), *The Journey of Tai-me* (2009), and *The Names* (1976) are outstanding examples. It was actually Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) that represented a revolutionary change of perspective: The central character Tayo is mixedblood, and his Indianness is seriously challenged in the context of post-Vietnam War personal dramas of mental and spiritual survival in a country that has little respect for its Native-born soldiers and still allows for racism in smaller local circles. Silko’s *Storyteller* (1981) adds to that focus from a very personal, autobiographical point of view as well as a female perspective that was also taken up in Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the*

Shadows (1983), Linda Hogan's *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir* (2002/2011), and then in Joy Harjo's prose text entitled *Crazy Brave* (2012). In the 1970s and 1980s, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), *The Death of Jim Lonely* (1979), and his *Fools Crow* (1986) continue the exploration of *The Surrounded*-like characters in the modern world. In the 1990s, a series of exciting novels by Louis Owens appeared: *The Sharpest Sights* (1992), *Bone Game* (1994), *Nightland* (1996), and *Dark River* (1999). These texts highlighted mixedblood characters whose quest for identity reveals a lot about the actual process of negotiation, its obstacles and triggering factors as well as the prospective benefits and potential risks of coming to terms with the so called 'hybrid potential.'

What unites these 'mixedblood narratives' is that they all discuss to some extent blended ethno-cultural heritage, conflicts, stigma, inhibitions, and frustrations related to that social existence, and the psychological feature of cognitive dissonance avoidance, in line with several personal factors. They are also narratives of re-Indigenization with a challenged return to Indigenous roots. Identity reformulation means ethno-cultural transits, fluidity, choices, and taking control of one's own narrative as well as the process of turning a presumably stigmatized identity into a self-conscious holder of valuable assets, a unique set of cultural attitudes, memories, and knowledge. These fictional characters select, adjust, and activate their ethno-cultural identity components through symbolic practices, such as participation in tribal practices and ceremonies, learning spirituality from elders and tribal peers, all related to Indigeneity, while also gradually understanding (as much as they have access to) their Euro-American roots, ancestors, and ways of thinking based on Western imagination. Throughout the process, there is a constant evaluation of the costs and benefits of selecting elements of ethno-cultural identity to emphasize or ignore, and it is only partly conscious. Another universal feature of these texts is racial de-categorization, breaking the binaries of race and thought. Furthermore, reparative justice is an aim in these stories; that is why they are often referred to as remedial narratives, bringing healing for historical and personal injustices related to being born into multiple races.

What I have found extremely exciting is the combination of genetic heritage that comes from the colonizer and colonized: families and lives that bear the hidden struggle of clashing paradigms and power relations, families where oftentimes the father or grandfather comes from a Euro-American background, with (un)conscious superiority attached to the

traditional notions of race, while the mother or grandmother is an Indigenous woman, with the epigenetics of being colonized and the turmoil and burdens of trauma, loss, and dispossessed lives that this entails.

In the 1980s, an emerging new discourse of identity was related to the Native American Renaissance, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, and multiracialism, leading to Post-Indianism of the 1990s. The latter concept characterizes many mixedblood people for two reasons: On the one hand, for centuries Indianism, the colonial and racially loaded discourse of ‘playing indjun,’ offered little benefit from Indigenous heritage. On the other hand, the term ‘mixed’ is confusing, raising the question of the extent to which an individual can be considered ‘Native’ or ‘white.’ This is the bad old blood quantum story. In the contemporary globalized world, especially for urban Natives, it is not a specific tribal affiliation that matters or one that can be easily related to, but more a broader, generic sense of Indigeneity that is certainly less clear and easy to capture in a simple identity definition. Many feel that the refusal of specific racial identification may release one from the burden of dealing with race as an obstacle in social relations, and the refusal to identify with a tribe or single Native or Caucasian identity is also a form of revolt. The 1980s mark a paradigm shift for the so-called identity narratives, and the change in public discourse and literature is mainly due to the constellation of ethnic revival, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and the rise of critical Indigeneity. Public discourse became celebratory of Indigenous cultures and increasingly open to the discussion of blended, hyphenated heritage. In addition, philosophy and academic writing also started to explore the interplay of race and class, liminality and fluid identities, performed identities as the expression of authority, control over one’s narrative and self-representation, and hybridity at the level of the individual in view of a culturally (racially) heterogeneous nation where social reality challenges the received notions of single identities and racial hierarchies.

Hybridity threatened to destabilize colonial power relations and thus was racialized in multiple ways. Attempts were made to close people into fixed categories of citizenship, color, attitude, and other features, and none of them worked well. We can observe such tendencies in colonial literature, and it is also visible how Postcolonial literature mirrors the challenge, the reality of nonbinary, unfixed identities, and how it actually facilitates the change itself. The way it may be transformative is depicted perfectly by literature: As Owens claims in his treatise on “the syllogistic mixed blood” (in Owens’s *Other Destinies*), the racially loaded colonial notion of ‘halfbreed,’ better put by Paula Gunn Allen as “conflicting

bloods" (in her *Skin and Bones* poems), can be turned into a 'hybrid potential.' This entails an empowering of the blended heritage individual and his/her right to self-definition, equal rights, and a value-based selection and fusion of cultural traits that the individual wishes to emphasize. In addition, this latter selection process is not fixed but may fluctuate and alter in the various life phases, due to the social environment, varying ethnic attachments, and the best interests of that person. As portrayed in the pages of recent fiction, old stigmas can be replaced by new sensibilities, and the writers give voice and authority to their protagonists to practice their Indigeneity or choose 'post-indianness,' to destroy binaries through participation, to get rid of the widespread sense of 'not-Indian-enough-not-white-enough-either' or 'half-and-half' notions of identity and become the 'masters in their own house': the conscious creators of a more comprehensive and balanced ethno-cultural identity. Over-generalizations do not work and each case and psycho-social adjustment and identity negotiation is different due to the diverse factors working in the background. Interdisciplinary approaches that integrate cross-cultural psychology, sociology, history, and literary studies promote a better understanding of such processes.

It is hard to find any overtly positive and 'happy ending' stories among these novels. The writers certainly feel committed to present the hardships, often tragic turmoil, potential risks, and mixed consequences that the individuals face throughout the partly conscious negotiation process that depends on the given person's ability to self-reflect and face cognitive uncertainties. Furthermore, the de-racialized texts in recent postcolonial fiction, followers of the Silko-Momaday-Gunn Allen tradition, depict the pattern of a difficult return to Indigeneity through ceremony and the birth of a new identity concept. Reconciliation is difficult for various reasons: One is mixed responses by tribal communities to the mostly urban mixedbloods, another is the gradually lost traditions, language, and cultural knowledge, and obviously a whole array of personal psychological and intellectual factors have a great impact too. However, what is shared by all mixedblood individuals is the opportunity to become aware of their potential to utilize their knowledge archives, cultural roots, and access to Indigenous and Euro-American cultural and family ties, to reconnect in their own way and turn their heritage into an asset value that may diminish the gap between their ego-recognized and socially-ascribed notions of identity, allowing space for change.

The opposition between Indigenous versus colonial structures of time and memory highlights the way the linear chronological model of time is

challenged by alternative understandings, in contemporary Southwestern mixedblood (Euro-American and Indigenous) writing. Owens writes:

I have learned to inhabit a hybrid, unpapered, Choctaw-Cherokee-Welsh-Irish-Cajun mixed space in between.

I conceive of myself today not as “Indian,” but as a mixedblood, a person of complex roots and histories. [...] I am the product of liminal space, the result of union between desperate individuals on the edges of dispossessed cultures and the marginalized spawn of invaders. [...] the descendant of mixedblood sharecroppers and the dispossessed of two continents. (*Other Destinies* 88–89)

Owens explains the unique ancestral set up and the associated special cognitive state of mind mixedblood persons acquire and then somehow cope with. What I would like to argue is that the reader of these texts may not be a mixedblood person, but can surely identify with the mindset for the very reason that Western ways of understanding have proved insufficient and unreliable, while Indigenous cognitive practices (dreams, visions, elders’ guidance, ancient ways) prove helpful as a return to authentic Indigenous ties. Although blended cultural knowledge archives are naturally available for individuals of mixed ethno-cultural heritage, readers can follow the fluctuation from monoracial and simplified, linear understandings towards a more complex way that allows for non-linear, non-limited ways. New Mexico is a unique space and regional literature by mixedblood authors and working with local artists of the same vein constantly evoke the presence of ‘core and confluence,’ the strong relation of personal and communal past and present. Visitors in the Southwest and readers of regional literature or viewers of local art can constantly feel four dimensions: the spatial dimension of roots and routes; stability and mobility and confluence; the historical dimension or ‘the confluence of civilizations’; the ethnocultural dimension of ‘being the crossroads’; and the spiritual dimension of the “Tricultural Psychéscape” that Gloria Anzaldúa discusses in her *Borderlands: La Frontera/The New Mestiza* (1987). In her poem entitled “To Live in the Borderlands,” Anzaldúa claims that

To live in the borderlands means you
are neither hispana india negra espanola
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;
To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the india in you, betrayed
for 500 years,

is no longer speaking to you
the mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the Anglo inside you
[...]
In the Borderlands
you are the battleground
where enemies are kin to each other;
you are at home, a stranger,
[...]
To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads.

This complex state of mind, the “Tricultural Psychéscape,” and the above-mentioned dimensions explain how the ‘confluence of civilizations’ is realized in the individual.

An example of the fictional presence of these dimensions – the confluence of time, space, and people of different cultures – is Joy Harjo’s lyrical memoir entitled *Crazy Brave* (2012), built upon four canopies reflected in the four parts of her autobiographical prose writing. The East is about beginning, the sunrise and the door to knowledge. The North stands for learning, difficult teachers, cold winds, and a prophecy. The West is about endings, the doorway to ancestors, and mental and spiritual tests. Finally, the South is about release, the newly acquired harmony of fire and activity. Harjo calls this journey into space and mindscape “my rite of passage into the world of humanity” (18). Although her journey seems linear in the sense that her westward mobility parallels her growing up, becoming mature and being able to cope with her reality, she constantly and increasingly feels close to her ancestors, the legacy of warriors, when painting, pursuing creative art. Her grandmother inspired her thinking. She was alive long before she was born, collecting the stories of the spirit realm. In contrast to that love-inspired *Whakapapa* connection that transgresses time, the experience of having an abusive father and some unrewarding relationships underlines the lack of love she needs to cope with and survive. Her newfound consciousness is the outcome of the struggles she describes, and it is partly related to getting conscious of her ethno-racial heritage, her empowering femininity, and becoming a skilled artist.

Harjo’s text is a pristine, sophisticated presentation of a mental and psychological development that is linear in the sense of time, increased consciousness and knowledge of how to handle the hurdles of life. It is also a highly artistic and lyrical presentation of the rhythm of life that the Native life cycle symbolizes. In that sense, Harjo combines Western and Indigenous knowledge archives, refuses the binary or prioritizes one over

the other, and pledges to follow her own path that integrates a deep understanding and appreciation for her ancestors as part of her present mind-scape formulating the way she approaches reality. *Whakapapa*, the New Zealand Indigenous term comes to my mind, where linear time in one's life is enriched by the nonlinear presence of certain ancestors, in order of their relevance. The otherwise traditional '*Buildungsroman*-ish' topos of learning, self-discovery, and earning a voice of her own is combined with another process that is related to ethnic identity: The emotional perplexity and psychic restlessness of an outcast mark the initial phases, where alter-ascribed identity is mostly negative, a burden on the young woman who feels no home in any culture. Then through her 'struggle of borders' and feeling of occupying the vacuum between two cultures, step-by-step she learns to live with perpetual transition and ambiguity, her mental and emotional survival skill, and also learns to juggle cultures. The latter sounds like a pragmatic skill of culturally hybrid individuals, while we can also observe her inner war of identifying collectivity. As Anzaldúa claims in her above-mentioned poem, "you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other, / you are at home, a stranger." The narrator's struggles with the incomprehensible sets of reference, the Indigenous and Western paradigms that clash and overlap in her mind but also press her to make silly choices, and she also knows that in the sub-conscious she attacks herself and tries to figure out how to cope with authority imposed on her, and then capture her own authority, her newly gained power.

Similar to Harjo's narrative, we can observe the psychological processes of turning 'conflicting blood' to 'hybrid potential' in these texts, and understand how one can utilize the multiple knowledge archives and make decisions to foster one of these components over the other(s). An example of the variety of time dimensions appearing in mixedblood writing is Owens's *Nightland* (1996).

Two half-Cherokee ranchers named Billy Keene and Will Striker find a dead man and a million dollars in the New Mexico desert, a discovery that leads them to a confrontation with their families' past and the *Nightland*: a place where darkness reigns. ("Nightland")

Let us take a closer look at the interesting time dimensions that appear in the pages of this book, which is on the surface a thriller.

First, there is a Faulknerian 'Edenic Past,' here a reference to the pre-contact Indigenous past, ancient times that in the Jungian sense run as an undercurrent, a romantic longing for the peace and harmony that today's

Indigenous people could never reach. I would relate this sense of a pre-contact past to tradition; that is, an overreaching layer of time that connects the Edenic past and the present. There are several references in the text to all the land and people being connected and “part of a bigger thing.” Also, spirituality and magic, symbolic phenomena like old Cherokee medicine or the spider web all refer to the traditional Native belief system. The brothers, Will and Bill, stand for tradition versus modernity, the latter carrying the potential risks of uprooting and loss of identity and social connections.

The next time layer is the Colonial Period and its lingering impact in the present. The *topos* of ‘cowboys and Indians’ here gets a new nuance: Cowboys were often queer in the revisionist postcolonial history and its remembrance, while Indians are the “Noble brown-skinned red man” (*Nightland* 234) who presents the “westerning,” that is, the birth of “half-breeds,” children of Indian, black, Irish, and Cajun parents. The mother is a “permanent resident in a different world, Indian country and her own house” (*Nightland* 34). The Cherokee father marrying the Irish mother in the family photo have no real connection with their sons who grow up in an estranged world, without proper connections, neither white nor Native enough, as the saying goes. The colonial space is mentioned as the land full of death and dried up rivers, *Nightland*.

Recent past and family history are the next layer. The writer plays a wonderful game with time here. For instance, Will was born and returned to live in the same room that now seems shrunken (36). Owens also offers a crime story, where Bill is killed by Odessa for money. Besides the personal part of the characters, the recent past here also means a postcolonial heritage of two types of genocide: the physical one depicted by the symbolic space of the Sandia Labs, the uranium mines that are killing Indians indirectly, and Trinity Site, on the one hand, and on the other Indian school, the space of intellectual genocide. These all lead up to the next time layer, the present, which is not ‘clear-cut,’ but in multiple ways is highly connected to the layers of the past. Chaos, disturbance, noise and entropy, mist of the mind are often mentioned throughout the text, and some characters are part of that chaos. For instance Odessa, the smart and evil woman, claims that she has “a PhD in genocide” (302), a weird contrast of value and inhumanity, similar to the parallel realities of our actual lives and the distorted reflection in the media or Disneyland and “weekend vision quests” (*Nightland* 169). The roots of the future are visible especially for the elderly, who can foretell the near future: Dangerous times are coming (61), they say. Ghosts and night walkers (131) appear in

the story, some positive and negative guides. In the disturbing reality and its even more disturbing cognitive projections, it is hard to tell the good directions.

There are three interconnecting phenomena here. Firstly, water is a conveyer of messages, life power, and dynamics between the layers of time. Rivers serve as a connecting medium over time, and the water in the well (e.g. *Nightland* 48), its cleanliness or lack signifies the vitality of a family or Native community. Secondly, the pattern of a horizontal journey turning into a vertical one that incorporates encountering the living past of that place is a recurring motif in this kind of fiction. Thirdly, remembering is fluid, and a unique way of selecting important figures of our past in a priority that is not linear, not related to the hierarchy of a family tree. The Māori term *Whakapapa* expresses that notion well. In Owens's novels, aunts and uncles often seem more influential than some parents, who might be missing or not even worth mentioning for their sin of neglect in the protagonist's view. Tracing one's ancestry in a nonlinear fashion in a taxonomic framework that links animate and inanimate, terrestrial and spiritual, is a newly recognized opportunity for the mixedblood who explores alternative cognitive ways.

Exploring the combination of Indigenous and Western notions of time, memory, and belonging in the context of Southwestern mixedblood narratives highlights a wonderful, less researched field that is becoming relevant with contemporary social changes. The renegotiated identities these novels present are the outcomes of an often painful journey, during which the protagonists learn how to take control over their own narrative and identity. Time is just one of the interesting factors where we can observe the blended knowledge archives, cosmologies, and cultural paradigms that mixedbloods possess, besides tradition and spirituality. Postcolonial literature allows for fluidity, liminal identities that are not necessarily tied in time, space, and definition. Furthermore, the past is not closed; memory is an integral part of knowing, along with dreams, visions, virtual homing, unusual connections with relatives in the past and present, and other cognitive processes that are not considered rationally conceivable in Western imagination. Literature may provide a ground for healing by opening these cognitive pathways and allowing a holistic approach to self-definition, not only for people of blended heritage.

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