MAKING HERSELF AT HOME IN THE WEST/INDIES:
THE GENDERED CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE WRITINGS
OF
MICHELLE CLIFF AND JAMAICA KINCAID

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, B. A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Valerie Lee, Adviser
Professor Ruth Lindeborg
Professor Abiola Irele
Professor Jacqueline Jones Royster

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

At the theoretical center of "Making herself at Home in the West Indies" is an exploration of Michelle Cliff's and Jamaica Kincaid's formulations of self as subject within a variety of cross-cultural contexts and their constitution of migratory, comfortable, and convergent subjectivities. This pattern of migratory subjectivities which originate in a West Indian location is different both in scope and influence from that of other diasporic women, for it is contoured by particular intersections of race, class and sexuality in newly independent societies. While these two writers reiterate many of the concerns raised by male West Indian writers a generation before, my emphasis is on the ways gendered locations affect the shape of their thematics.

These two women writers encode their experiences of exile in ways which affirm their connections to the oral culture and traditions of the place left. Framing their self-narratives within a West Indian tradition of storytelling, Cliff and Kincaid, as raconteurs, assume the authority to take liberty with other traditions of writing the self. Chapter One explores the ways in which autobiography and the Bildungsroman are creolized in Abeng and Annie John, connecting this talking-back to various coming-of-age stories. The relationship between coming-of-age and exile is explored in Chapter Two where I argue...
that in *Lucy* and *No Telephone To Heaven*, Kincaid and Cliff theorize migration and exile as performances of identity. Chapter Three focuses on the validation of maternal antecedents in bringing the writers to creative voice and examines the ways in which the orality of the mother's world is deployed by these two writers as a tactic of intervention. The final chapter argues that in *A Small Place* and *Free Enterprise* the two writers recover West Indian historiography so as speak more specifically to the heterogeneity of their experiences, and that in these two works, travel becomes as occasion to witness from a variety of vantage points. The study concludes with an assessment of the participation of these exilic voices in West Indian poetics.
Dedicated to Nyika and Kara,
my daughters who mothered me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All good things come from God.

I wish to thank my adviser, Valerie Lee, for her guidance and her encouragement, for her generosity with her time and with her books, and for her mentoring and friendship. I also wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the other members of my committee, Drs. Ruth Lindeborg, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Abiola Irele for their guidance, intellectual support and encouragement.

I am grateful to Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC) and the Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities (LASPAU) for supporting my doctoral studies.

I wish to thank my family and friends for their prayers, unbounded support and love. Finally, I acknowledge the patience and understanding of my daughters to whom this dissertation is dedicated.
VITA

May 10, 1957 ......................... Born - Castries, St.Lucia

1979 ................................ B.A. English, University of The West Indies.

1987 ................................ M.A. English, University of The West Indies

1989 - present ......................... Lecturer
                                          Sir Arthur Lewis Community College
                                          Castries, St. Lucia

1993 - present ......................... Research Associate,
                                          The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English

Studies in Caribbean Literature.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwik Kwak!: Narrations of the Self</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Talking back to the <em>Bildungsroman</em></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Negotiating Exile</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Slippery Tongues: Re/Claiming Orality as a Tactic of Intervention</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. W/Righting History</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinite Chronicles of the World and The Word</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

*Kwik! Kwak!*: Narrations of the Self

Oh but it should be laid out
and chronicled, crazy for all my life
with a place for all my several lives
daughter, sister, mistress, friend, warrior
wife.

Lorna Goodison, “The Last Poem”

Clearing Spaces

At the theoretical center of this project “Making Herself at Home” is the idea of the West Indian woman’s formation as subject within a variety of cross-cultural contexts and the constitution of a comfortable, convergent subjectivity. Home accrues a range of meanings in these various contextualizations. It relates to geographies: home is an island, a community, a house. It becomes a political term: home describes Africa, the New World and the nation-state. It is an ideology: home is the imagination, a safe, nurturing space, a place where one can speak freely. But home can be a prison, a cell, a grave. It can be a place where one is silenced. Home can be both center and margin. Multiple and shifting, home is nevertheless a site for the construction of identity. My project focuses on the ways in which two West Indian women writers, Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are ‘making’ themselves in these various ‘homes’. 
Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid both reside in the United States. That is in itself not unusual: a large number of Caribbean novelists write outside the region. What is remarkable about these two West Indian writers is not only the volume of their literary production -- over the last fifteen years each woman has averaged one book every three years--but also the ways in which their writing epitomizes the changes occurring in the West Indian literary tradition at the end of the twentieth century. Cliff and Kincaid personalize the political and politicize the personal. Narrative functions as both the source and example of an enabling cultural theory as each writer wrestles with the peculiarity of her migration and its relation to exile--a condition already overdetermined by colonialism. The eclectic, fragmented form favored by Cliff and Kincaid as a way of encoding the female experience is a rejection of the linear polemic of some male-authored West Indian text. Furthermore these women privilege kwik! kwak! narratives, that is stories which reveal their folk origins and which confirm their appreciation of the ways in which the West Indian storytelling process has supported their artistic creativity. Autobiography asserts a female “I” as the subject who will not be silenced as each writer becomes the raconteur of her own life story.

The category of “woman,” long under-theorized in West Indian literature, has with the proliferation of fiction by women, opened up to reveal the complexities of the hitherto unarticulated female experience within the domestic and public sphere. The literary activities of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid, the circumstances under which they come to selfhood, their consistent troubling of their relationship with home, the ambivalence of their location within the American metropolis all connect to the
thematics of West Indian women writing in the region. Each writer insists on a
gendered selfhood which is easily transgressive and constantly disruptive. Both writers
attempt to free themselves from conventions of gender, race, and sexuality. Neither
presumes to speak on behalf of the group or as the representative of a community.
Nonetheless both participate in community. As raconteurs, Cliff and Kincaid repeat
versions of their life stories. Each calls out a “Kwik! Kwak!” , welcoming her
community of readers; neither offers a “Kwik! kwak!” closure because each continues
to tell never-ending stories.

While it is necessary to narrate the journeys which these women writers make
to arrive at this position, my story mapping is tentative and partial, for these writers
are elusive and slippery. In undertaking a comparative analysis of the writings of
Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid, I am mindful that while these two women arrive at
somewhat similar ideological positions on the formation of female subjectivity, they do
so through very different routes. Nor are their positions ever fixed. As critic, I
become a raconteur of their stories, inevitably shaping them, imposing order through
exegesis. Yet, I too must offer the traditional Kwik disclaimer of responsibility for
such slippery subjects. Given the migratory nature of the subjectivities each espouses,
I remain mindful that my own scholarship may provide a false sense of fixity, a
theoretical containment which is antithetical to the fluidity characteristic to their
writing. Therefore, in my analysis, I have consciously avoided a partiality to any one
theoretical approach, for these writers themselves resist theoretical or political
alignments.
Notwithstanding the contested relationship between scholarly containment and the boundarylessness of Cliff and Kincaid’s writings, they, like other West Indian women writers, demand critical attention, for while Cliff and Kincaid are often reiterating the concerns raised by male writers a generation before, the vantage point from which they speak and the cultural styles they assume have been paid only limited attention. The tendency to describe the writings of West Indian women as a re- visioning of male versions has allowed attention to focus on issues of literary emergence, contributions to nation-building, and on thematic filiation. Yet, while it is true that the subject matter of novels by West Indian women is often indistinguishable from that written by their male antecedents, what seems crucial and as yet under-theorized are the ways in which the gendered locations from which they speak affect the shape of these thematics.

West Indian literary criticism has for a long time reflected the domination of West Indian males. Writers such as Edward Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, C. L. R. James, George Lamming, Roger Mais, V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and Derek Walcott have in time come to represent the “Great Tradition” of West Indian Literature. But that tradition, is in fact an extremely young one which has come into being less than half a century ago. Related to the upsurge of the West Indian novel in the 1950’s were the many essays and articles produced by these writers as they attempted to formulate a West Indian aesthetics. Theory met praxis, birthing a literary tradition. West Indian literary criticism celebrated the moment by showering attention on the most visible--the writings of men.
Three decades later it was the West Indian woman writer who began to dominate the literary scene but the existing scholarship is slowly reflecting that presence. Evelyn O’Callaghan’s Woman Version is the only book length study of West Indian fiction by women: typical of most “first of its type” works, it covers a variety of theoretical issues and a wide range of novels. Caribbean women writers have been the subject of two anthologies: Out Of the Kumbla and Caribbean Women Writers. Each anthology was conscious of the void of scholarship and apologetic of the limitations of its selection. Out Of the Kumbla, a wide-ranging collection of critical essays made an important contribution to articulations of “feminist” consciousness by bringing together major critical contributions of both male and female scholars writing on a Caribbean literary tradition. Caribbean Women Writers was more than a compilation of critical essays. It was also the first volume where Caribbean women writers were speaking of their art alongside critics reading it.

There have been other critical interventions outside the region which have included literary analysis of Caribbean women’s texts. One major comparative anthology, Motherlands, explores the various manifestations of mothering as a personal and political issue in texts written by African, Caribbean and South Asian women. Carole Boyce Davies’ Black Women, Writing and Identity is engaged in as wide a project as Motherlands. In Davies’s study of black women’s writings, the focus is on the narrative and theoretical representations of black women and women of color, and she devotes a chapter to the ways in which West Indian women living in the United States write about the experience of migration. Writing in Limbo also participates in
this type of theoretical inquiry, and Gikandi’s study of Modernism in the Caribbean includes discussions on Michelle Cliff, Merle Hodge and Zee Edgell. Thus, the critical focus on Caribbean women’s writing has been general rather than specific and these interventions directed at a group—however heterogeneous—rather than on the specificities of individual writers within the group.

Though choosing to focus on two out of a large group of provocative West Indian women writers, my study balances its narrow range with a sensitivity to the other critical contributions by and on West Indian writers as a whole. Characteristic of West Indian writings in the 1950’s was a tradition of debate where writers were reading and responding to the ideas of each other. It is this debate which has generated much of what now constitutes a West Indian Aesthetics. However, such a tradition of debate has not yet developed between West Indian women writers, particularly because the socio-political contexts for that kind of theorizing has changed. My study makes a space for the gathering of West Indian writers and critics. Identity issues remain the familiar subject of our discourse. It was germane to literature in the 1950’s as it is to the 1980’s. Historicizing these articulations of selfhood in order to show how Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are part of this movement becomes the first order of business for the critic/raconteur. *Misiè i di ‘Kwik!’ ‘Kwak!’*

**Claiming Identities**

For the West Indian subject, self-formulation occurs in contexts which already bear the imprint of colonialism and its identity-erasing template. History is often a
referential point in any articulation of an ideology of selfhood, largely because it is judged as the primary narrative which brings man into being, and in confirming his origin, establishes him as a rational, agentive subject. However, the Europeanized versions of history available to the West Indian subject had instead foregrounded incidents of conquest and enslavement, domination and mimicry, and had presented him with an image of self as passive object of colonial expansion. This text afforded the West Indian no agency and therefore no identity.

The insistence on claiming an identity as a West Indian becomes crucial to the literature and politics. As Kenneth Ramchand explains in The West Indian Novel and Its Background:

West Indian novelists applied themselves with unusual urgency and unanimity to an interpretation and analysis of their societies’ ills including the social and economic deprivation of the majority, the pervasive consciousness of race and colour . . . the lack of history to be proud of, and the absence of traditional or settled values. (5)

How does the subject who has never been regarded as “I” acquire identity? Seeing and reading himself outside of Western Enlightenment, the West Indian comes to accept a version of himself as a rude Caliban who, having been brought into language, nonetheless lacks an identity, authority or power and is unable to establish an ontological identification with Prospero. The task therefore, is to constitute a subjectivity which will bring Caliban closer to this imagined ideal. The West Indian is therefore constantly struggling for a teleological narrative which will name him as an individual character.
Nationalism and literature constituted the forum for these discussions. The Caribbean subject has been named Caliban in both the western political and literary text. Yet however savage, rude and untutored, this discourse had constructed him, the historical example of the Haitian Revolution offered a version of a victorious Caliban to counter this reductionist ideology. Prospero’s ideology of triumph had been dismantled with his own tools. Through education, the legacy Caliban had once cursed, the West Indian had come to an awareness of a historical community of resistance and the achievement of selfhood it had wrought through violent revolution. But there were other alternatives, ones inspired by a magic similar to Prospero’s. The source of that magic became highly debatable, and the articulation of selfhood formation accordingly varied. Now it was important to move beyond Manichean frames and to construct a West Indian identity from the skeleton of the Haitian Caliban.

Significantly, in the West Indian writers’ efforts to articulate this alternative subjectivity, they inscribed the experiences of the “I” as emblematic of the group and in their claiming an interchangeability of the group and the individual, ironically reiterated the same Western-based paradigms which had reduced the colonized to an undifferentiated, un-individuated, homogenous group. Implicit to their theorizing of identity was the assumption that European hegemony has manifested itself uniformly through its new world empire and that the responses to this imperial encounter were uniform throughout the Caribbean islands. The reality, however, was that the colonial enterprise had occasioned a series of identity formations, related not only to geography but to the asymmetrical ways in which acculturation to the plantation system
occurred. Furthermore the differing impact of the cultural habits introduced by slaves from various parts of West Africa needed to be considered. Issues of gender, an emerging classism, and color stratification which had shaped the colonizing experience and were in turn shaping the identity formation of the emancipated West Indian subject also needed to be addressed. In the clamor for an adequate model for West Indian identity, only some of these issues received attention.

Inevitably, what emerged was a series of paradigmatic representations of a subjectivity which was being reconstituted on what Sidone Smith and Julie Watson describe as “the site on which cultural ideologies intersect and dissect one another in contradiction, consonance and agency” (xix). In the early 1950s, a range of postcolonial strategies of identity recuperation was being offered simultaneously, each presenting itself as a definitive manifesto, all attempting to bring order to the seeming chaos of history. Each blueprint had some specific ideological justification for the constitution of identity: be it based on the reclamation of an African past, or on hybridity. But the heterogeneity of the region did not make for its easy containment into theoretical paradigms. West Indian writers remained undeterred in the production of a useful subjectivity.

George Lamming and Edward Brathwaite stand out as English speaking Caribbean writers who were committed to representing the ways in which the colonized slave drew upon the culture of Africa—its language, its religion, its material culture, and its tactics of intervention—to sustain them in the New World. Colonial history, as it had appeared in official documents and as it was disseminated within educational
systems gave no account of an African or Amerindian past. Yet, as both Lamming and Brathwaite were separately arguing, ignorance of the past experience of newly enslaved people does not erase its existence or its integration, albeit covertly, into the socio-cultural fabric of Caribbean life. In the novels of George Lamming and the poetry of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, there is the valorization of African presence in the Caribbean and the writing into view what was previously submerged in Europe’s linear narrative of conquest. Both writers believed that recovery of “Africanness” would lead to the achievement of a coherent history--one which established the West Indian as being part of a larger, more significant past than previous learned versions of history had conceded. In his essay “The African Presence” Lamming describes the connection he feels on witnessing scenes in Ghana that resonate with the habits of his own West Indian history as “the resurrection of voice once familiar and unknown” (162). Narratively, Lamming returns to this perception and grafts it onto another cultural event in the Caribbean--The Haitian Ceremony of Souls--thereby creating what Pacquet describes in the Forward to Pleasures of Exile as “an alternative hierarchy of values” (viii). In claiming these cultural antecedents as part of a consciousness which impels one towards revolutions, Lamming interprets such cultural phenomena as signs of a sustaining African presence in the New World: a presence which initiates a drama of returns and re-connections, purification and empowerment.

For Lamming, it is through ceremonies such as these that the West Indian moves through an evaluation and endorsement of history and identity--one which disrupts the original, monologic, and colonial discourse. Ultimately, Lamming
believes this connection with Africa brings forth a new vision of self and of West Indian society, one which possesses and inspires an Afro-Caribbean society with the memories of its powerful ancestral past. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming expresses his personal arrival at this truth thus:

And there [I] saw the psychological effect of freedom. It does something to a man’s way of seeing the world. It is an experience not gained by education or money but by an instinctive re-evaluation of your place in the world, an attitude that is a logical by-product of political action. (165)

This way of seeing the world is mined in Lamming’s fiction as a continuous culture and tradition of which the West Indian needs to be brought into fuller awareness.

This sense of Africa as providing a confirmation of one’s place in the world is reiterated in Brathwaite’s writing as more than cultural and political phenomena, whereby even climatic occurrences in the West Indies remind one of an African connection. Brathwaite’s description of seasonal drought in St.Lucia assumes symbolic stature:

living in st.lucia at this time, I watched this drought drift in towards the island . . . and I suddenly realised that what I was witnessing—that milky haze, that sense of dryness—was something I had seen and felt before in ghana. it was the seasonal dust-cloud drifting out of the great ocean of sahara—the harmattan. by an obscure miracle or connection, this arab’s nomad wind, cracker of fante wood a thousand miles away did not die on the sea-shore of west africa, its continental limit; it drifted on, reaching the new world archipelago to create our drought, imposing an african season on the caribbean sea. and it was on these winds too, and in this season, that slave ships came from guinea, bearing my ancestors to this other land. (190-1)
Having established this preternatural connection, Brathwaite uses this essay (as he has used many other theoretical or creative works) to detail the many ways in which African culture had survived the middle passage experience and the value of its creative adaptation to the cultural and political practices of New World inhabitants.

Like Lamming, Brathwaite physically returns to Africa. His journey to Ghana assumed the power of a pilgrimage, there he is psychologically reborn into an Akan community whose power has survived waves of adversities. This recognition of an indomitable lineage moves Brathwaite on his return to the West Indies, to a passionate validation of Africa as the foundation of New World cultural history. Both societies share similar experiences of migration, necessary or forced, and the Akan people’s triumphant survival of these painful journeys are symbolically repeated in resistance activities in West Indian society. Indeed, Brathwaite’s theorizing, emerging years later than Lamming’s is a product of what Abiola Irele in “The Return of the Native” describes as “a renovated consciousness” (174) which sees an African presence in West Indian cultural habits.

Whereas Brathwaite and Lamming were creating communal history and a personal genealogy out of an African-inspired history, other prominent Caribbean male writers such as Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris were advocating a relationship with the past which conceded to the varying traditions which made up the West Indian experience. For Walcott and Harris, identity issues related more specifically to the energy and power embedded within the New World landscape: its myths, its fables, its fragmentation, its diversity, and its unpredictability. Specifically, where Lamming and
Brathwaite were searching for the coherence of an African inspired identity, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris were advocating ways of interpreting West Indian history which would escape what Harris has elsewhere termed “dead end realism” so as to:

bring distant or removed characteristics of history abreast of presences of the moment. Such simultaneity of the past and the present deepens the legacies that act upon us out of the past, [making] one aware of the pressures of a ceaseless quest for understanding in which the energies of the past become an omen of a living continuity native to ourselves. (24)⁸

While Harris and Walcott share this vision of an alternate rendering of history, the specific circumstances which shape their perspectives and the ways in which each sees the vision being creatively worked out in the art is a function of the specific cultural landscape from which each emerged.

Derek Walcott was born on an island where the historic military tug of war between the English and the French resulted in an English government and a French church collaborating to preserve the privileges of the colonialists. Not only was Walcott caught between the language and cultural practices of two differing European powers but he was also being influenced by a folk consciousness, one born out of the cultural (and linguistic) merger of Europe and Africa. Neither does Walcott read this personal predicament as unique, for as he expounds in “What the Twilight says: An Overture” this is emblematic of a West Indian’s condition. Walcott proposes instead that the native imagination seek escape from the ‘nightmare of History” by claiming a mulatto consciousness which ignores historical allegiances to either Europe or Africa and establishes for itself a newness separate from past. Such an act facilitates the
transmutation of history from nightmarish prison within which one is helplessly bound into an optimistic gateway—entry into a new world, new beginnings.

Where other West Indian theorists have been quick to establish African connections, Walcott instead sees West Indian identity beginning at the moment when one eschews colonial history as a pernicious fiction, "a literature without morality [where] . . . everything depends on whether we write this fiction through the memory of hero or of victim" (2). Furthermore while he accepts the literal ancestry of all races in identify formation, Walcott is nevertheless careful to separate filial devotion from cognizance of ancestry. The former paralyses, the latter moves one towards the future. In "The Muse of History" Walcott declares himself, a persona of the West Indian artist/subject, as free also from a legacy of recrimination or hate, free too from servitude to the muse of history. Instead he argues thus:

The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains or forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. This shame and awe of history possesses poets of the Third World who think of language as enslavement and who in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence or nostalgia. (2)

By claiming a strategic amnesia, Walcott forgoes what he judges as an unproductive battle with history and renames himself Adamic, historyless man. This new identity becomes connected in Another Life to the authority which the West Indian artist has to change his psycho-social landscape: "So from a green book held in the hands of an astigmatic master, in those mornings of my life when I imagined myself a painter, the spiritual history of this region begins". 9
The newness which Walcott celebrates, the locating of West Indian identity at the moment of imperial contact in the new world, is also a feature of Wilson Harris’ theorizing. Harris too begins with a perception of history as larger that a cataloguing of bitterness and guilt, confrontation, or atonement, for as he warns in an interview with Charles H. Rowell:

A wound of the past may so overwhelm the imagination of a culture or a civilization that humanity becomes a pawn or a robot extension of the parenting past that has atrophied or become a museum fixture. A void is created between the parenting past and its soulless progeny in the present and the future. (196)

Significantly (and he is unique among the West Indian male theorists in this regard), Harris is also prepared to concede that the psychic damage wrought by history extends to both the colonizer and the colonized. Both bear the burden of history, each needs to move through and beyond the tyranny of history, each needs to divest self of the baggage of race, social status, authorities of domination or power born from blame before he can arrive at self definition.

For Harris, this engagement with history is an ongoing one which returns constantly to the initial ground of the colonial encounter and in its traveling substitutes “subjective idealism,” with a radical realism which manipulates and transforms historical contradictions. What is generated through this process is a discourse which is respectful to the ways in which fables and myths embedded in the landscape constitute history and identity. The origins of these are varied and multi-cultural, and the influence of the colonizer indistinguishable from the contribution of the colonized. Harris’s theorizing recognizes that in the meeting of colonizer and colonized, a
blending occurs of African, Amerindian and European elements, and from this almost
alchemical process emerges an indigenized Caribbean tradition -- one which is complex
and fluid, bearing the traces of confrontation and resistance, co-option and complicity.

In the intersection and collapse of these cultural trajectories, Harris see the West
Indies becoming what Benítez-Rojo so aptly ascribes in The Repeating Island, as “a
chaotic and materially unrepresentable archive whose promiscuity keeps it quite far
from being able to provide a stable category” (155). Identity remains a hopeful
possibility and the promiscuity of cultural forms useful in providing connectives
between the fragments which constitute identity. Ultimately Harris’ vision seeks to
unify these fragments into a distinctive form which while it can be made, unmade, and
re-made, represents West Indian identity.10

These formulations offered by Lamming, Brathwaite, Harris and Walcott are
however race-based ones, reacting to colonial versions of West Indian history;
theycountering charges of nihilism, fragmentation and chaos with representations of
creative re-ordering. Indeed, while these male writers/theorists were consciously re-
defining what constitutes history, they were ratifying the view that it is history which
creates identity.

But many West Indian women writers could not accept this premise, for the
history of the Caribbean as it had been told and was being told had presented woman as
silent and her experience of colonialism as unremarkable. Assumptions of identity as a
fixed ungendered category meant that the particular ways in which race class and
gender informed experience became irrelevant, and that female subjectivity was

16
accordingly being cast in the same mold as the West Indian male. By and large, West Indian woman writers were committed to redressing this “ancient tyranny”. Their intervention began with the valorization of their many migratory locations, what my epigraph identifies as “several lives/ daughter, sister, mistress, friend. warrior / wife” (7).

Significantly, West Indian woman writer were not focussing on the role of woman as a mother. For too long that was the only representation afforded. The West Indian woman had been essentialised as the grand Mother Africa, the daughter of the Diaspora from whose womb from which her West Indian children had been expelled. She was the West Indian landscape, surviving repeated waves of conquistadorial assault, her fertility uninterrupted. She had been the embodiment of national ideals. She had given birth to the new day of independence. Now it was important to offer other versions of that female self, ones which presented colonial experience in ways which were mindful of gender and the ways in which race and class were configured in this female-centered domain. In her essay, “Experience,” Joan W Scott argues that identity cannot be essentialized for the experiences which shape it are themselves contextual and contingent. She goes on to explain:

... [One] needs to attend to the historical processes, that through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes ... that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience is to historicize the identities which it produces. (25-6)
Historicizing the West Indian female experience, the writings of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid represent West Indian woman as a subject who, because she is constituted by varying experiences, produces a narration of history which reflects these non-essentialist positionings.

The re-authoring of narratives of West Indian female identity was not, however, a project limited to the women writers. The West Indian female critic was also contributing to the script, expanding the dialogue in ways which echoed the articulations of their male predecessors some thirty years before. Evelyn O'Callaghan, author of a historical novel, a professor of English at the University of the West Indies and a published critic, serves as an example of this changing context. Her study, Woman Version represents a theoretical engagement as both practitioner and critic. O'Callaghan, responding to earlier articulations of a West Indian identity and sensitive to the particular ways in which race and gender intersect, constructs a feminist poetics in terms of a musical analogy --“dub version.” For her, this new “woman version” is:

...a kind of remix or dub version which utilizes elements of the ‘master trope’ of Caribbean literary discourse (combining, stretching, modifying them in new ways); announces a gendered perspective; adds individual styles of ‘talk over’; enhances or omits tracks depending on desired effect; and generally alters by recontextualization to create a unique literary entity. (11)

In the replacement of a male-centered version of history with a “woman version,” the old anxieties about the epistemological field in which theories about history are constructed is now mediated by the recognition that unaccommodated female experience make such fields partial, constructed, deconstructable and reconstructable.
Further, as O’Callaghan and other critics in general, and Cliff and Kincaid in particular suggest, these new female-centered narratives of identity, while they wish to de-center the dominant discourse are not impelled by the need for one replacement ideology. Indeed the polyphonic character of these inquiries seems to favor not so much a substitutive gesture, but rather one which Davies and Fido in their introduction to Out Of The Kumba define “as a movement from confinement to visibility, articulation and process. As a process, it allows for a multiplicity of moves exteriorized, no longer contained and protected or dominated” (19). Within these multi-contoured, socio-political spheres, West Indian female subjectivity is engineered in ways which are mindful of previously dismissed antecedents: oral forms of uprisings and resistance which draw from a variety of traditions. Further, emerging from former voicelessness, the woman version is not so much fixated with the past as it is committed to establishing a fix on the past, one which allowed for a polyphony of experiences.

Reclaiming previous versions of West Indian identity, women writers are participating in a West Indian feminist poetics which transforms such theories to workable articulations of their multi-cultural reality. Cliff and Kincaid located outside the region, return to these reclaimed versions and further inflect them with the particularities of their own experiences as outsider/insiders. Operating within and without these female-centered aesthetics, each woman writer uses the personal circumstances of her migration to North America, and the re-negotiation of identity this has generated to de-center masculinist and nationalist texts. These new locations allow
Cliff and Kincaid to participate in other writing communities thereby investing their narratives of identity with a transnational character which in turn provokes a further reconstitution of home.

Susan Hekman in “Reconstituting the Subject,” contends that “subjects who are subjected to multiple discursive influences, create modes of resistance to those discourses out of the elements of the very discourses that shape them” (51). The resistant texts which Cliff and Kincaid produce are accordingly shaped by the articulations of a West Indian consciousness, but with some major differences. Where before the debate had been conducted in two separate spheres, one devoted to theory the other to praxis, Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are, like many other West Indian women writers, dismissive of such theoretical orthodoxy. Dispensing of traditions which appoint theory as the high priest of critical articulations, Cliff and Kincaid willfully disrupt the divide between theory and narrative. Michelle Cliff in an interview with Merle Schwartz justifies her subversion in the following way: “We are much more free, more experimental because we are not faithful to Western forms as much as white Western writers are. We have a different sense of time and space. and we have more access to the dream life... to our imagination” (617-8). Jamaica Kincaid offers as forthright a defense of her sub/versions. In an interview with Moira Ferguson, Kincaid explains:

People like me... just sort of usurp all the boundaries and just mix them up and just cross borders all the time. We have no interest in formalities. We are not interested in being literary people. We have something to say that is really urgent... We have got to say it now. You don’t know how long it will be that you can speak, maybe tomorrow you may be shut up again. (167)
For both writers it becomes important to have their say now. Cliff having been once silenced is aware of the consequences of voicelessness. Kincaid, though having never been silenced, is aware that this privilege can change depending on her social position.

Related to freedom of speech is the ability to name, for as Kincaid explains in “Flowers of Evil”, “this naming of things is . . . crucial to possession—a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is murder, an erasing, and it is not surprising that when people find themselves prey to it (conquest) among their first acts of liberation is to change their names” (159). Previously the West Indian had been named in a variety of discourses. The misnaming of the region also has a related history. Columbus’ first mis-naming was following by Europe’s own ideological and territorial naming. Nationalist efforts re-named the region as “The West Indies” and literature supported the naming process in its articulations of West Indian literary genealogy.

Women too had be named, in largely essentialist ways. Now these constructions were being undone and West Indian women writers were naming themselves in different ways: ways which were mindful of West Indian oral culture, its private resistance, its unruly subversiveness, its history of guerrilla warfare, its obeah, its magic, its power. But this naming was operating in contexts of ongoing imperialistic naming of the Caribbean and its inhabitants--ones which named the Caribbean as a beach; a tourist vacation package; a marketplace for American goods, a
basin and a backyard for political initiatives, a text-book study of the activities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But it was also being named as home.


“Where is the nigger’s home”? Brathwaite asked this question some thirty years ago in his book, Rites of Passage. In these female re-negotiation of identity, Kincaid and Cliff are answering: Home is always under construction. Home is here, elsewhere, everywhere, nowhere. But if identity is constructed at home, what happens when home assumes these forms? Carole Boyce Davies in Black Women, Writing and Identity offers one possible response, arguing that “the experience of migration makes and unmakes identity” (3) and that subjectivity is constructed through the various performances which occurs simultaneously at the site of those convergences. She proceeds with an explanation that black women’s writing re-defines identity in terms other than minority, exclusion and marginality, in that it makes new connections with women of similar history thereby making this identity a shared one, one which reconnects and re/members the previously dislocated or forgotten. Caribbean women writers such as Cliff and Kincaid become part of this process, and home becomes “the product of numerous processes of migration . . . a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, language, communities of people” (13).

But the immense scope of Davies’s project allows for the unconscious erasure of difference and the reduction of Black woman to a flat monolithic category despite her
best intentions to provide “unbounded contexts” (17) for her theorizing. While she concedes to a migratory and ever-changing subjectivity for Black women and testifies to identity’s corresponding ability to respond to a variety of re-interpretations and re-interrogations, Davies’s analysis does not extend far enough into the interactive contexts of particular landscapes and their impact on these migratory subjectivities.

My contribution to the theorizing of Black women’s identity relates specifically to the Caribbean women writer writing home and self within this migratory context. I am proposing that the pattern of migratory subjectivity within a West Indian arena must be different in scope and influence from that of African women, women in the United States or in Latin America. While these may all be part of a transnational pattern of resistance by diasporic subjects in response to Eurocentric discourse and its imperialistic practice, my project locates Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid as examples of West Indian negotiations of a migratory subjectivity. For while Davies’ essentializing of Black women’s identity may be strategic to her project, my own interest is in de-essentializing the black West Indian women in relation to other black women and in locating West Indian female identities within arenas which take into account the peculiar intersections of race and class and sexuality within newly independent societies.

Davies offers a stirring analysis and validation of boundary crossing. There is in her critique a sense of ease and an absence of resistance which the realities of international travel challenge. The economic and legal barriers which limit mobility and one’s painful status as itinerant and outsider are never addressed. For while
Davies explores the Caribbean migratory subjectivity within a North American landscape using her mother’s freedom as an example of the possibilities of migration, she downplays the terms under which one becomes part of Elsewhere. Austin Clarke, a Barbadian writer living in Canada, describes this other side of migration and the trauma it engenders. His personal essay “Exile” presents the situation as follow:

The ‘exile’ is a beggar in the most sophisticated sense that he must know his place. And he himself contributes to whatever deprecation of his native culture, his mores, his native views is implied, which he is forced to evaluate through foreign eyes and using foreign sensibility. He is, most of all, a man who lives in two cultures; and when one culture is undermined . . . becomes at least a schizophrenic. (61)

It is significant that Davies chooses to include Audre Lorde and Paule Marshall, two African American writers of Caribbean parentage as engaged in a similar enterprise of writing home as are Cliff and Kincaid. Whereas Davies considers all four women as “Caribbean -American women of African descent” (115), this label makes no space for the differences of origin for these women and dispossesses Cliff and Kincaid of the particularities of their legal entry into the United States. The necessary encounter with US. immigration offices, the visa arrangements one needs to suffer through before being allowed into the United States, and the rigor of green card application are never part of Lorde’s and Marshall’s experience in the United States. Cliff and Kincaid as “aliens” are part of the group which lines up at the Immigration counters in poses which remind one forcibly of what Clarke calls the beggar condition. Marshall and Lorde are Americans who pass through unhampered.
In describing the terms under which their parents migrated to the United States, both Paule Marshall and Audre Lorde present those experiences in ways which run counter to Davies’s hopeful theorizing. “From Poets in the Kitchen” details the hardships which women in particular endured, and the ways in which they are victims maneuvered by a capitalist system. Marshall illustrates the West Indian immigrant’s loss of control and power with an example of the relationship existing between the migrant mother and her Brooklyn-born children. Awe and unease taint the relationship because parental authority has been abrogated under this new system. Child-rearing is now governed by a system of rules which are unfamiliar and outside of the West Indian derived maternal power system. Where in the West Indies the mother’s might may have established itself in certain disciplinary habits, in this new land these practices could mean the arrest of the parent for child abuse. Nonetheless “From Poets in the Kitchen” goes on to show that there are patterns of resistance within this domain. Marshall writes: “Confronted therefore by a world they could not encompass, which even limited their rights as parents and at the same time finding themselves permanently separated from the world they had known, they took refuge in language” (7).

The autobiographical writings of Lorde and Marshall and the fictional portrayal of the West Indies suggests that as resistors their parents had not only taught them the magic of their mother-tongue but had, dreaming of acceptance in a strange land, sustained themselves and reclaimed their children by evoking the West Indies as a cultural sources which could be accessed and creatively deployed. However even as
Marshall and Lorde developed this view of the West Indies--one filtered through the longings of the mother and her unconscious romanticization of home--they do not need the particular survival strategy which had generated these visions. However, should their native land (the United States) not offer the Brooklyn born writers the necessary sustenance, they can then return imaginatively to an alternative homeland, their othermotherland (the West Indies). Both landscapes are theirs to claim and under such circumstances identity formation can, for Marshall and Lorde, indeed occur within the multiple, expansive and empowering landscape which Davies claims as “a cultural geography and ‘cognitive mapping’ of one’s experience and location” (115) available to black women.

This “cognitive mapping” however functions differently for Cliff and Kincaid, who though closer in age to Marshall and Lorde experience migration to the United States in ways which are similar to that of the West Indian migrant some thirty years ago -- the time period which Marshall explores in “From Poets in the Kitchen.” Cliff arrives in the United States in the early sixties because her parents are employed in quite substantial jobs there. Her mother worked for the British Embassy and her father was employed by various business companies. Both parents are sufficiently light-skinned to pass for white and did so when necessary. Even so her family held itself separate from socio-political activities in the United States. As Cliff admits to Adisa in a 1992 interview: “And whenever they had to socialize with Americans there was huge tension in the house. They never fit in” (274). The racial composition of the group labeled Americans is never specified by Cliff. The reader is allowed to speculate that
Cliff is referring to the white Americans whom she later confirms her parents hated. Of note is her further insistence that racism in American was the cause of her family’s discomfort. The irony implicit in this admission is useful, for the quality of life, the nature of economic privileges the young Michelle Cliff enjoys, her family’s ability to travel freely between the United States and the Jamaica which she calls home, are intimately connected to the family’s ability to pass for white.

While Cliff is hesitant in articulating the privilege of skin color, her own admission that in her family “there was that awful color sense which is almost unspoken -- the closer you are to white the better things are” (Adisa, 275), connects the reader to the social practices in many Caribbean islands where for a long time middle management jobs where held by people of lighter skins. In Jamaica, Cliff’s family does not need the “self protection” which occasioned passing in America. The colonial power structures have already sealed in place certain discriminatory practices which guarantee “local whites” certain privileges. But there are some other consequences for participating, albeit quietly, in that power. The same structures which favor Michelle Cliff because of her skin color, also exclude her on the basis of heterosexual privilege. The safety of Jamaica as home is contaminated by these contradictions and exile seems a logical response. Cliff’s early writings are the keening lamentation of lost safety, of denied access to the Jamaica she loves--the world of her grandmother where she felt free of the machinations of that power.

While her frequent returns to Jamaica provided Cliff with her once lost genealogy, these visits nonetheless confirm Jamaica as a negative place which she feels
close to but can not live in. In her aforementioned interview with Adisa, Cliff’s judgment of the limitations of Jamaica are passionate and brutal:

It is an incredibly provincial and oppressive place. There are things about it like the landscape, and some of the people, that I really love, but I hate the classism that I grew up with. I hate the system of oppressing other people of color. I hate pettiness, obsession with appearance, what things look like, how you appear to the outside world ... I hate the sexism, the extraordinary double standard. ... I experienced a lot of it as a negative place. ... (p.275)

Jamaica for Cliff is home, but she leaves for other more habitable homes.

Jamaica Kincaid is as unceasing in her reiterations of Antigua as home, the place of her citizenship. But like Cliff, her alignment with the West Indies as home is a complicated one. Jamaica Kincaid migrated to the United States under conditions which were dramatically different from Michelle Cliff’s. Whereas Cliff had lived in the United States as a child, returned to Jamaica, left for a British University and then returned to the United States, Kincaid’s route to the United States is less circuitous. She arrives as a live-in babysitter because her mother had heard of an American family needing a nanny. She, a black Antiguan whose education is limited to O’levels, (not quite the American equivalent of a high school diploma), enters the job market at a significantly lower economic level than that enjoyed by Cliff.

Although Kincaid’s many accounts of leaving Antigua make no mention of a yearning for the safety of this island community, the many instances which Kincaid has provided of the early impecuniousness that marked her early years in the United States would have foreclosed on the possibility of travel between Antigua and the United States. Her struggle to educate herself, the racism she was exposed to, and what she
perceives as her forced alignments with powerless African Americans are the realities of Kincaid’s migration. While she has not given up her Antiguan citizenship or her right to freely criticize her island home, Kincaid is equally adamant that it is place where she could never live, that there her creativity would be stifled, her individuality submerged beneath the weight of her mother’s personality. Having left home at seventeen believing any place to be better than Antigua, Kincaid becomes a voluntary exile, and considers herself thus empowered. In her chapter “Writing Home,” Davies concludes that “Writing home means communicating with home. But it also means finding ways to express the conflicted meaning of home in the experience of the formerly colonized. It also demands a continual re-writing of the boundaries of what constitutes home” (129). Jamaica Kincaid’s narratives confirm this.

Cliff’s engagement with the West Indian community is similarly conflictual. Searching for an obsolete geography which will assure her of her identity with “black Jamaica,” Cliff returns through memory to relate her personal history to a larger family history and this checkered family history becomes emblematic of national Jamaican history. The specificity of her connections, the certainty of her claims as a Jamaican affords her an anchoring site from which she can then access other denied subjectivities—ones based on gender and sexuality. A North American landscape seems better able to facilitate these broader articulations given that the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of Jamaican society, what Cliff sees as its predisposition to classify and codify the individual in patriarchally-defined mores, cannot allow those multiple identities.
Cliff instead chooses to live in California, commuting to Hartford, Connecticut where she teaches creative writing at Trinity College. Now her travels extend from the West Coast to the Eastern seaboard and its breadth affords her sufficient space to unravel what Sara Suleri, the Pakistani exile living in the United States, describes in *Meatless Days* as the “tangled filaments of her subjectivity” (22). Significantly, the narrowness of Jamaica is supplemented in this new place which Cliff now calls home and she now has space and choice of various communities with which to claim kin. Yet Cliff chooses to simultaneously remain connected to a West Indian community of women writers and has in recent times moved closer to a community of political novelists -- people of different racial origins who find commonality in shared anxieties and passions.

Her refusal to limit herself to one place along with her insistence that those who live outsider the borders of the Caribbean must not be eliminated from a West Indian canon, speaks to the multicultural consciousness that Cliff has recently come into. The articulations of an anxiety for a Jamaican identity in her earlier writings are in a 1992 interview with Merle Schwartz (published in 1994) recontextualized as part of a process. She defends the seeming contradictions in this multicultural, transnational perspective in the following way:

**But I am coming into myself as I write.** The person I was while writing *Abeng* is not the person I am now. I re-read *Abeng* the other day when I was at home; I haven’t read it in years. It’s a good novel but I’ve gone beyond that. When I started writing *Abeng*, I was really trying to construct myself as a Jamaican. I was able then to claim the rest of the people that I happen to be as well as I write. [emphasis mine] (598)
Having migrated beyond these articulations, Cliff arrives at a transcultural location by routes other than those established by Davies in the chapter “Writing Home.” She now gives cognizance to the politics of global oppression where race is but one of the issues. Further the hyphenated status which Cliff now claims, her self labeling as transnationalist, afford her the freedom to occupy various discourse communities and to pick and chose from all traditions. Cliff does not apprehend herself as isolated in this frontierless world for she claims it as a space populated by other diasporic writers, as uprooted, as dislocated and as free as herself. Davies’s “migratory space” is crowded by more than black women writing their identity.

_Bodies of Water_, a collection of short stories written after her Jamaica novels, best exemplifies what Salman Rushie has elsewhere labeled a “stereoscopic vision.” Once again autobiography returns as fiction and events in Cliff’s life: her homosexuality and the alienation it breeds in her family, her loneliness as a child, her immigrant status in the US, these are all threaded through her stories. Jess, the immigrant child who learns at an early age that a better life is always elsewhere, serves as the narrative link between a variety of experiences of abandonment and loneliness. She is the protagonists of the two stories, “Election Day 1984” and the title story “Bodies of Water.” Jess is also the prototype of the loss, submerged rage, hunger for community and impotence which characterizes the other stories.

Only one of the ten stories, “Columba,” is set in Jamaica, yet it is similar in thematic concerns to the other nine ‘American’ stories. Generally these stories detail a psychological landscape which is universal -- one where man’s inhumanity to man is
repeated in a host of circumstances, some political, others historical. The Holocaust and Vietnam, slavery and Civil rights agitation, domestic violence and the AIDS crisis form part of the litany of travails to which the young and the aged, the poor and the powerless, women and homosexuals are exposed. Race though still an issue is now explored as part of a wider context of oppression.

The last three stories in the collection: “Election Day 1984”, “Bodies of Water” and “Keepers of All Souls” function somewhat like a triptych detailing Cliff’s concerns. Alongside Jess’s travels through the United States in search of a community of resistors from whom she can learn the meaning of life is her brother Bill’s imminent AIDS related death. Bill’s insistence on living the life his family disapproves of, his choosing to die within the gay community, rather than to return to the comfort of kinship further interrogates the adequacy of familial community. “Keeper of All Souls,” the final piece in the collection completes the portrait of itinerants in search of freedom-giving communities. Symbolically, Sam’s makeshift altar celebrates those questing spirits and the ironic fulfillment of community through death:

The altar rose from floor to ceiling, and stretched from side to side of the small room. On its front shelf were things Sam arranged and re-arranged as his vision moved him. Things collected. Things the earth had yielded after a summer downpour . . . Pieces of colored glass, fragments of medicine bottles, Sunday china, everyday ware. A piece of brick. Rusted watchface. Glass-headed, cloth-bodied dolly. Spent shells. Rubber nipples. Ribbon. Wooden letters from a printer’s tray. Ring of skeleton keys.

Every place on the altar is cluttered with relics. Everything made.

(154-5)
Sam, recorder of lives and deaths, arranger and re-arranger of facts -- relics of the past--is another persona for the artist or historian. He connects parallel memories and provides a community among the dead for those who in life had yearned to belong.

On the narrative edges of this centerpiece are the shadows of other stories. Agnes who in “Burning Bush” had avenged her rape by murdering her brother resurfaces in Ann Dillion’s memories, the spinster who lives on the lake near to Bill. Agnes’s murder of her family and her lighting out for territories unknown at the age of seventy five is judged by Ann as unnecessary violence to procure freedom. Instead Ann’s freedom repeats the route chosen by Mrs. Baker and her ‘friend’ Velma Jackson in “Screen Memories” in the two women’s quiet relinquishing of that censuring space for an alternative supporting community. The Vietnam veteran who in “American Time, American Light” falls asleep in a barn one winter’s day and ironically meets the fate he has been escaping becomes a ghostly reminder to both Bill and Ann that flight is merely a trap which returns one to things feared.

_Bodies of Water_ metaphorically connects the scattered geographies outlined in the various stories. The title of the collection resonates with images of separation and connection integral to bodies of water. The body of water which the migrant child traverses is also the same body of water which brings the jazz trumpeter and the protagonist in “Burnt Memories” to the hopeful freedom of Europe. Ultimately, these bodies of water are the spaces negotiated by Cliff as she continues her interrogation of race, class, gender and sexuality. In “Burnt Memories” the grandmother offers a stirring defense of her racial prejudices, explaining her dedication to her piano, “a
precious African thing . . . civilized, the sum of its parts” (92) as a tribute to the
African tradition from which she emerged: “‘You have to go deep inside yourself -- to
the best part.’ The best part she thinks, for if anything can cloud your senses, it’s that
white blood”(92). But Cliff’s vision is wider than this myopia; she has already
discovered the black part and is now learning to accept the white part. Together these
pieces make her into the artist and the resistor who insists that “I am in the world to
change the world.” Homeless yet still a part of community, Cliff now chooses to
interpret this paradoxical placement as a source of empowerment.

Jamaica Kincaid, on the other hand, enters a different negotiation with power.
She has no use for Michelle Cliff’s necessary journey back to the West Indies,
primarily because her memories of home are kept alive in her repeated stories about
her mother and her family. There is no need to claim an identity she was taught to
despise; instead she is claiming one she fears was despised. In “Flowers of Evil,”
Kincaid admits: “I was of the conquered class and living in a conquered place; a
principle about this condition is that nothing about you is of any interest unless the
conqueror deems it so” (156). Kincaid’s ceaseless conversations about herself and her
relationship with her mother, all the small and usually intimate details of her life,
become important because she makes them so.

Race issues resonate differently for Kincaid. Nowhere does she admit to
anxieties about being black. Instead she argues that since skin color is something one
has no control over then one should not claim it as a privilege or a curse: “It’s not an
effort you made and became black. It’s just the way you are. There is nothing
particularly pleasing or displeasing about that” (Ferguson, 164) But the confidence
which generates such an articulation ironically emerges from a society where race
matters, for race matters in all Caribbean societies, some to a greater extent than
others. But, rather than seeing power as a metonym for race, Kincaid reads race as
one manifestation of power, and the fact that the currently powerful have white skins is
merely an accident of time and circumstance. For Kincaid, it is in accepting race as an
issue that one becomes powerless.

Living a genteel life in Vermont and writing her views on gardening for The
New Yorker are activities which, as Kincaid herself is well aware, allies her with the
powerful. She can afford to spend money on expensive plants, can buy two of every
gardening tool, and has enough leisure time to pursue her two main interests: reading
and gardening. Neither is Kincaid interested in alliances—be it with a West Indian
social community, non-existent in Vermont, or a literary one. While she is interested
in the mechanics of power, Kincaid, unlike Cliff, does not see herself as part of the
powerless. She can empathize with that group but not identify herself as powerless.
Pragmatically dividing the world into the powerful and the powerless, she remains
interested in the fate of the underdog even while her lifestyle positions her with the
conquering class.

What seems to constitute power for Kincaid is the ability to take what you want
unapologetically. In her childhood, her physical size, her inability to stand up to her
mother had made Kincaid powerless. The scars of this former vulnerability remind her
that regardless of her new alignments, she can easily return to being powerless. Her
writing offers countless examples of operations of the powerful and ultimately her location in America, her choice of Vermont as a home is the act of Kincaid the powerful. She also claims America, because she sees herself as having similar entitlement to all the other exiles who claim themselves as Americans. In *Annie John*, Kincaid’s autobiographical first novel, Ma Chess rejects houses for holes in the ground where one can come and go as one please. America becomes Kincaid’s hole in the ground, and as an expatriate among expatriates she has a right to claim this space. As a successful writer, she too can afford to come and go as she pleases.

She also claims gardening as a space where her she can express her individuality. Well aware that she is part of a tradition where people garden to survive, where they grow food instead of fancy vegetables and flowers, and where garden is back-breaking labor, Kincaid’s gardening in Vermont, like her reading and writing, becomes a related act of survival. While on the surface she appears to be the lady of leisure who reads and gardens, the small pebbles of philosophy which her articles on gardening unearth reminds the reader that while the contexts may have changed, Kincaid remains preoccupied with the same issues which characterized her earlier writings.

Kincaid’s most recent work, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) confirms this. Bringing together the many issues circulating in her other works, Kincaid traces the acquisition of power and the ways in which such power is deployed. More significantly, she deconstructs familiar notions of what constitutes power. The protagonist, Xuela, is powerful because she remains outside of love and desire, and her
mother’s death, the perpetually mourned loss is what makes Xuela indomitable. Xuela’s mother dies in childbirth. The connection between Xuela’s birth and her mother’s death is developed in the novel as an un-assuaged need which brings the protagonist to define love and desire as unattainable. Paradoxically, because she needs her dead mother, Xuela needs no-one. That is the source of her power. The engagement with the Kincaidian mother continues. The powerful and the powerless wear the same face and with their interchangeable roles comes yet another migration of identity.

Re/claiming Tongues.

In West Indian society many labels are attached to woman’s speech. Positive ones connect it to a rich oral tradition. Negative ones dismiss it as the noise of tongues in constant motion, always talking and talking loudly. Within a patriarchal discourse marked by cultural admonitions which limit women’s speech to domestic noise or folk performance which have political currency, Kincaid and Cliff, through their liberal use of West Indian oral traditions each arrive at an emancipatory literary poetics which energizes the wagging tongue long cited as a bane of women. Coming to speech, Kincaid and Cliff each create self-reflective meta-narratives which celebrate tongues always in motion, talking, talking loudly, talking insistently. Theirs are tongues which talk back, tongues which wound, tongues which are unruly and disruptive. Theirs are also tongues which probe, which intrude, which bring joy, tongues which savor, which experiment, which seem silent, which connect with other
tongues. Theirs are tongues which mate. Yet, theirs are also tongues thrust out in
defiance against those very traditions which they celebrate because it is perceived that
oral traditions are themselves complicitous in keeping women outside the realm of
political power.

It is the energy of the tongue which is always in motion that I would like to
capture in my project and to that end have used the various motions of thrusting tongue
as a frame device for my chapters. This tongue remains connected to the oral tradition,
to folktales and proverbs, to subversive calypsos and riddles and each chapter title
evokes the West Indian oral tradition which has often empowered the tongue: its
folktales and proverbs, its subversive calypsos and its fondness for riddles, puns and
word play.

Chapter One is the first movement of the tongue, one thrust outwards in
defiance of traditions great and small. Beginning with an examination of the ways in
which the bildungsroman is creolized within a West Indian literary tradition, I argue
that whereas initially the bildungsroman linked the fate of the writer as
autobiographical subject to the collective predicament of an island community, Kincaid
and Cliff are using Annie John and Abeng to talk back to both a European and West
Indian literary tradition and focus instead on an individual consciousness and its
articulations of selfhood. Creating a bridge between the bildungsroman and the
künstlerroman, these two writers, in their eagerness to explore their arrival at artistic
freedom, make a generic detour and graft onto the kunstlerroman certain creolized
strains of the bildungsroman. In so doing, they create yet another hybrid genre which
speaks directly to their politics of location as writers living outside the region. The chapter ends with exile: the consequence which, as each novel has established, comes from talking back, and from coming of age.

Chapter Two picks up on the idea of the necessary exile occasioned by talking back. *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Lucy* explore the nature of the privilege and freedom gained in exile: the ability to construct a hybrid identity which in exile intersects with class, race, gender and sexuality in ways other than those which obtained in the Caribbean. Both writers respond differently to this freedom and I wish to link the differences in response to the personal circumstances which initiated their exile. Journey figures prominently in these two narratives, as it does in the writing of most Caribbean writers, yet I will argue here that it is not framed solely by markers of lamentation, nor is it constructed as a trope for psychic disintegration. Instead journey affords a construction of woman as open to infinite possibilities of signification.

This chapter also connects the migratory activities of the two writers under analysis to the larger regional pattern of movement, re-location and dislocation and is concerned with the ways in which each woman writer creates a specific survival strategy to negotiate her new homelessness. I am also suggesting that there are various performances of identity which are facilitated by the survival bundle which each writer carries with her from location to location. Each bundle, metaphorically constructed as a house, is constituted largely of the traditions imparted to her primarily through a community of women, and helps to make the journey from one location to another.
Chapter Three explores the ways in which each woman writer returns to this community of women presided over by the mother and grandmother. The tongue already empowered by that community returns to it and revalorizes the history of these oral communities. The Land of Look Behind and At The Bottom of the River are the two works which will frame this discussion. Through a close reading of both texts, I point out the ways in which the oral is represented, not only in terms of a storytelling tradition but in terms of how each writer links the oral with a specifically maternal legacy. To discover the oral is to discover the mother. To discover the mother is to speak with her voice. Related to journey is the move towards reclamation of the mothertongue, one which, at the same time, probes at the mothers’ complicity in keeping women in habits of silence. In helping to keep certain modes of speech contained in the fixed creole spaces of the home or the yard, mothers have supported patriarchal tyranny. Significantly, this chapter returns to an analysis of the mother/daughter relationship explored in Chapter One and to an exegesis of Cliff’s and Kincaid’s first literary works. But the analytical thrust is different. Here I am interested in the reasons why Kincaid and Cliff each excavates her maternal past, and propose that return now offers a sustenance and anchoring which is necessary after exile. However, the development undergone through exile allows Kincaid and Cliff to reclaim womantalk and to manipulate its power. Disclosure now functions as a way into testimony--a proclamation, an instance of power, the right to speak, to talk back.

The ways Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid choose to speak back are varied. My final chapter focuses on Free Enterprise and A Small Place. There, I argue that
Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid assume the position of witness as they testify on the historical narrations of conquest and dominion. In so doing each writer superimposes a female sensibility on earlier male versions of history. Contextualizing this re-theorizing of historicity and historiography, I suggest the ways in which changes in the socio-political landscape and the shifting locations which Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid each occupy, generate new narratives of history. Where formerly identity usually emerged out of history, now history is subordinate to identity.

Yet the perceptions of multiply located witnesses need to be themselves problematized in so far as points of view wrought in absentia or re-constructed through memory may repeat the biases which have contaminated previous versions of history. This chapter goes on to explore the contradictions and the ways in which Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid justify these by a retaliatory rhetoric which insists that the winner names the moment. Ultimately history is transposed into historiography, each writer creating her version using particular strategies of resistance and differing tactics of intervention. Both depose the written word as source of historical fact, each offers an alternative version which makes no claim to being absolute or prescriptive.

Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are still talking back, and writing back. The conclusion reiterates the polyvocal, open-ended narratives of these two women. Their ongoing narratives of identity and their shifting locations of home suggest participation in a Caribbean feminist poetics and the simultaneous engagement with transnational feminist poetics, in order to create discursive spaces large enough to allow for their continuing migrations.
Notes

1 In St. Lucia, the raconteur always begins the storytelling session with the kweyol (creole) phrase: “Misié I di kwik”, to which the audience answers “Kwak”. Roughly translated, this phrase written here in French Antillean orthography, means “Gentle people, I say ‘Crick’. “Kwik/crick” while it has no meaning in and of itself, sets the stage for the storytelling process, for it invites a relationship between the teller and the audience. Throughout the story, the raconteur pauses strategically and says “Kwik”. This time the audiences “Kwak” is a response to the call for approbation. The ritual not only confirms the raconteur’s skill as a storyteller and the liveliness of the story but also the tacit agreement that storytelling is a communal contract which holds both the teller and the audience responsible for the tale. The story usually ends with “Kwik, kwak”, this time functioning as a disclaimer that the raconteur is merely a conduit for the story, rather than the origin and must therefore not be held accountable for its “truths”.

It is useful to point out that this tradition is not unique to St. Lucia. Merle Hodge uses this folk tradition as the shaping principle of her novel Crick Crack Monkey. While the “Crick crack” ritual differs from island to island, the rhetorical intents remain similar.

2 “Caribbean” is often used to refer to a geographical area, while “West Indies” refers to the group of English speaking islands which came together to form a political union and took unto themselves the name “West Indies” so as to separate themselves from the geographical grouping. In places, I will use the general term “Caribbean” to refer to issues which are common to the Caribbean basin.

3 Jean Rhys has received wide critical attention but most of the criticism on her novels has been produced outside of the region. Rhys was, until Diane Simmons’ book on Jamaica Kincaid, the only West Indian woman on whom book length studies have been done.

4 Any discussion of West Indian identity is always already prefaced by Naipaul’s dismissal of West Indian history as one of nothingness and futility, a reiteration of the positions maintained by Froude a century before. Naipaul’s now famous statement in The Middle Passage: “The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies” (209), has like acid burnt through a budding West Indian consciousness. Yet out of the corrosion has come the retaliatory optimism of writers intent on offering an alternative to the bleakness of Naipual’s vision. See for example Walcott’s statement in The Voice Of St. Lucia May 2, 1973 “Nothing will always be created in the West Indies for quite a long time, because what ever will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before” (3), and Brathwaite’s creative re-working of Naipaul’s lines in the poem “Postlude/Home”: “For we / who have cre-atetd nothing / must exist / on nothing” (79).
Given that this section concerns itself with the various blueprints for identity formation being offered by West Indian writers, the nihilism of Naipaul’s vision will not be foregrounded in these discussions.

5 I am deliberately using the masculine pronoun here because debates on West Indian subjectivity were conducted primarily by Caribbean male writers. That is not to say that women had not themselves articulated a position on selfhood, but most of the literature by women suffered an extremely limited circulation (see for example History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave or The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands) and was largely ignored as part of a West Indian canon. Jean Rhys, a white Dominican writer publishing Wide Sargasso Sea in 1968, was valiantly engaged in these self same articulations. There were however many reservations about the identity she was espousing especially as she was presenting that identity through a protagonist whose whiteness was judged by Rhys’ detractors as marking her privilege based on a socially-constructed status. While Rhys was anxiously presenting whiteness as an ideology which must be considered in relation to gender, class and economics, the privilege of whiteness remained overwhelming for black West Indians whose lives seemed intimately affected by race.

6 Aware of the many contestable definitions of “Postcoloniality”, I am using the term here, as conceptualized by Tiffin and Slem (1989) to mean “the cultural realities of societies whose subjectivities have been constituted at least in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism” (xi). In so doing, I hope to evoke the notion that postcolonial carries with it traces of the colonial and the ways in which this presence undermines the colonial/postcolonial divide.

7 I am speculating here that this response may be in part shaped by both the occupations and the racial compositions of these two writers. Where both Lamming and Brathwaite are black Barbadians, Walcott is a light-skinned, green eyed St.Lucian, first apprenticed as a painter. It was under the tutelage of Harold Simmons, another St.Lucian landscape artist, that Walcott came into an appreciation of the rich inspirational power of the land and the folk. Harris, similarly hued, was intimate with the impenetrable majesty and mystery of the Guyanese landscape.

8 See, for example, Harris in an interview with Vera Kutzinski, Callaloo 18.1, 1995. There he talks about the partiality/fragmentation of his vision as it manifests itself in his fiction and the ways in which his novels continuously grope towards an understanding which has yet to be contained in a neat theoretical package. His suspicion of absolute models is to my mind a reiteration of his position some twenty eight years before as articulated in “Tradition, The Writer and Society” where he was wrestling with a narrative form which would best synthesizes the Caribbean experience.

9 Quoted in Sandra Pouchet Pacquet’s essay “West Indian Autobiography” 203-4, this is a fragment from Walcott’s notes in the prose manuscript of Another Life.
At this point I need to sound a cautionary note. The positions presented here do not
represent these writers total articulation of West Indian identity. I have chosen to
highlight the attitudes which had currency at a time when issues of West Indian identity
were more immediate. Furthermore implicit to many articulations of a Caribbean
Aesthetic was a larger political agenda. What I am hoping to give here is the sense of a
burgeoning West Indian nationalism and the fondness for dichotomous thinking so
prevalent at that time. This historicizing of literary movements is valid because is in this
period and within these circulating ideas that Kincaid and Cliff enter the literary scene.
However these are theories which were articulated by practicing and maturing writers.
There is in fact a sense that these writers were traveling constantly through old landscapes
and seeing them anew, observing things they had missed, or because of their experience
giving new meaning to old ideas.

For example where once some had held truth to be an absolute now writers like
Naipaul were revising this position and moving closer to the postmodernist perception
that there are always many truths residing in an idea. Mellowing from his earlier
unequivocal indictment of the region as having no history and therefore no identity,
Self-Invention” sees as a “changing attitude towards the territory which he has traversed,
and a refinement of that understanding of himself as a writer...articulating the idea of
personal self invention” (4). Whereas the young Walcott had been preoccupied with
creative schizophrenia, he can in a later interview, re-interpret this as the totalizing
tendency which betrays the melodrama of youth and can, in turn, problematize this
position in ways which relate more intimately to colonial interpellation. As the earlier
footnote on Kutzinski’s interview with Harris indicated, totalizing is not something one
can ever be free of. Harris is however suggesting that one returns to old interpretations so
as to acquire a different visualization which disrupts the absoluteness of that perspective.
Conceding that there are always multiple meanings resident in an idea, a return to the idea
lessens the risk of totalizing. Brathwaite’s own vision of history has widened. In the
“Rehumanisation of History”, Gordon Rohlehr aptly maps the ways in which
Brathwaite reanimates history in terms of “spirits, apocalypse and revolution” (250).

I have borrowed thus phrase from Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* where he uses it
to discuss the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Similarly, in his poem “Nigger Sweat” Edward Baugh evokes the despair and hope
which drenches the potential immigrant as he waits in the US Embassy Visa section, for
the processing of his application. The sign in the waiting arena reminds the potential
applicant to keep the documents dry. Baugh juxtaposes the honest sweat which has been
put to the service of American capitalism and the nervous secretions which threaten to
dissolve the legitimacy of the application. The poem comes to an ominous conclusion
where the same sweat becomes “a river rising, rising/ and swelling the sea and I see/ you
choking and drowning/ in a sea of black man sweat” (51).
In *Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid describes a popular form of punishment in Dominica, where a child would have to kneel on the ground or on rocks in the hot sun and hold two large stones over her head. This same practice occurs with many variations in other islands. With education, sensitization to the ethos of child abuse, the practice has declined.

The consequence of this racial typecasting is a recurring concern in West Indian literature. Olive Senior’s short stories focus intimately on how the power dynamics of small rural communities in Jamaica are influenced by this color bar. Similarly, in his play *Old Story Time*, Trevor Rhone dramatizes the break-up of the family because of this invidious privileging of color and the self-hatred which darker-skinned people suffered. But the problem is not limited to Jamaica, Derek Walcott also takes up this theme in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* where Makak’s apotheosis comes through his dreams of the white goddess who liberates from the ugliness of his dark skin. In “The British and French West Indies” Bridget Brereton provide an explanation of the ways in which class, color together affected economic status within a community, “racism, as well as sensitivity to color or shade, were strong everywhere and the pattern of race relations developed on the basis of an officially sanctioned belief that people of African (and Indian) descent were inferior, intellectually and morally, to people of European origin” (92). In *Abeng*, Cliff engages in a fuller self-reflexivity of the status of ‘tall hair and fair skin” in Jamaican society, contrasting the acceptability which Clare’s color brings her, despite the fact that she, like many of the darker-skinned children cannot afford the school fees and is on scholarship. *No Telephone to Heaven* further develops the separateness engendered by color and the damaging psychology of passing.

For a fuller statement of Kincaid’s position on the differences between West Indians and African Americans, see her interview with Moira Ferguson (citation already provided).

By the Jamaica novels I am referring to *Abeng*, *No Telephone to Heaven* along with Cliff’s prose/poetry pieces: *Claiming an Identity They Taught me to Despise*, and *The Land of look Behind*. These works relate her coming into a Jamaican identity. On the other hand, *Bodies of Water* and *Free Enterprise* undertake markedly different projects and to my mind are examples of Cliff’s transnational imagination.
CHAPTER 1

Talking Back to the Bildungsroman.

“Make sure you done grow before you start giving backchat”
Caribbean proverb.

The restlessness and dissatisfaction which initiate the literary subject’s movement away from the familial and the familiar and the anxiety to become an articulate and an articulating self are widespread anxieties. The Bildungsroman is typically the literary form used to ideologically map out this process. However with the frequency of its narrative representation of the journeying subject as the white male, the Bildungsroman has come to be identified with a western model of development, which in inscribing the white male as the universal protagonist theorized his particular progress into adulthood as prototypical. In spite of its bias, this genre continues to be employed within a variety of literary cultures as a narrative site within which to constitute subject formation. Specifically, in a Caribbean literary context, race and gender considerations together with the experience of colonialism have created particular aesthetic inflections so that self-assertion and self-ascription are usually presented in terms of a racial, national and sexual identity.

Reviewed, recast and rendered more applicable to the discursive formulation of the marginal subject, the Bildungsroman in the twentieth century contextualized the journey of the Caribbean protagonist into adulthood, framing a development of voice
and agency within an experience of conquest and domination. But the *Bildungsroman* has a utility greater than the examination of the process of ‘soul making of the individual.’ Accommodating more than the contested progress of the protagonist into maturation, it became a literary form useful to the depiction of political self-representation in colonial and modernist contexts which deny the validity of homeland and wholeness. In the 1950’s the genre was used to represent the experience of an entire community. Indeed one of the most individualistic of Western literary forms was now appropriated into a context where communal forms of representations was still the dominant impulse and was deployed as a means of writing the silenced community into history.

Of necessity, the *Bildungsroman* undergoes transcultural modifications in its re-location in different discursive arenas suitable to a variety of resistance ideologies. With Caribbean adaptations, the development of the protagonist and the assumption of a position of responsibility in society is presented within a larger paradox. On one hand, we have the detailing of a process whereby the unformed native is being molded into a suitable colonial subject. On the other, the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* records the ways in which native culture resists imperial invalidation and acquires significance in the folk world as a powerful, sustaining and sustainable force. The journey towards selfhood occurs against a backdrop of the competing power of the metropolis and the folk community, a struggle often characterized in postcolonial studies as the imagined encounter between Prospero and Sycorax.
The *bildung* for the Caribbean protagonist, Caliban, becomes an act of strategic alignment with either of these societies. Consequent to this process, Caliban develops a double consciousness, in that he carries the trace of both discourse communities. In his famous formulation of “double consciousness” W.E.B. Du Bois speaks of the formation of African American subjectivity within a socio-historical context which ‘only lets one see himself through the revelation of the other world—the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others . . . One even feels his twoness — an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one dark body” (17). Whereas Du Bois’s theory had established the Negro as living within a hyphenated context, Vèvè A. Clark in “Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness” goes beyond this oppositional framework to identify another alternative, what she refers to as ‘the third principle.”

Clark offers instead “the reformation of form,” a reduplicative narrative posture which assumes and revises Du Bois’s double consciousness. In the wider field of contemporary literacy criticism, this reformative strategy approximates the deconstruction of mastery” (42). For Clark the deconstruction of mastery occasions an interactive creativity which she establishes Du Bois’ Hegelian dialectic as having overlooked. She then posits *marasa* consciousness as a vernacular approach which better situates diasporic activities and uses examples of Vodoun and jazz as representations of deformed mastery. Clark’s *marasa* consciousness is similar to Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s concept of creolization as an indigenous perspective from which to understand West Indian literature, and in supplementing Du Bois’s “double
consciousness,” affords a useful transition to a discussion of the relationship between creolization and double consciousness. In *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1730 - 1820*, Brathwaite establishes creolization as a process, a situation of continuous conflict that is generated by more than the mere juxtaposition to and relationship with metropolitan society. Creolization is instead a complex, symbiotic and dynamic process whereby both metropolis and colony are transformed through intervention. The discourse of creolization concedes an uneven relation of power between colonizer and colonized and extends the imperial encounter to one which doubles back on itself and in so doing creates a shifting context within which to read Caribbean letters.

With Caliban’s intervention into the *Bildungsroman*, there was more than an inversion of a genre or an annexation of a discourse which would serve his revolutionary polemic. What was at work in those early West Indian novels was what Brathwaite has defined as “reciprocal interchange” allowing for an ongoing mediation of Propsero’s triumphant epistemology with the noise of Sycorax’s “strange and terrible magic”. In *The Tempest*, Caliban describes the island as “full of noises / sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not” (3.1.135-136) It is the clamor of those noises which reminds him that Sycorax though imprisoned in a tree, is not defeated. Her noises move Caliban to revolt, the noise of Prospero’s language returns Caliban to surly servitude. While dualism is inevitable, the tension of these choices creates a vigorous instability which does not allow for the domination of one set of noises but rather makes a space for an ongoing dialogue.
And in his refusal to be silent and amenable Caliban was making defiant use of Prospero’s language as an instrument of interrogation and resistance and subverting a traditional European form to power his rebellion. Caliban’s *Bildungsroman* critiqued the patriarchal society which Prospero had presented as ideal. The means which Prospero had used to forge his manhood, his humanity, his nationality, and ultimately his superiority were now made to craft access to the selfhood denied to Caliban. In the re-defining of Prospero’s terminology for self-development, the *Bildungsroman* became what bell hooks in *Talking Back* has establishes as “an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of dominion that would render [one] nameless and voiceless” (8). Caliban’s talking back was operating on different registers, each register articulating a particular grievance, all interested in recapitulating Prospero’s hegemony and in establishing Caliban as an active and powerful subject.

However in the imitation and adaptation of a European form, there was the unconscious perpetuation of some of its limitations, specifically the paternalistic myopia which had emphasized the maturation of one kind of subject while ignoring the existence of a resisting other. Caliban’s transgressive operations on Prospero’s invidious text of individualism tended to substitute a communal and collective identity for the individual articulation of selfhood. Such an elision created the seamless narrative of a monolithic black identity which left no space for difference or for the Caribbean woman who for the most part was objectified as part of a nationalist landscape, or confined to the supporting roles of daughter, mother and wife.⁶
Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid critique the aforementioned modes of representations. Although they may not be consciously writing back to these earlier writers, they are reacting to the ideology which had shaped this previous generation. Specifically, Cliff and Kincaid contributed to the further creolization of the *Bildungsroman* by destabilizing both maculinist and popular feminist conventions of representing the female subject. Their strategies in *Abeng* and *Annie John* while participating in feminist, nationalist and postcolonial theories of resistance, do not allow for the easy location of either writer in a particular ideological camp. For while identity and representation remain critical anxieties in these two novels, that self is in fact highly contested. It is an autobiographical self, yet both writers are rewriting personal history in ways which persistently troubling what constitutes autobiography; it is a filial self constructing its subjectivity through resistance to regimes of power located in the maternal; it is a sexual self whose positioning along a continuum of sexuality eschews both homosexual and heterosexual labels.

This chapter also argues that *Annie John* and *Abeng* function as manifestations of Kincaid's and Cliff's *Künstlerroman*. Each woman embarks on a journey toward artistic selfhood and uses autobiographical fiction to mark out her own *bildung*. The material conditions which facilitate the literary production of the two novels is reflected in *Annie John* and *Abeng* as the circumstances which frustrate Annie's and Clare's reproduction of themselves in society. The triumph of the fictional protagonist in achieving selfhood is engineered to imitate each writer's success in establishing herself as a published author. Further, the importance of community in the articulation of
each protagonist’s bildung is repeated in Kincaid’s and Cliff’s varied manipulations of literary history in order to forge their identities as writers--identities which challenge and transform literary forms of self-representations.

The creolized Bildungsroman: An early West Indian version.

Autobiography, an account of the life of an individual, is a literary tradition which came into prominence in the eighteenth century. Like the Bildungsroman, it also describes the relationship between the individual and society and is in most instances as much a personal history as it is a representational one given that the fate of the individual is often inextricably linked to that of society. However, despite the remarkable similarity of theoretical intent, the autobiography has for a long time maintained a generic separation from the Bildungsroman. In “Shadowing, Surfacing/Shedding: Contemporary German Writers in Search of a Female Bildungsroman,” Sandra Friedman provides a account of the relationship between the two genres that is useful:

Autobiographical accounts, insistent upon the accuracy of their narrative content, came to serve as an exemplary function, indicating the path one’s life should take, either by explicit or implicit injunction. Together, the Bildungsroman and the autobiography acted as complementary counterparts of the same expressive role: the fictional and the non-fictional account of the individual in his (‘his’ is, of course, being used in this context intentionally) development, in his struggle to integrate himself, his ideals, and his perspectives into an increasingly industrialized, materialistic, and alienating bourgeois society. (304-5)
Friedman goes on to connect the distinctive blurring between the two forms to
Germany’s post World War II crisis of identity. The introspective realization of man’s
inhumanity to man had generated suspicion for the concept of truth as universal. Truth
now came to reside provisionally in the one’s own experience—in the life lived:

‘Fiction’ writers, in turn, began infusing their narratives with ‘new
subjectivity’ authenticity. In such novels, authors traced their own
experiences and development in the process of combating—or
conforming to—their society. This autobiographical material is set
within an ostensibly fictionalized framework that removes the work from
the realm of the traditional autobiography. (305)

The Bildungsroman also maintains the connection between the individual and
the society for there is a parallelism between the story narrated and the process of
reading it. Martin Swales in The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse
traces this connection to Karl Morgenstern, the earliest architect of the concept of the
Bildungsroman as it came into being in the nineteenth century. Morgenstern
developing the ideas of Jacob, an earlier theorist, defined the genre thus:

It will justly bear the name Bildungsroman firstly and primarily on
account of its thematic material, because it portrays the bildung of the
hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completion; and
secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the
reader’s bildung to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel.

The act of writing does not occur in a social vacuum; instead the reader is as much
transformed both by the experiences of the text and by his identification with the
protagonist.

In the revisioning of the Bildungsroman, West Indian stories of maturation are
as much narrative explorations of the artist’s own struggle to define his subjectivity as
it is the anxiety of a nation to establish itself as sovereign in the face of imperializing forces. It is this second task which goes beyond the concerns of the European expression of the genre. Further, the West Indian artist establishes himself as the prototypical subject and uses his own experiences as the basis upon which to narrate the development of a wider community. Sandra Pouchet Paquet in “West Indian Autobiography” provides specificity to this claim:

Autobiography gives the writer direct access into his privileged relationship to the West Indian community as an insider, and, additionally it gives him the opportunity to define the quality of his relationship to that community in ideal terms. Self-revaluation becomes a way of laying claim to a landscape that is at once geographical, historical, and cultural. In this fashion, the writer is privileged to write himself into the symbolic systems that make up West Indian literature and culture. In the process, the autobiographical self as subject is transformed into a cultural archetype, and autobiography becomes both the lived historical reality and the myth created out of that experience. Personal experience and historical events alike are transformed into autobiographical myth. (198)

_In the Castle of My Skin_ is one of the earliest examples of the West Indian male _Bildungsroman_. In his introduction to the 1983 edition of this novel, the writer George Lamming provides a retrospective explanation of the circumstances which generated his writing of _In the Castle of My Skin_ and confirms the willful blending of autobiography and fiction. He explains: “In the desolate frozen heart of London, at the age of twenty three, I tried to reconstruct the world of my childhood and early adolescence. It was also the world of a whole Caribbean reality” (p. xii). The novel is indeed rich with correspondences between Lamming’s own childhood and the life he creates for the boy G. There is however a larger didactic intent driving the narrative,
for the author measures the boy’s journey to adulthood in terms of another fiction: the
development of political consciousness which characterizes a Caribbean community as
it moves from colonial dependence towards Independence. Autobiography becomes
depersonalized into raw material for the production of a collective, political identity
within which the individual can safely situate himself. Lamming is insistent on this
substitution of the individual “I” with the collective. In an interview with Daryl
Cumber Dance, he explains the undergirding ideology as:

[Very central to a lot of the fiction in the Caribbean in which the ‘I’ of
the writer is hardly separable from the ‘we’, even when the ‘I’ is
speaking only of the ‘I’. The opening of In the Castle of My Skin is the
‘I’ of the ‘I’ but that ‘I’ is in a sense not only the ‘I’ of the ‘I’ but the ‘I’
of any of the others. That ‘I/we’ arrangement I want to keep. (142-3)

Indeed this I/We arrangement is maintained throughout In the Castle of My
Skin. Lamming connects G’s coming of age with the social changes occurring in the
village as it struggles for independence. The fragile structure of the village and its
struggle to maintain its visible shape are initially called into doubt by the flood which
“could level the stature and even conceal the identity of the village” (3). In the course
of the narrative, the connection between the boy’s lack of selfhood and the village’s
inability to sustain its “visible shape” solidifies. Self-consciously, Lamming develops a
narrative mode which he later justifies as expressing the collective human substance of
the village rather than the individuated process of creating subjectivity. He judges this
as the deliberate bypassing of a “central consciousness where we focus attention and
through which we can be guided reliably by the logical succession of events” (xii).
Instead Lamming argues for "several centers of attention" which work simultaneously and acquire their coherence from the collective character of the village.

Social and political changes, emblematized in new patterns of land ownership in the village, are depicted as disrupting the former ways of living as the tenants are forced to find new homes. Lamming orchestrates the ensuing loss of communal genealogy to evoke G's desire for a replacement stability and rootedness as he looks beyond his village home and the island for a new and safe community. At the end of the novel Lamming leaves the reader with the sense of an unrecoverable order and the inevitable future of destabilization. He juxtaposes the lack of psychic coherence in a fatherless and now history-less boy with the improbability of a society emerging which can withstand the trauma of de-colonization.

The Bildungsroman tradition as it exists in Western literature observes a particular convention with regard to endings. Typically, the closing moments of the narrative celebrate the maintenance of social order in the triumphant re-absorption of the mature protagonist into a society which, though deficient in some regard, is sufficient to the sustenance of the protagonist. Further the protagonist's compliance with the existing authority, however questionable, is a ratification of an order which though challenged, survives. This model of bildung, although constantly under review had maintained the German preoccupation with a concept of the freedom found in growth and journey as one which Swales has labeled a "secular submission and spiritual independence" (155). The dynamism and instability which the protagonist's quest had activated is never fully accommodated and this lack of resolution creates an
open-endedness which allows the society to reach its own bildung. In The Way of the World, Franco Moretti explains the genre thus:

Even though the concept of bildungsroman has become even more approximate, it is still clear that we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization. (15)

Generally the emancipatory potential of the Bildungsroman does not survive its creolization intact. The concluding images which frequently mark the male West Indian Bildungsroman are usually those of exile rather than the harmonious reconciliation of conflict. Psychological paralysis is nonetheless inextricably bound up in the possibilities for change contained in the autobiographical narrative which as I have argued is so often embedded in the creole version of the Bildungsroman. It is the fact of the autobiographer’s successful bildung, as shown in his artistry, which allows for what Konjte in The German Bildungsroman calls “a fictive activity [which is] deeply rooted in a spontaneous process within the self and a process of enormous power to affect reality” (75). In Writing in Limbo, Simon Gikandi offers a less enthusiastic, though no less insightful assessment of the role of autobiography in the facilitation of G’s bildung in In the Castle of My Skin. “The act of narrating the self engenders the tracing of the process of separation and loss but on the other hand, the narrative foregrounds the utopian desire for isotopic integration” (85). While Lamming appears to support this view of the utility of autobiography, he nonetheless allows a bleak fiction to overwrite optimism.
In *In the Castle of My Skin*, self-assertion and self-expression are subordinated by the social chaos which surrounds G. As the boy/man wrestles with a language with which to name his experience, the inchoate semiotic space created by a rhetoric of nationalism as espoused by Slime, temporarily reduces his linguistic quest to a babble of meaningless words “going pop, pop, pop, in your head” (155). Pa, modeled on Lamming’s Godfather, had functioned as the center in G’s life and in his eviction and relocation is no longer able to hold the boy’s always unraveling subjectivity together: “It was as though my roots had been snapped from the center of what I knew best, while I remained impotent to wrest what my fortunes had forced me into” (224). The societal devaluation of Pa constitutes a disregard for the oral history he carries and a dismissal of his way of self-expression.

Similarly, the honesty and sincerity which had marked Pa’s discourse and which had provided the boy with a useful genealogy are inauthenticated, G—now a willing inmate in the prisonhouse of colonial language, hopes that there he will learn new ways of seeing and of being which will provide him with a sense of authenticity:

They had the right words. Language was a kind of passport. You could go where you like if you knew how to say it. It didn’t matter whether you felt everything you said. You had language, good, big words to make up for what you didn’t feel. And if you were really educated you could command the language like a captain on a ship, if you could make the language do what you wanted it to do, say what you wanted it to say, then you didn’t have to feel at all. You could do away with feelings. . . . when the feelings come up like so many little pigs that grunted and irritated with their grunts, you could slaughter them. You could slaughter your feelings as you slaughtered a pig. Language was all you needed. It was like a knife. It knifed your feelings clear and proper . . . (155)
But there are other ways to arrive at feeling, ways which are neither murderous nor committed to annexing power.

Lamming depicts these options through antithesis. Colonial education moves the boy into further uncertainty rather than closer to self-expression. Instead Trumper’s role in the narrator’s life is substituted as a possibility of an alternative mode of resistance and of new locations and definitions of power. Departure for which the boy is being trained does not necessarily spell G’s obedience to colonial authority for it is Trumper’s own migration to North America and his lessons about racial identity there which allow him to substitute acquiescence with resistance. Trumper is able upon his return, to tutor G into an awareness of the power he and the villagers have to change their reality. It is Trumper’s bildung which moves the narrator to a level of political consciousness and which creates a qualified optimism in the closing chapter. Like the reader who is transformed by the act of participating in the Bildungsroman, G’s reading of Trumper’s development of race consciousness functions as a sign that he must undertake his own bildung: “I had nothing to say because I wasn’t prepared for what had happened. Trumper made his own experience, the discovery of a race, a people, seemed like a revelation. It was nothing I had known, and it didn’t seem I could know it until I had lived it” [emphasis mine](306-7)

Unfortunately the discovery cannot be made within the boy’s society. Personal and spiritual independence remain uncorrelated with social and national articulations of selfhood.
In the Castle of My Skin is largely about relationships among men. The role of
the woman in the national project as it evolves is that of invisible, though useful,
support. G’s mother, devoted to her son’s success remains un-named, trapped within
the stereotypical depiction of woman as the nurturing edges which holds male
subjectivity together. Her world, populated by women who provide a choral
commentary on the vicissitudes of the life which G hopes to escape from, remains
invalidated by the “I” narrator. Her complexities, the significance of her domestic
rituals all remain unmarked and unacknowledged. Woman’s discourse becomes
anecdotal. The storytelling which defines women’s community, the orature which
often provides insightful commentary on the inadequacy of the political vision driving
the social transformation of the village, are, while they are quietly informing G’s ways
of representing his world, unacknowledged and unappreciated. The narrator’s
judgment of their repeating and re-writing of their daily exigencies is a harsh one:
“Their consciousness had never quickened to the fact of life to which these confidences
might have been a sure testimony” (17). The womenfolk are never more than props in
the drama of nationhood

Lamming parallels G’s disregard for the mother to the community’s own lack of
respect for people like Pa. Both are representatives of the devalued folk. In the
community’s devaluation of their worth, resides the suggestion that liberation processes
which do not begin or draw support from these oral sources are doomed. This point of
view finds partial correspondence in the ideology of nationalism as articulated by
Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth. In his argument on “National Culture’

60
Fanon establishes that the native intellectual goes through three distinct phases. He identifies these as a first stage where the colonized subject is intent on slavish adherence to European mores. At this stage, the native intellectual is intent on establishing self-worth through comparison with imported models. But the second phase is an antithetical one backwards to memories of a childhood world governed by cultural habits which are yet to be undermined by colonialism. For Fanon the immersion in this world is only partially successful because “the native intellectual is not a part of his people, since he has only external relations with his people he is content to recall their life only” (222). But according to Fanon this stage is not without utility. It becomes the energizing vault from which the writer as revolutionary springs.

After having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, he will, on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people’s lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people, hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature and a national literature. (222-3)

The relationship between the three phases are not marked out as neatly in In the Castle of My Skin. While the folk world sustains the boy G and is a safe space to which the exilic Lamming returns, it is never validated by its inhabitants as necessary to the discourse of nationalism. It generates no revolutionary movements, nor does it bring the subject to self-discovery and authority.

The double consciousness which I earlier suggested was an inescapable part of the postcolonial condition does not always manifest itself in the consistent ways or with consistent results. Lamming’s double consciousness affords him a recognition and
respect for West Indian culture and its nurturing environment which the protagonist of
*In the Castle of My Skin* has yet to arrive at. George Lamming’s own autobiography
retrospectively articulates the discovery of a race and people and the power of the folk
society. The experience which G claims he needs to live before he can arrive at the
political consciousness which now powers Trumper, re-enters the narrative as George
Lamming’s *bildung*. G with his abbreviated name becomes a representative of a
cultural condition and Lamming’s vehicle for exploring a collective experience.
George Lamming’s arrival at double vision where he can see self as a part of and apart
from his community becomes an example of this process.

Finally *In the Castle of My Skin* is not only a novel about a child growing up.
It is about a society coming to recognize the worth of its native culture. The *bildung*
of the child becomes the *bildung* of the society which replaces G as the central character.
But the perception of the village as character encourages a tendency to reduce it to a
monolithic acquiescing body wherein social categories are flattened out and gender
performance unproblematically portrayed. What happens however when identity issues
become unruly presences within the social order? Can the West Indian community be
rendered in different or even contradictory versions when the “I” representing the
“We” is a female “I?” *Wide Sargasso Sea* attempts to answer these question but the
racial cast of Rhys’s protagonist does not allow for a full representation of Caribbean
society. *Crick Crack, Monkey* written some four years latter provides a fuller answer.
Womanist Interventions in the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*

**Take 1**

Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey*, written in 1970, presents a young girl growing up in a society where nationalism is struggling for precedence over colonialism. Cliff and Kincaid are among a large body of West Indian women writers who although writing some ten years later, locate their novels within the same time frame. Unlike Hodge, these other writers complicate their presentation with a discussion of the ways in which patriarchy is imbricated in the discourse of nationalism. Admitting in an interview with Karen Balutansky that the theme of individual maturation is prevalent in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Hodge is quick to subordinate it to the larger issue of colonial domination. She claims that her narrative intent, like Lamming’s, is to “use the child narrator as a seeing eye, as a kind of stock taking in the face of non-recognition of West Indian culture” (653). However Hodge’s own social constructedness allows her to argue from a position different from Lamming’s who had foregrounded the public institutionalization of colonial hegemony.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey* Hodge is sensitive to the ways in which colonial power is deployed in domestic institutions, that is through the family and class relationships which shape the psycho-social development of the protagonist Tee.

This shift in Hodge’s perspective allows for a more rigorous interrogation of community. Hodge revisits the literary space which *In the Castle of My Skin* carves, so as to construct a largely self-reflective text which makes use of the creole language patterns and the oral narrative structures to which *In the Castle of My Skin* had paid
passing attention. Rhonda Cobham’s explanation of the difference in the philosophical approaches in these two texts is a useful one. In “Revisioning Our Kumblas,” Cobham writes:

Structurally, however, unlike the questing hero of the male writer, the folk culture in relation to which the heroine’s alienation is measured is also the source or potential source of her redemption. Instead of allowing the literary form of the romance and its latter-day equivalent, the existential narrative, to define and marginalize the culture of women as outside of time and historically redundant, that culture itself becomes a structuring agent, providing the ambiance through which modern problems like alienation and the loss of authenticity are perceived and articulated. (51)

The mode of articulating the loss of authenticity in Crick Crack, Monkey is one which seeks to valorize the folk world both linguistically and narratively. Drawing on an oral creole tradition, Hodge employs a mode of storytelling which itself renders the experience of maturation as a fable which has applicability to the wider West Indian society. Her choice of “crick crack” as title and trope relates to the call and response chanted at the beginning of storytelling sessions in the Southern Caribbean as explained in the Introduction. In the novel Hodge uses “crick, crack” as a way into critiquing the “fairytale” which Caribbean people have been told about the superiority of European culture and the inadequacy of Caribbean folkways. Her refrain, “crick crack” is followed by “Monkey break e’ back /On a rotten pommerac,” a warning of the consequences of blind acceptance of colonial fairytales.

Similarly, Hodge portrays Tee as being told two conflicting narratives. One is a story told by Aunt Beatrice—a “monkey” who is thoroughly interpellated by the “It's
better in Britain” ethos—about the benefits of middle class life and a colonial education. Aunt Beatrice prefaces her story with the warning that the folklore being offered by the child’s paternal aunt, Tantie, prevents one from accessing this respectable world. Alongside Aunt Beatrice’s tale of respectability, Ma Henrietta, the child’s paternal grandmother offers an enchanting one about a supportive cultural community which can bring the heroine both redemption and the power to defeat the goblins of patriarchy and colonialism.

Hodge’s “crick crack” also deconstructs the earlier story of women’s role in the enterprise of nationalism. Where they had been portrayed as peripheral to that project, Hodge is insistent here that the West Indian male and female are both implicated in the imperial enterprise and that the West Indian subject, to borrow a phrase from Patricia Waugh in Feminine Fiction: Revisiting The Postmodern, “is historically determined and discursively oriented” (169). Tee’s fascination with the transformative authority of the colonial world imitates G’s fascination with the language. Correspondingly the impact of colonial education on Tee’s development occupies a significant and irreconcilable space in the narrative.

The girl’s respect of school—the antithesis of the folk world—gradually displaces the power of orality as evidenced in Tantie’s creole world. Literacy as defined initially by the Anglophile Mr. Hinds and later reinforced by Schoolteacher replaces orality:

I looked forward to school. I looked forward to the day when I could pass my hands swiftly from side to side on a blank piece of paper leaving meaningful marks in its wake; to stare nonchalantly into a book until I turned over the page, a gesture pregnant with importance for it indicated that one had not merely been staring, but that that most
esoteric of processes had been taking place whereby the paper had yielded something or other as a result of having been stared at. (20)

But the attachment to colonial education as a way of gaining subjectivity results in the descent into psychosis. Tee reads books which do not cast her as subject, books about a culture which is antithetical to the shabby, disorderly world of Tantie. Learning that subjectivity means you are the subject of discourse, Tee exchanges her creole identity for the make-believe Helen’s. The world which Tee’s books valorize is closer to Aunt Beatrice’s middle class one --Hodge’s example of colonial mimicry. But while Helen, Tee’s “proper double” could function in Aunt Beatrice’s world, in Tantie’s world there is no place for pretense and the Helen identity recedes. But the colonial desire which had generated Helen remains buried, resurfacing in the behavior patterns encouraged at high school when Tee becomes a permanent member of Aunt Beatrice’s household.

Tee now lives a double life. In Writing in Limbo Gikandi explains this doubleness:

Tee tries to constitute herself by striving for the fragmented languages of other people; but even as she reproduces other peoples words and views, she is frantically seeking to institute the integrity of her own voice and her privileged position as an observer and narrator. In other words, against her limited authority and truncated mastery of language, she still struggles to express things ‘otherwise’ to endow discourse with what Bakhtin would call the subject’s ‘semantic and expressive intention.’ (205)

The double consciousness growing in the child is supported by the domestic world within which she operates. Tantie’s world, raucously vocal, and unabashedly resourceful, is as much a part of Tee’s consciousness as Aunt Beatrice’s citified, antiseptic way of being. Both generate a sense of unbelonging. The bush to which Tee
retreats in order to “escape the sound of Aunt Beatrice’s voice” (128) must not be read
as a symbolic return to Ma and Tantie’s world because even as the memories of life
with Ma surface as a reassurance of a safe space there is a simultaneous “bottomless
horror” lest her new relatives and friends discover the “ordinaryness” and
“niggeryness” of her summer vacations at Point d’Espoir:

For suddenly I saw us coming out of the water with our petticoats and
panties and old trousers clutching at our bodies, and some of us who
hadn’t bothered to find a tattered piece of clothing to bathe in, naked.
And then Ma. Ma who sold in the market. Ma who was a market
woman. (128)

Linguistically and culturally, Tee is now devaluing the way of life at Pointe d’Espoir.

Tee’s voluntary sitting in standard English speech patterns encourages what Gramsci
calls “cultural domination by consent.” Yet Tee remains linguistically suspended
between the creole world which has affectionately shortened her name to Tee and Aunt
Beatrice’s proper one which formally names her Cynthia. Neither is her true name.
Ultimately, the protagonist’s inability to name herself as subject is inevitable to a
colonial experience which has dismembered her.

At the end of the novel however, Tee utters the “crick crack” disclaimer to both
stories. In moving beyond Tantie’s “niggery” world, Tee no longer validates Ma
Henrietta’s oral traditions. The range of her power to educate Tee about the meaning
of her “true true” name and the importance of her genealogy is reduced to a quiet
“crick crack”. Furthermore in rejecting Tantie as too common, Tee never learns
appreciation for the ethic of caring which makes Tantie so attractive and useful to her
community. Aunt Beatrice’s middle class pretensions, having transformed her

67
discourse to the squeak of a “high heel and stockings voice” (3), which remains largely ignored by her husband and children, now poisons Tee’s perception of what constitutes social worth. Neither is Tee able to offer “Crick crack” to this narrative for Aunt Beatrice’s story is constantly repeated in the formal education Tee is receiving, and the noise of its frequent reiterations confirms its worth to Tee.

Tee’s loss of spirit is balanced by the presence of Toddan, her younger brother who is undiminished by Aunt Beatrice’s properness. Hodge seems to be suggesting that Toddan’s through immersion in Tantie’s world has brought him to unapologetic speech, an ability to be comfortable in a variety of socio-linguistic contexts. In her first novel, Hodge is scrupulous in her rendering of Toddan’s own mode of survival, the nurturing he receives from Tantie and the security he gains in her creole world as an options which is never available to Tee. He can say “Crick crack” to Aunt Beatrice’s world because he has never really been a part of it and because he is not as yet fully immersed in colonial education.

Hodge highlights Tee struggle for self-assertion but is careful to show that the solution does not reside in the child. The novel ends with the evocation of the West Indian’s transcendental desire to escape the nothingness of his society: “I desired with all my heart that it was next morning and a plane was lifting me off the ground” (160). Here Tee’s closing statement are similar to the sentiments expressed by G in In the Castle of My Skin as he leaves Barbados. Indeed Tee’s bildung is similarly deferred and Hodge instead substitutes her personal experience of maturation—her coming to

68
appreciate West Indian culture only after she has left Trinidad—to suggest that Tee, like G. and Trumper, will arrive at her moment of claritas after living in another culture.

While Hodge’s interest in the engineering of West Indian subjectivity affords us a portrayal of the ways in which colonial education affects women, in no way is the interpellation rendered in gendered terms. Coming of age is a political anxiety. Tee’s absence of power is in fact not articulated in ways which are mindful of the complexities of female positioning in Caribbean society. The impoverishment of spirit which Tee now suffers as she makes her way into adulthood and exile will resurface in other West Indian Bildungsromane. But with a significant difference.

Ten years later when Erna Brodber, Michelle Cliff, Zee Edgell, and Jamaica Kincaid come to the Bildungsroman as a genre useful for articulating female subjectivity, they too locate their protagonist in the folk world so sensuously cast in Crick Crack, Monkey. Sycorax’s strange and terrible magic is dramatized anew. The autobiographical locations of Cliff and Kincaid give further direction to this production. Like Crick Crack, Monkey, Abeng and Annie John, focus primarily on the female community to which the subject has access. Each writer reconstructs the power of the folk world: its stories, its cultural myths and its black magic. The chief arbiter of that power is a maternal figure, one who is potentially nurturer and destroyer of the protagonist’s Bildung. The ways in which the mother manipulates the power of folklore so as to seduce the listener/protagonist into compliance becomes the subject of Annie John. On the other hand Abeng focuses on the longing to return to the romance of native myth and the ways in which access remains denied because of aborted
initiatory rites. While both novels track the development of the female protagonist in this folk world, each writer is careful to complicate the journey with the alternative sign-posting offered by the literate, colonial world. Once more Sycorax is brought into opposition with Prospero. The nature and consequence of their contact is the focus of the ensuing section.

Take 2

Annie John traces the maturation of a young Antiguan girl from an idyllic childhood through a painful adolescence to a solitary adulthood. The story, told by the first person narrator, Annie, is preoccupied with the relationship between the young girl and her mother, a relationship which in many ways is paradigmatic of an archetypal encounter with the great and terrible mother. The struggle takes place at the site of maternal power—the domestic—and in a manner typical of folklore, there is the suggestion that defeat by the adversary (the Kincaidian mother) will result in the child Annie becoming an apprentice to that power.

Karen Rowe in “Fairy Born and Human Bred,” discusses the emergence of Jane Eyre’s10 female identity in terms of a struggle between the fairy tale romance which she has been socializing into believing and the rebellious independence which her own life experiences are validating. Rowe explores this dilemma in terms of the relationship between fairytales and the patterns of maturation, arguing that these romantic paradigms create false expectations which women subconsciously play out in their real lives:

Less explored than the impact of folktales on social conditioning are the specific implications of the internalized romantic patterns for women.
who write and read novels. Folktales patterns evoke a subtle yet pervasive influence on the structure of the female bildungsromane and our expectations as readers and literary critics. (69)

Rowe’s analysis is pertinent to the exploration of the ways in which the structure of Annie John is a deconstruction of the fairytale—a “crick crack” response to the romance of domesticity offered by the mother. But the mother’s world cannot be so easily dismissed and Kincaid is mindful of contextualizing Annie’s resistance as alternating between an attraction for and a repulsion of the sustaining space which the mother offers.

Kincaid represents the duality implicit to the maternal as embodied in the mother’s hands, images of which appear with dependable reliability throughout the novel. Alternatively manipulative and capable, these hands become a governing metaphor for the folk presence in the novel and support a representation of the mother as both nurturing and devouring. Jacqueline de Weever in Mythmaking and Metaphor in Black Women’s Fiction presents a useful frame for this notion:

Myths of all cultures have produced the archetypes of the nurturing mother and the destroying mother, from Isis of the Egyptians and Kali of the Hindus to Coatlicue of the Aztecs with her head-dress of skulls and the African death mother wearing a gnashing mask on her belly. Transforming and nurturing as well as stifling and destructive, the paradigm is the earth mother who gives birth and sustains her children and to whom they return in death. . . . At once reassuring and terrifying, complex and powerful, the portrayals are emanations of the universal mother, giver of life and taker of life. (133)

In Annie John life and death are presented in this world as part of the same circle.

Annie Sr.’s hands first introduced as dressing the body of a dead child in preparation
for a funeral encourages the later association of her creativity with the life and death of her daughter’s individuality.

This duality is echoed in other communal activities. The cabinet maker is also the undertaker “Straffe & Sons: Undertakers and cabinet Makers” (5) and Annie’s father is a furniture maker who also makes coffins carved with bunches of tiny flowers on the side (5). Similarly in the folk world, death brings one to prominence in much the same way life can. The children’s schoolyard conversations focus on listing the number of people whom they once knew who are now dead and those who gain social prominence are the ones who have known the most dead people. When the humpbacked girl dies, she gains a popularity which she never enjoyed in life, becoming the subject of every schoolgirl’s conversation and the narrator describes her funeral as an event which she attends even at the risk of being punished.

The life and death paradox remains connected to the mother’s hands throughout Annie John. The young child initially reads the hands as loving ones. These hands circle Annie in love. They initiate the bathing rituals where mother and child find safety from the evil magic of the father’s jealous mistress in their submersion of a watery dyad which has love as its countervailing magic. These hands also fold the child’s past into neat accessible photographic bundles: baby clothes in a trunk, each postscripted with a story of joy at the child’s birth. “On and on my mother would go. No small part of my life was so unimportant that she didn’t make a note of it, and now she would tell it to me over and over again” (22).
However the harmonic circle of the mother’s hands opens, with the child’s arrival into adolescence. The child no longer feels herself to be the center of the mother’s world. Mealtime conversations revolve around the father. Annie, gradually cast as observer rather than participant, feels thrust out of her mother’s love. Rupture is confirmed in the girl’s interruption of a love-making scene between her parents. The mother’s hands which were once skilled at embroidery, gentle in soothing unfortunate burns, capable of identifying blemished produce are now reduced to skeletal ones whose grasp the child now needs to be constantly on guard against:

But her hand! It was white and bony, as if it had long been dead and had been left out in the elements. It seemed not to be her hand, and yet it could only be her hand, so well did I know it. It went around and around in the same circular motion, and I looked at it as if I would never see anything else in my life again. If I were to forget everything else in the world, I could not forget her hand as it looked. (30-31)

The artistry and magic of the mother’s hands are now rendered suspect.

Interestingly it is only one hand which Annie associates with death, and here I wish to argue that the other hand is still connected in the child’s mind to domestic creativity and safe maternal space. The autobiographical essay which Annie writes on her first day of high school is a celebration of her mother as nurturer, but the fictionalizing of the ending is a result of Annie’s recognition that her mother intends to bring about the death of the loving community they once shared. The conflicting activities of the two hands, their simultaneous manipulation of life and death returns the mother to the paradoxically rendered folk world where sleight of hand, Nancy duplicity and serpent cunning are part of its repertoire of magic. In the betrayal, the
mother's hands are associated with the death of an exclusive community between the two Annies and as that hand urges the child into maturity and the creativity which comes there of, it continues its contradictory [yet on another level perfectly comprehensible] connection with death.\textsuperscript{12}

The mother attempts to make Annie an acolyte to the power, majesty, and eroticism of the domestic and the young Annie dressed as a miniature of her mother is potentially seduced to her mother's faith. She learns how to prepare meals, how to look after a herb garden, how to run a household. She glories in her closeness to her mother and is a small shadow dancing in unison to her mother's desires. Annie is the willing initiate, eager to be educated into her mother's realm of power.

But with adolescence comes the deconstruction of that paradise. As the child assumes a shape and form of her own, the potency of her mother's lore is decanted. Annie penetrates the mysteries of her mother's powers and learns that the folk world to which she belongs is already contaminated by outside values--values which cause the mother to substitute matriarchal power with a patriarchal ethos which limits her power to domestic servitude. The folktale which would make Annie queen of the kitchen is substitutes with another: Lucifer's rebellion and loss of paradise. Annie has accessed the text of this retaliatory tale through her colonial education. The mother at once God-like\textsuperscript{13} becomes the adversary of this new tale, one which sees Annie battling a tyrannical authority that constantly threatens to co-opt the girl's identity into heterosexual subservience. The domestic kingdom which her mother is preparing Annie for will be presided over by a man in much the same way that the mother-child
dyad existing between the child and her mother become interrupted by the father.\textsuperscript{14} The society into which the mother urges Annie is one which pays allegiance to patriarchy and forecloses on an independent identity.

Strategically, the mother had avoided trying to make the adolescent Annie into her own image. To do so would replicate power into static modes which without difference cannot be regenerative: “You are getting too old for that. It’s time you had your own clothes. You just can’t go around the rest of your life looking like a little me” (26). However the mother’s socialization makes her intent on transforming Annie into the good woman who knows about manners and piano playing, neo-colonial, middle class values reminiscent of those adhered to by Aunt Beatrice in Crick Crack Monkey, values which the mother is herself “uneducated” to. Ultimately an Annie obedient to her mother’s lessons will be a woman who is framed in the domestic even though the particular style of the framing will be determined by the novitiate:

She took to pointing out that one day I would have my own house and I might want to it to be a different house from the one she kept. Once when showing me the way to store linen, she patted the folded sheet in place and said, ‘Of course in your house you may chose another way.’ That the day might actually come when we would live apart I had never believed. (28-29)

Preparing for her emotional separation with her mother, Annie finds a substitute community of female friendships to replace this lost paradise. Gwen and the Red Girl both fulfill the lack which the mother’s premature separation is engendering. A suitably adoring Gwen assuages Annie’s need to find a world where she is once more the center, for where she was once the heart of her mother’s world, now with the

75
approach of adolescence the erotics of that love gives way to a brusque apprenticeship. With Gwen, Annie returns to the safety of that former maternal love, the two friends share one heart, "joined step in step" (46). Indeed Annie is rewriting the former text of her mother's devotion by detailing her closeness with Gwen in the same sensuous vocabulary of her autobiographical essay.

Puberty brings Annie closer to a community of women and Gwen's role as mother/comforter becomes inadequate. The Red Girl, uncombed, unwashed, and outside of maternal influences is both the antithesis of Gwen and the epitome of all that Annie's mother had trained her to avoid. As Annie lies and steals her way into the Red Girl's affection, she is frequently spurred on by the recognition that such behavior would horrify her mother. Interestingly, the Red Girl never has a proper name in Annie's narrative of self-gratifying friendship. Unlike her relationship with Gwen, there are no public demonstrations of affection between Annie and the Red Girl and having served her purpose as instrument of Annie's rebellion, the Red Girl disappears from Annie's life.

When Annie first menstruates, a sign that she has now joined a community of women, her mother welcomes her to this new sisterhood with a story of her own coming-of-age. Annie's response to this empathy is "What a serpent!" (52) This condemnation is born out of another memory of the mother's duplicity when she had earlier used sympathy to get the child to reveal the location of her cache of marbles. The mother's reaction when the child is sent home from school because of fainting induced by her menstruation is interpreted by Annie as yet another strategy to seduce
her into sororal complicity: "When I got home, my mother came towards me, arms outstretched, concern written on her face. My mouth filled up with a bitter taste, for I could not understand how she could be so beautiful even though I no longer loved her" (53).

But this sororal community being offered is devoid of the homo-erotic bonding which marked Annie’s pre-menstrual community of girlfriends, and is a reminder that the process of maturation is linked to allegiance to a particular social structure which does not facilitate such female friendships. Significantly, Annie’s mother is isolated in her domestic realm. There are no gatherings of women, none of the rambunctious energy which Paule Marshall manages to capture in her depiction of her mother’s kitchen and its Saturday transformation into a coven where the young girl learns the magic of words. This “unpopulated” world is the one which Annie is growing into. Later, Gwen’s engagement to the boy from Nevis is viewed by Annie as a kind of suicide, the fullest manifestation of the un-named dread which the girls had experienced in the cemetery when Annie’s first period brought them to the realization of the consequences of maturation.

When I looked at them sitting around me, the church in the distance, beyond that our school, with throngs of girls crossing back and forth in the school yard, beyond that world, how I wished that everything would fall away, so that suddenly we’d be sitting in some different atmosphere, with no future full of ridiculous demands, no need for any sustenance save our love for each other, with no hindrance to any of our desires, which would, of course, be simple desires -- nothing, nothing, just sitting on our tombstones forever. But that could never be, as the tolling of the school bell testified. (53)
In the manner typical of the *Bildungsroman*, the particular heterosexual convention of marriage is offered as a necessary dimension to the girl’s self realization in both the oral community within which the mother is immersed and the colonial bourgeois one into which Annie is being formally educated.

The girl’s *bildung* comes through conflict with her mother and occasions a rejection of her world. In as much as the mother’s own departure from Dominica, occasioned by her backchat to her father, had propelled her into adulthood and exile, so too must Annie’s backchat presage her striking out on her own, for a place with no return address, with her own trunk and her own set of rules. Annie’s desire for autonomy repeats her mother’s earlier departure from an autocratic father and imitates Ma Chess’s willful emancipation from the confines of domesticity. Ma Chess chooses to replace her house with “a hole in the ground where one can come and go as she please” (126). Each female is in fact seeking a space within which to articulate her selfhood. Annie finds freedom in a trunk. Ma Chess finds it outside of the house, a domestic space which had muted her voice and the authority of her black magic. Her daughter, on the other hand, uses the domestic as a secular stage upon which she plays out the magic of her good mothering. In contrast, Annie who is heir to a genealogy of orality and black magic, chooses to free herself from both by naming herself as a power separate from even though developed through both. At the end of the novel Annie’s escape into exile suggests an escape from both worlds and from the limitations of both choices.
The education through which Annie is interpellated offers similar liberatory discourse. Her induction into the British literary canon offers *Jane Eyre* and *Paradise Lost* as escape routes. *Jane Eyre*’s flight to freedom is the repetition of Annie Sr.’s escape from her father. Escape then seems a recurring motif in Annie’s liberatory theology although what she is escaping from is what both Annie Sr. and Jane Eyre escape into: marriage. Marriage means having to dance attendance on a man old enough to be your father, or in Rochester’s case, old and blind. Annie accordingly defines marriage as offering no identity other than wife and mother. Marriage is merely an re-inscription into the domestic, “the high point from which one is going to jump, hoping to land on their feet” (137). Lucifer’s choice in *Paradise Lost* becomes more attractive, voluntary exile from paradise and the privileging of a relentless individualism.

Annie’s escape from her mother and her exile into the embrace of another formidable enchantress—the Mother Country—is typical to folktales where the heroine is unable to recognize the many faces which the enemy assumes. While the dangers of apprenticeship to the mother are obvious, becoming a novitiate to Ma Chess is an option available yet ignored in Annie’s *bildung*. The society she moves towards is attractive because it is the antithesis of what she has rejected, and her triumphant establishment of her own personhood makes her confident that she can maintain her individualism in this brave new world. Symbolically, the final image we have in Annie John is of a vessel turned out on its side and emptying slowly. The reader is thereby warned that empty vessels are likely to be filled. How empty is Annie and in what
ways will she be filled are questions which Kincaid deliberately leaves unanswered. The process of engineering female subjectivity is after all a continuing project. Where many conventional ends with a return to social order, this creole version, like the male West Indian *Bildungsroman*, offers open-endedness.

*Abeng* repeats the anxiety of having to choose which society one becomes integrated into. The protagonist, Clare Savage, like Annie John and Tee, is caught between two worlds and *Abeng* presents the consequences of the inevitable cross-fertilization between an oral, folk world and a scribal one. Cliff presents the folk world of the grandmother as dichotomous to the one which Clare’s father and her formal education are preparing her for. The history of Clare’s name speaks to this tension. It is at once adopted by the father in memory of an English college, testimony of his abiding colonial allegiance, as it is proof of the mother’s quiet devotion to Clary, the young village girl who had mothered her. Cliff signals the continuous ambivalence undergirding Clare’s *bildung* by her definition of “abeng” as both an instrument of resistance and a means of sustaining the hegemony of the slave master: “*Abeng* is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the canefields in the West Indies. The *abeng* had another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another” (preface).

Cliff underwrites the narrative of *Abeng* with these continuing contradictions. Kitty, once named “Freeman” marries Boy Savage. The daughter of slaves unites with the son of slave master and Freeman becomes Savage. The Savages worship at two different churches, Boy’s Anglican church in the morning and Kitty’s in the evening. a
visible sign of their separate allegiances and an articulation of the nature/culture split which constantly bifurcates the text. The afro-centricity Kitty advocates is countered with Boy’s euro-centricity. The two daughters are shared between the parents. Clare is offered as acolyte to the father, and encouraged to absorb Boy’s lessons of superiority even though Kitty’s own experiences bring her to the questioning of its validity. The younger, darker daughter, Jenny is the one chosen to be educated into the ways of Kitty’s people.

The domestic for Cliff is emblematic of the political. Alongside the narrative of British military conquest is the lore of native resistance. Nanny, the Jamaican Maroon woman who had frustrated the efforts of Britain to return her and her people to slavery, acts as a counterpoint to the victorious narrative which Boy offers as proof of his racial superiority. The signpost which Boy offers Clare in her journey towards adulthood illuminates paradoxically, a powerful folk tradition of resilience and resistance. For every tale of conquest that Boy narrates, there exists a postscript of the constant subversive presence of resistors which parodies his imperial text. Similarly the historical accounts of patriarchal domination as evidenced through military success, are themselves interrogated in the suppressed versions of resistance recorded by women in diaries and journals. Faced with so many resisting versions, Clare seeks ontological verification in the creation of a version of self-history which will not be constantly underdone by a conflicting ideology. At the same time, the lack of intimacy between mother and daughter creates a hunger for a maternal community in the child and a search for other-mothers.
Cliff locates Clare’s search within a maternal context which in *Abeng* becomes a metonym for the folk. Kitty’s deferred nurturing is taken up by Miss Mattie, the child’s maternal grandmother who offers a useful and substitutive apprenticeship. Clare’s summer sojourns with her grandmother serve to reiterate the power of Nanny’s enduring presence, for the grandmother’s own life is an example of how instruments of oppression are transformed into weapons of resistance, the symbolic recurrence of Nanny’s famed act of catching and deflecting bullets with her buttocks. The grandmother has transformed her position as the ill-treated wife into the role of leader of her community church. Where the mother in *Annie John* had made the kitchen the place from which to create her magic, the grandmother in *Abeng* transforms her parlor into a part-time church within which she articulates her liberatory theology. The range of her influence is significant. Servitude is exchanged for community service and the empowering of women.

Yet the grandmother’s gospel does not bring conversion to her daughter and it is Kitty’s lack of empowerment which partially diffuses the power of the grandmother to effectively influence Clare. Kitty is formally educated into an appreciation for whiteness and shame for her folk origins. Mediating between the folk world and the social sphere in which she now circulates, Kitty lacks the courage to stand firm against her husband’s prejudice or to provide a contradictory subtext to his narrative of triumph. Where the grandmother is open in her allegiance to the folk, Kitty’s loyalties are furtive and apologetic. Her alignment to her colonial history is a shamed-faced admission of defeat rather than the defiant testimony of Nanny’s resistance and it is this

82
inability to articulate a triumphant discourse which allows her to continue surrendering her daughter to Boy’s educating. Further, the child’s resemblance to the white father absolves Kitty from the responsibility of nurturing Clare and in the relinquishing of maternal authority she makes a space for Boy to substitute Empire as the possible other-mother to the child. More particularly, Kitty’s silence and distance from her daughter denies the child full access into the folk world and limits Clare’s responsiveness to her grandmother’s ideology.

Whereas Annie John focuses on the ways in which the intimate maternal community shapes self-development, Abeng is concerned with the ways in which the wider community, especially that of women, becomes responsible for Clare’s bildung. The village girl Zoe is a maternal substitute for Clare, just as Clary was once for Kitty. This melding of identity is supported by Clare’s romanticization of what being folk constitutes, an idealization which is itself generated by the mother’s sanctified love for the folk, defined in her mind as poor, black, and down-trodden masses:

Kitty wore her love for Black people--her people--in silence, protecting it from her family, protecting the depth of this love from all but herself. Kitty could have been the Maroon girl in the poem -- poised against the curiosity of all lighter than herself and her people. Although she was in fact quite light skinned, the shade of her younger daughter, like the inside of a Bombay mango when the outside covering is cut away. But color is of course often metaphorical, and Kitty judged her shade with an inner eye. She poised herself against the attacks of the colonialists which threatened her people, her island. Kitty should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Ali, and Nanny too--and had she known of the existence of these women, she might have shared her knowledge, her extraordinary passion, using its strength, rather than protecting what she thought was its frailty. (127-8)
In aligning herself as descendant of the slave and her daughter as descendant of the master, Kitty reduces their maternal relationship to a historical re-enactment of conquest which essentializes victim and victor into frozen behavioral roles.

From the mother’s non-action the girl learns the virtues of silence and submission. From the grandmother, Clare learns that women can take power unto themselves, however Clare’s method of self-empowerment is shaped by the patriarchal and imperialist inclinations encouraged by her father. Clare believes selfhood can be achieved by brute force, the power to wield a rifle, to assume the authority of the white man, to act the buckra. It is this identification which allies her to her father’s community, and makes her an outsider to the folk world occupied by Nanny and Miss Mattie. The rifle symbolically and predictably destroys the bond between the grandmother and child. Not only does it prove all Miss Mattie’s misgiving about her son-in-law’s savage blood, but it is also her proof that Clare has aligned herself with a community of oppression rather than one of dialogue and sharing. Clare’s lapse into the linguistic certainty of buckra speech when ambushed by the cane cutter foreshadows this alignment for it already separates her from the discourse community of Zoe and Miss Mattie, the woman-identified community which does not depend on a rifle for the establishment of personhood.

Cliff is careful to enlist reader sympathy for Clare by punctuating the cow-killing incident with the girl’s interior monologue. While Clare’s actions are never fully justified, they are mitigated by an exposition of her continuing anxiety to be “smaddy”, to be someone, to acquire an identity which is greater than being Miss
Mattie's granddaughter or Boy's daughter. The girl's social construction provokes the need to participate in power and privilege, things which her own upbringing as Boy's son/daughter have made her gender male. Miss Mattie wields real power in the village community. But Clare cannot however perceive it as real because she is socialized into a belief system which requires more tangible proof of power. Community service is not valorized.

Clare's misdeed with the rifle generates a volley of accusations, all of which culminate in banishment. Miss Mattie expels the child from her folk world because in acting like a buckra, Clare has proven she does not belong. Kitty's secret belief that Boy's savage blood is the only one coursing through her daughter allows her to read Clare's transgression as proof of the arrogant, hegemonic assumptions of the planter class. On the other hand, in keeping with his ideology of the superiority of whiteness, Boy reads Clare's action as the uprisings of blackness in her. "Blackness was the cause of his daughter's action--and the irresponsibility he felt imbued those people--and now had to be expunged once and for all. On this little island so far removed from the mother country, a white girl could so easily become trash" (149). Boy's association of the folk world with blackness repeats his wife's ideological position. In both narratives, this world is devalued: Boy dismisses his daughter's genealogical link to it, while Kitty excludes her daughter from the shared participation in its magic and mystery. Clare is banished on a literal and psychological level from the world which she wishes to belong to.
Driving each banishment is the common assumption that Clare is performing outside of the social expectations of what constitutes womanhood. Although Miss Mattie understands the pragmatics of violence as strategies for resistance and survival, Clare’s senseless killing of the cow is judged as neither and is seen as an anti-womanist act which imperils the survival of the community. Whereas Nanny, Mma Ali and Inez had used violence for self-liberation, Clare is unable to write her narrative of self-empowerment within a similar script. The phallocentricity of a loaded gun gestures plainly to her alignment with masculinist forms of empowerment and is a tacit rejection of the epistemology supported by the grandmother’s folk community: “She was a girl; she had taken a gun and ammunition. . . She had stepped out of place” (115).

Similarly the notion of Clare having transgressed the gender boundaries established for her is reiterated by her parents. “She had stepped out of line, no matter what, in a society where lines were unerringly drawn. She had been caught in rebellion. She was a girl. No one was impressed with her” (149-150). So how does a girl like Clare establish personhood? Who will teach her to be the good woman when both educating groups have conflicting ideas on the constitution of womanhood?

The parents’ solution is to seek another surrogate mother for the child, one who will prepare Clare for the society in which Boy expects her to take her rightful place:

Boy taught his daughter that she came from his people — white people, he stressed — and he expected Clare to preserve his green eyes and light skin — those things she had been born with. And she had a duty to try to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all — and make the skin, now gold, become pale and subject to visible sunburn. These things she should pursue. (127)
Mrs. Beatrice Phillips, with pale skin unmarked by the sun, is the mode chosen in pursuit of that ideal. An embittered woman who has buried thirteen children, Mrs. Phillips' world view is antithetical to Miss Mattie's gospel of caring, responsibility, and sharing. Isolated in a racist prism which makes white good and black transgressive, unruly and contaminating, Mrs. Phillips judges the world by the color of its skin. But Cliff is slyly suggesting that Mrs. Phillips is not all that different from Miss Mattie who validates blackness and uses race to judges both Clare and Boy Savage. Both women are caught in the same epistemology of values, but where Miss Mattie had suppressed her prejudice until given proof of the wickedness of whiteness, Mrs. Phillips remains unequivocal in her condemnation of blacks.

Living with Mrs. Phillips, Clare learns how to suppress her racial identity and moves close to Boy's expectations of what constitutes the good woman -- silent and bidable, careful not to disrupt, to transgress, to offer an opinion. At the end of Abeng, Clare's bildung is established as the lonely entry into womanhood and membership with a community of women who fulfill their socially acceptable role. The notion of female community depicted in Miss Mattie's world is parodied in the strained relationship between Mrs. Phillips and her sister, Mrs. Stevens. Mrs. Stevens provides the proof of the consequence of transgression. Her strategic madness once adopted as a mask in which she could resist societal manipulations has became real. The role models available to Clare in this new society act as a counterpoint to the female-identified community inhabited by Zoe and Miss Mattie, and Clare, like Annie, has to distance herself from these options so as to arrive at her personhood.
Construct Subjectivities and The Resistance to Hegemonies

Whereas the earlier movements of this chapter were concerned with the ways in which the Caribbean female subject becomes apprenticed to a particular social system, this section focuses on with the ways in which subjectivity is generated within these multiple conflicted locations. While the protagonists choose to reside in a colonial space, their privileging of the colonial world over the folk does not signal a rejection of the oral community primarily because these two worlds do not operate within distinctly separate spheres. Specifically in Annie John and Abeng the oral community is presented as already contaminated by a colonial value system. The deference to European manners, the cast of power relations, the continued validation of bourgeois culture, its racialized prejudices, its norms and its mores are symptomatic of the penetration of that world.

In de-essentializing the folk world as the edenic space which cocoons the subject, the two writers are not however dismissing its power and influence. Annie John and Clare Savage engineer their subjectivity by a thorough engagement with power sources of that world—the female community. The continued fascination with the mother as both the arbiter and sign of power is played out in various ways. In Annie John Kincaid orchestrates Annie’s rebellion as a sign that the protagonist needs to move beyond maternal power if she is to achieve individuality. In Abeng, Cliff recalibrates her analytical lens to present the absence of the mother as a reality which the protagonist must accept and therefore transcend. She intimates too that Clare can
approximate the power of the mother by giving birth to herself as subject. Encoded within the developmental plot of both novels is the thesis that the constitution of a subject requires possession and re-formulation of maternal authority and participation in its power. Cliff and Kincaid in theorizing that power further complicate it. Power is presented as not un-restricted to the mother but is instead located in a wider community of women where it is creatively and incessantly deployed. In both novels resistance itself is problematic, for the resisting subject not only needs and loves that which she is resisting but paradoxically is evolving into the very thing she is resisting. She is becoming her mother.¹⁶

If subject formation comes through an identification with a maternal community, one which may well wear several conflicting faces, how therefore is subjectivity constituted in such contradictory contexts? D.W. Winicott, a British child psychiatrist who has achieved some prominence in Object Relations theory, conceptualizes the development of the ego in relation to the object as a maturation process the responsibility for which is assigned to the mother, the child’s primary caregiver. In Maturation and The Facilitating Environment, Winicott explains that the self-definition which the child undergoes within the mother/child dyad takes place when the child experiences an identification of self as real. This identification occurs because the child sees herself reflected in the mother’s gaze. Acting as a mirror this “good enough” mother passively submits herself to the offspring’s gaze in order to facilitate the development of an accurate, unidealized version of self. Conversely, Winicott
argues that premature separation and withdrawal comes about when the mother is unable to generate the child’s creation of a self-image:

The mother who is not good enough is not able to implement the infant’s omnipotence, and so repeatedly fails to meet the infant’s gesture; instead she substitutes her own gesture which is given sense by the compliance of the infant. The compliance on the part of the infant is the earliest stages of the false self and belongs to the mother’s inability to sense her infant’s needs. Through this false self, the infant builds up a false set of relationships and by means of introspection even attains a show of being real so that the infant may grow to be just like the mother. (78)

Winicott sees ego development as a process wherein the “good enough” mother ensures the child’s trauma-free transition from the mother/child matrix to the wider social community. Within this construct the mother is held solely responsible for identity formation even though her role is, at that point, a passive, reflective one.

This formulation of the role of “good enough” mothering in psychic development connects to the centrality of mothering as a thematic concern in Caribbean literature. More particularly, within the Winicottian construct of mothering and mirroring, both Annie and Clare experience bad mothering. By imposing her desires for the “good [enough] daughter on the child, Annie’s mother acts counter to Winicott’s passivity and is responsible for the monstrous version of self which the adolescent Annie is haunted by. On the other hand, Clare lacks a self-image because Kitty’s racial ambivalence does not allow Clare to develop an accurate unidealized version of herself. Kitty’s own lack of identification with her green-eyed, white skinned child causes Clare to develop an image of herself as external and unprotected. This in turn evokes a premature separation between the child and the mother, with the
child constantly seeking to identify her self in other women, be they Zoe or Anne Frank.

Although the Winicott model finds some applicability in both Abeng and Annie John, to reduce the novels to sagas of bad mothering is to support a discursive system which locks women into essentializing gender roles as sole caregivers. For even while Winicott claims that “good enough” mothering is not gender specific, his writings never ascribe any function to the “good enough” father working in tandem with the mother. Thus he provides no discursive space for the ways in which Boy Savage shapes Clare’s self-image or for the responsibility of Annie’s father for her maturation.

Further, within the Caribbean family structure the child is usually exposed to a variety of caregivers. In an interview with Karen Balutansky, Merle Hodge explains the specificity of relations between Caribbean kinship support systems and socialization:

All this business about mother-figure and father-figure, all that is based on a conception of family which is quite narrow. I think that if we begin to be serious—as we have begun to be—about Caribbean family forms, we have to realize that almost all of us are socialized . . . in a family framework which has nothing to do with the traditional nuclear family. . . . So with all that I think we have to change glasses to look at these issues. . . Children are shared here by a network of households, which makes nonsense of this business about nuclear family—that you belong to two people alone, . . . and if you lose one of them it’s a big drama and a big trauma. (655)

I wish to posit here an engagement with issues of mothering which borrows from Winicott and is creolized by Hodge’s theorizing. Ma Chess and Miss Mattie, ego facilitators within the Winicottian frame are part of Hodge’s “network of households.”
Ma Chess directly assists in the birthing of an individualist Annie when she arrives magically to heal the psychically suspended child. Likewise, in *Abeng* Miss Mattie provides a communal context rich with women who can mirror the child’s gaze. Her own racial composition offers the child a way of negotiating colorism.

Common to both endings are moments of re-creation where each girl symbolically gives birth to herself. In *Annie John*, this process of self-invention is staged as the demonization of the female body, an ensuing psychic withdrawal, and the rebirth of an independent self. Significantly, Annie perceives her emergent sexual self as a monstrous version of the fallen Lucifer:

> I saw myself among all these things, but I did not know that it was I, for I had got so strange. My whole head was so big, and my eyes, which were big, too, sat in my big head wide open, as if I had just had a sudden fright. My skin was black in a way I had not noticed before, as if someone had thrown a lot of soot out of a window just when I was passing by and it had all fallen on me. On my forehead, on my cheeks, were little bumps, each with a perfect, round white point. My plaits stuck out in every direction under my hat; my long thin neck stuck out from the blouse of my uniform. All together, I looked old and miserable. (94)

It is Annie’s perception of herself as inhabiting this deviant body which makes her vulnerable to the malicious teasing of the schoolboys loitering at the street corner and to Mineu’s, her one-time playmate, witnessing of her degradation. Judging herself as having matured into transgression, Annie returns to her memories of herself as the precocious admired child, to the time before she lost her sense of self and the ability to articulate that self. Attempting to overlay her recent ugliness with images of her former glory, Annie summons up her name as a reminder to Mineu and herself of the time.
when she was adored and happy. But the magic of her name is insufficient to counteract the new label of slut which her friendliness with the boys earns her.

Seeking to articulate what Foucault calls a “reverse discourse,” Annie accepts and empowers herself as slut which her mother now names her. In accusing the mother of being similarly sluttish, Annie takes on to herself the power of the mother, to name and accuse. Annie’s ensuing illness is a symbolic retreat to a womb where she is reborn into her own personhood separate from the mother and as powerful. With the continued support of a female community in the person of Ma Chess, the girl is brought closer to the recuperative folk magic which will strengthen her emergence as a girl/woman. After her long illness, Annie’s individuality becomes emblazoned in her style of dress, her speech affectations, and her deportment. The mannerism which she had once read as awkward become her new signature and makes her the talk of the school. “I made myself into a presence so felt that when I removed myself, my absence was felt too” (129). Now community is useful as a stage upon which Annie can act out her separateness. She can now articulate what Audre Lorde in *Zami: A new Spelling of My Name*, defines as a biomythography.¹⁷

However, in *Zami*, Lorde’s conceptualizes female community as a necessary scaffolding in the construction of self. These perceptions supports yet deviates from Kincaid’s theorizing of female community in *Annie John*. Like Kincaid’s Annie, the protagonist in *Zami* comes into selfhood assisted by a circle of women as mythic and as self-determined as Ma Chess. By evoking the word *zami* “a Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers” (259), Lorde conjures up a Caribbean
feminist utopia as the community to which her mother and grandmother belong and uses this matrilinealism as a means of creating an embracing mythology which resolves her own plural identities. Their supportive friendship and love allow Lorde to piece her various identities into a powerful whole. She is now empowered to name herself as a black woman who loves other women "sexually and non-sexually." Specifically Lorde locates her sexuality within a tradition of like-minded, women-identified ancestors: "I lived each of them as a part of me" (256). Hers is a vision not of an individualist isolation but of having a place in a community where women become strong and beautiful, in loving other women. Lorde's lesbian identity is a shared one which as it comes into its own personhood is pushed out with the help of a supportive female community and emerges "blackened and whole" (257). Conversely, the sexual identity which the child Annie begins to form is interrupted by social conventions which return young women to heterosexual compliance. Her Antiguan society does not name women living and working together as friends and as lovers to be an option. Instead female community is subordinated to masculine desire and the institution of heterosexuality which as Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born explains:

Demands that the girl child transfer those first feeling of dependency, eroticism mutuality from her first woman, to a man, if she is to become what is defined as a 'normal' woman—that is a woman whose most intense psychic and physical energies are directed towards men. (219)

Rejecting the prevailing myth of male dominance, Annie chooses to make herself the new object of desire, although that self, while it has the power to name itself as separate is not fully embodied. "I didn't feel my feet touch ground. I didn't even feel
my own body. I just saw these places as if they were hanging in the air, not having top nor bottom, as if I had gone in an out of them at the same moment’ (143). The wholeness to which Lorde refers is as yet deferred.

Abeng also complicates the formation of female sexual identity within West Indian society. Cliff narrates Clare’s furtive journey into sexuality and subjectivity as outside a strong female support system. The desire Clare feels for Zoe, her curiosity about her changing, desiring body, occur within a context of bewilderment and a muteness-engendering shame. Further, the homophobia which surrounds Clare make it difficult for her to articulate the specificity of her burgeoning sexuality. The women-identified community which Lorde establishes as nurturing is similarly evoked by Cliff in her delineation of the relationship between Mma Ali and Inez and its later day echo, Clare and Zoe. “Lying besides Zoe on the rock, she had felt warm. Safe. Secluded. She felt that this was something she wanted all along” (126). However Abeng complicates this community with the insertions of racial and social differences between the two girls. Indeed Clare has been indoctrinated into an institutionalized concept of womanhood which labels the “swift strong feelings—largely unspoken feelings she had for Zoe” (126) as deviant. Sexual desire is itself constructed as transgressive and the women who populate Clare’s world have suppressed the erotic which in both Zami and Annie John become rewritings of the maternal. Where Lorde moves her protagonist to a public testimony of lesbian desire, Cliff depicts Clare within a privatized, interior and inarticulatable world, one which is the antithesis of the female-gendered space which had brought these other women to voice and an unruly subjectivity.18
Clare's lack permeates her self-narrative and the text of her affection for Zoe:

"In her love for Zoe, Clare knew that there was something of her need for her mother. But it felt intangible and impossible to grasp hold of" (131). Abeng stands in distinct contrast to both Annie John and Zami in terms of the rich intimacy of the mother/daughter bond detailed therein. Lorde evokes the soothing sensuality in the image of the child Audre sitting between the warm, open space of her mother's legs. "I remember the warm mother smell caught between her legs and the intimacy of our physical touching nestled inside of the anxiety/pain like a nutmeg nestled inside its covering of mace" (33). Similarly in Annie John:

I was on my mother's back, my arms clasped tightly around her neck. . . . When we swam around this way, I would think we were like the picture of sea mammals I had seen, my mother and I naked in the seawater, my mother singing to me a song in a French patois I did not yet understand or sometimes not saying anything at all. I would place my ear against her neck and it was as if I was listening to a giant shell, for all the sounds around me . . . would seem as if they came from inside her, the way the sound of the sea are in a seashell. (42-3)

In Abeng however, scenes of primal intimacy between mother and daughter are modulated by the mother's reluctance to reveal herself to her daughter. The powerful ways of women which Kitty ideologically subscribes to are never conveyed to her daughter. Nakedness becomes emblematic: "It would never have occurred to Kitty to be naked with her daughter, and any intimacy between them abruptly stopped there" (53). Clare's continued longing to suck at her mother's hidden breast has preoedipal origins: "At twelve Clare wanted to suck her mother's breast again and again--to close her eyes in the sunlight and have Kitty close hers also and together they would enter
some dream Clare imagined mothers and children shared" (54). Cliff composes this scene as the deferred erotic experience which Jean Wyatt identifies as "the locus of maternal systems of relations based on presence and connections" (479).

**Abeng** rehearses the re-creation of the beleaguered female body outside of a female support system. Clare’s entry into womanhood marked by the onset of her first menstrual cycle is attended only by memories of Zoe’s voice and her instructions. There is none of the magic of Lorde’s menstrual moment or the mystery of Annie’s. There is no community to warn her of the consequences of what Erna Brodber describes in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* as “a hidey-hidey thing” (23). Neither is there a sense of what Ntozake Shange details in *Sassafrass, Cyypress & Indigio* as “marvelous menstruating moments” (19). Instead Clare serves as midwife to her own delivery: “Something had happened to her and it did not matter that there was not another living soul to tell it to” (166). The pain which Clare experiences as her uterus expands and contracts is intimately related to this lonely birthing process.

The isolation is reinforced in her dream vision in a scene which repeats one in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Tia hits Antoinette with a stone so as to remind her that history has already ordained that they occupy separate social and political spheres.

Clare’s dream reverses the encounter. It is Clare who violates the community between herself and Zoe in as much the same way as her killing the cow had destroyed the girls’ friendship. In her dream Clare gains forgiveness for her violence. Zoe shares with her knowledge of folk medicine and ethno-biological strategies for self-healing which Kitty herself had held but not revealed. The moss and aloe compress which Clare applies to
her bleeding body heals breaches: both the biological violence of the female body emerging into womanhood and the severed union between Zoe and herself.

Significantly as Clare administers to her birthing/ bleeding self she catches sight of her own reflection in the stream. This act of self perception serves as a counterpoint to the earlier erasure she had experienced after the cow-killing episode. Then she had become "some girl in a story that come to no good" (147), forced to accept other narrations of herself as delinquent and wantonly cruel. Now she can apprehend" her own likeness even though it was barely light" (165).

As deliverer of herself, Clare transforms her female body into a text on which to inscribe this new experience of being. Previously, she had been the female body on which her father had written his ambitions for racial purification. She was the deviant body which Miss Mattie had narrated as performing outside of gendered norms. In taking control of the authorship of her female body, Clare writes herself into a community of female resisters. Her action imitates the way in which Nanny of Maroons had marked her bullet-resisting body as a powerful and rebellious text to disrupt the old narratives of conquest. Erasing the story of herself as the pale skinned body with guaranteed access to colonial privilege, rewriting the old narrative of herself as a gun-toting, cow-killer, Clare marks her menstruating body as powerful, mysterious and life-giving and in so doing gains symbolic entry into a Jamaican womanist discourse community. Clare is now part of Inez's and Mma Ali's world.

Clare's inscription into an oral female folk community, through the re-creation of this as yet tentative genealogy allows her a new field of power. This narrative
authority, appropriated partially from her formal education (her reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*) allows Clare to name herself as both woman and writer. At the end of the novel, Cliff presents Clare sitting on the verandah facing the rising sun. "her diary was in her lap and she was writing about what she had awoken to" (165). However, Clare has become the agent of discourse, she is not the individual speaking subject but the silent writing one who as Cliff reminds us is "not yet ready to understand that everyone we dream about we are" (166). She is nonetheless "Boy's daughter’s" and has not yet arrived at a full validation of the oral community as one which affords her the ability to name herself as subject. Clare therefore stands in contrast to Annie who manages to call her identity into being through a refusal to name herself as her mother’s daughter. Both protagonists, however, name themselves as artists.

**Portraits of the Artist as a Creole Woman.**

*Annie John* and *Abeng* function as *Künstlerromane*, that is, each novel marks the writer’s journey to artistic selfhood. This identification functions at two levels: the development of an artistic consciousness within and without the novels. The earlier sections outlined the ways in which the two works depict the child’s journey towards maturity and artistic self-hood. Both protagonists are, at the end of the novels, depicted as tellers of powerful stories, stories about themselves compiled from an inventory of all the experiences which constitute their subjectivity. At the same time, the physical presence of the texts demonstrate Kincaid’s and Cliff’s own success as
tellers of powerful, publishable stories and the admitted autobiographical content of the works point to the ways in which each writer attempts to express herself as both writer and woman.

Writing for many women has long been viewed as a domestic enterprise, something scribbled in one’s spare time and not something one could make an occupation of. For West Indian men, writing was also not considered an occupation, though for very different reasons. The material conditions attached to literary production in the Caribbean did not guarantee one any financial rewards. On the other hand, for West Indian women, writing has often been seen as neither serious or worthwhile. Velma Pollard in an interview with Daryl Dance wryly categories women’s artistry as an ‘after’ project: “A little pigeon hole out of [one’s] real life in terms of time: After the children have been put to sleep, or after the children have gone to school, and after you’ve done the grocery, after everything else, then you get a little moment. . .” (172). Art in such repressive contexts usually manifests itself in unconventional and unorthodox ways.19

Kincaid theorizes this creativity differently. Admittedly, she presents the mother as having diverted her creativity into different channels, yet there is never a sense of Annie Sr.’s artistry as wasted and unappreciated. Indeed it is its potency which makes it dangerous to the child. In Annie John, women keep their artistry alive by transforming their domestic world into a creative site. The activities which Pollard list as suppressing creativity are themselves manifestations of working artists: women who grow children in as much they grow flowers or herb gardens.
The mother’s creativity extends beyond her domestic chores. In Annie John the mother is constantly depicted telling stories—stories which ground her to a powerful oral world. These stories speak of her desire to establish a personal history, the recording of her life and the establishment of her identity as woman and mother, albeit an identity which participates in the power of an enveloping folk world, albeit one which has been partially co-opted into heterosexual servitude. Correspondingly, Annie is apprenticed to her mother and becomes a teller of her own stories. Initially Annie’s stories are lies fabricated to escape the mother’s hegemony. Her autobiographical essay however is the first attempt to transform the lie into art and at the end of the novel, the protagonist is able to weave her own story of selfhood from the ‘lies’ about maternal devotion and the falsehood of what constitutes a woman’s role in society. Now Annie is repeating her mother’s stories so as to undo them and her repetition affirms the power of the tradition which the mother is rooted in even as it establishes an artistic and dynamic continuum which extends to Ma Chess and beyond.

Indeed, Jamaica Kincaid is tireless in her citation of her mother as the source of her own creativity. Consistent to every interview which she has given is the admission that her mother is the source of her artistry. Her statement to Selywn Cudjoe is typical: “When I write I use my mother’s voice, because I like my mother’s voice . . . I feel it would have no creative life, no real interest in art without my mother. It is really my ‘fertile soil’ ”(222). In the mining of events in her life for fictional production, Kincaid rewrites her interaction with her mother in a variety of ways, and
with the regularity with which maternal relations surface in her work, the reader is reminded yet again at how this old soil can be turned over for regenerative fertility.

The maternal power is not limited to the mother and mothering is also the responsibility of the group as Hodge has earlier established. The artistic legacy of the grandmother is a recurring theme in Caribbean *Bildungsromane* written by women. Caribbean women artists have themselves acknowledged their indebtedness to their foremothers. In an interview with Betty Wilson, Merle Collins cites her grandmother’s and mother’s voices as part of the creative lode from which she mines her fiction

In fact my mother is the storyteller... To her now, as far as she is concerned, all this is natural. Sometimes she would be talking and we would just shout with laughter because of the way she tells the story. Someone else might tell the story and it just doesn’t come across in the same way. I think she is a great story teller... Oh she is a great performer and my grandmother was also. So that sometimes when I hear my voice on stage for example, I hear my grandmother. Or I write something and I can re-read it and laugh because I am hearing my grandmother. (101)

On a related note, Michelle Cliff in “Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character,” identifies the grandmother as a source of alternative wisdom:

Hers is the power directly related to landscape, gardens, planting when the heavenly signs were right, burying the placenta and the umbilical cord, preparing the dead for burial. This powerful aspect of the grandmother originates in Nanny, the African warrior and Maroon leader.

At her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practices and food. She assists at rites of passage, protects and teaches. She is an inheritor of African belief systems, African languages. (277)

The ideology of the powerful grandmother surfaces in *Abeng*. Cliff portrays Miss Mattie as the triumphant representation of resistance--a woman steeped in the oral life
of Jamaica and who is unapologetic in her identification with the folk even though her
material reality exposes her to many of the privileges denied to women in her
community.

Cliff is careful however not to romanticize the grandmother into an earth
goddess with an infinite capacity to nurture and sustain. As leader of a small church,
Miss Mattie’s womanist epistemology does not encourage intimacy. Her role as
mother to Kitty is subjugated to her responsibilities as community leader. Kitty’s recall
of a childhood illness and her mother’s delegation of Clary to the role of other-mother
is important. While the incident speaks to Miss Mattie’s stature in the community and
the devotion she inspires, it also illustrates the limited reach of Miss Mattie’s
maternity. Clare becomes the marker of this inadequacy. Miss Mattie’s inability to
transfer her creativity to Kitty, to move her to an ethos of caring which manifests itself
in public, outward gestures, suggests a failed apprenticeship which in turns leaves Kitty
unable to nurture her own daughter, Clare. But if Clare is partially autobiographical,
as Cliff so deftly states “an amalgam of myself and others but eventually herself
alone” (264-5), then the failure of Miss Mattie is only partially reflected as the
limitations of Cliff’s own grandmother--the woman she often establishes as responsible
for her passionate claiming of a Jamaican identity.

The process of self-definition as an artist is implicated in patterns of filiation
which both writers establish for themselves. Whereas the novels trace the bildung of
the protagonist within a female support community, the writers themselves use
intertextuality to evoke the development of their artistic coming of age within a literary
support community. Jamaica Kincaid, returns to an oral support community, reclaiming and complicating the folk stories with which her mother had fed her imagination. In contrast Michelle Cliff claims a literary other-motherhood for herself which includes other diasporic writers.

*Abeng* is rich in intertextual engagements with a literary support community which facilitates Cliff’s own artistic journey. Bessie Head, to whom Cliff dedicates the novel and Jean Rhys form part of the sororal group of racially alienated women. Cliff is particularly interested in talking back to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys’ protagonist Bertha becomes the maternal ancestor for Clare Savage. The anxieties of the former, the need to belong to a creole society are taken up by Cliff and brought closer to resolution. Where Antoinette was culturally cast as creole, Cliff’s Clare Savage is the racial product of the meeting of two worlds. Clare therefore connects Rhys to Cliff and this genealogy affords a new community to replace the West Indian one denied to Jean Rhys. Bertha’s double consciousness reappears and through constant re-writing is connected to the doubleness experienced by the writers.

The doubleness which I initially argued characterizes Caribbean *Bildungsroman* is repeated in the writers’ articulations of their own arrival at artistic consciousness. In the two novels, there is a dual subject who is both the teller of the story and the protagonist. This is further complicated by the autobiographical nature of both *Annie John* and *Abeng*. Each writer manipulates the subject who is then read, not as a mirror representation of the author, but as an aspect of the self explored through language. The relationship between the protagonist and her world is representational of the
writers’ own affirmation and legitimization of their authority as writing subjects. In a manner reminiscent of the slave narrative where the act of narrating comes to constitute a way of self-fashioning, Jamaica Kincaid and Michele Clif each use autobiography as a process of giving birth to one’s tongue.

The ways in which these tongues speak may vary and the locations from which they speak are multiple, but what remains consistent is the loud ways in which they testify to this independence, this coming of age in the West Indies. The account each writer gives of herself is consistently defiant. Her backchatting establishes her as an independent thinker who is unafraid to speak out in protest or disagreement at the structures which have left her unaccommodated. Each writer gives backchat to the Bildungsroman, a genre which had once marginalized woman as the proper object of study. Further, their revising of the genre, while it supports other Caribbean literary efforts to creolize the Bildungsroman, is insistent on modifications which relate specifically to their anxieties. Gender and genre are brought into a more utilitarian alignment, one which speaks more directly to the material and aesthetic conditions under which West Indian women produce literary works.

Their backchat does not limit itself to literary conventions. The societal conventions which restrict the development of the artist also come under scrutiny. More precisely, Clif and Kincaid are speaking to the social forces which affect the female writer’s production of self and in particular her relationship with a maternal community, in order to comment on the wider issue of an engineered West Indian female identity. While these accounts may seem too harsh, too hasty or too unfair,
Abeng and Annie John have a directness which reflect the honest perceptions of young artists. Newly emerged from silence and growing into tellers of powerful stories about themselves, Cliff and Kincaid are telling never-ending stories about themselves, stories which are inflected by the various psycho-social contexts in which they are narrated.

Embodied in Abeng and Annie John are alternative ways of arranging and thinking about the world, ways which have as their centers, the female heroine, hitherto the marginalized subject of the Bildungsroman. Their fictional autobiographies now offer personal history as text and that text as history. But unlike their male counterparts, this version of text-as-history is not proffered as testimony for a community, and is self-focused rather than representative. Cliff and Kincaid modify Pacquet’s claim that the autobiographical self as subject is transformed through narration into a cultural archetype. Instead, the identity which each writer has journeyed towards remains determined by the particular dynamics of her relationship with the maternal forces in her life. Further, this newly articulated narrative of maternal responsibility in the coming-of-age process, while it is echoed in other female-authored works on childhood, is presented in far more contentious ways. The reluctant matriarch gives way to the mother who is both nurturer and destroyer. The mother is the primary target of backchat. In exile this one-dimensional assessment of the mother’s role will be modified. In the meantime, departure is inevitable to backchat because in giving backchat one establishes herself as a grown woman living in her mother’s house and to deploy yet another West Indian proverb: “Two woman rat cyan live in the same hole.”
Notes

Chapter I

1 Backchat is a Caribbean expression which can be translated as impudence and rudeness. As such it relates to the Caribbean and African-American expression “womanish”. In her preface to In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens, Alice Walker uses this definition of womanish: “outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior” (xi) as a basis on which to construct “womanist” theory.

2 Bildungsroman is one of the German words which has made its way untranslated into the English critical lexicon. The term is a compound one made up of two distinct theories: namely that of bildung, a concept of growth which Ted Konjte outlines in The German Bildungsroman as ‘an organic process culminating in personal maturity and integration into affirmed society; and der roman -- the theory of the novel. The word Bildungsroman has no equivalent in English and “novels of development”, “novel of education” or “novel of formation” are three approximations of this concept. Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the patriarchal limitations of this genre and have opted for the term “novel of development” as a concept which more fully embraces the important role which gender occupies in the psychological development of the protagonist. In this chapter I choose to use the word Bildungsroman rather than any of these approximations so as to foreground the genre’s relationship to an European world view, and to what Gayatri Spivak in “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” has called the “constitution and the ‘interpellation’ of the subject not as an individual but as a ‘individualist’” (Rpt “Race,” Writing and Difference, 263).

I am also interested in the political character of the Bildungsroman. Peter Hohendahl argues in Bildung: A National Literature, that from the beginning the history of the genre was closely related to the process of German canon formation, a process which in the nineteenth century contributed to the shaping of national identity. My privileging of a concept which has in fact had an unfortunate relationship to a chauvinistic German essentialism, and which has often been dismissed by feminists because of the sexism implicit to it, is both deliberate and deconstructive. It represents my own, and Caribbean writers’ intervention in an imperial genre which had given little consideration to non-western cultures. It also connects to a post-colonial appropriation of a genre already being dismantled into various ideological trends—the salvaging of imperial material for our own discursive formulations.

3 I am using the figure of Caliban here to refer to the colonized subject. While I am aware that post-colonial revisions of The Tempest have had a distinct masculine bias and that feminist scholars have responded by rehabilitating Caliban’s absent mother Sycorax, my
project is not concerned with justifying which character best serves as a trope for imperial domination. Here I am reading Caliban and Sycorax as aspects of a body of resistance, with the power of the mother flowing into the activist offspring. For a fuller articulation of feminist troubling of Caliban Studies see Abena P. A. Busia’s “Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female.” Cultural Critique 14 (1989-90):81-104, and Rob Nixon’s “Caribbean and African Appropriations of The Tempest.” Critical Inquiry (Spring 1987) 557-578.

Clark establishes in this article that her argument qualifies Baker’s discussion of mastery of form / deformation of mastery in Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance. She is proposing a discursive strategy, one lodged with an Afro-Caribbean landscape, which like Baker’s model moves beyond binary oppositions.

Clark explains marasa consciousness as a theory which has its basis in Haitian Vodoun. Marasa is the Vodoun sign for the Divine Twins. The creation myths among the Fon/Ewe of Dahomey speak of these twins as non-patriarchal in character and their power as being non-gender specific. The twins remind of the contradictions embodied in ancestral spirits such as Legba, Loko and Ayizan. The revelation of opposition paradoxically draws one to participate in a way of thinking which is beyond opposition and outside of binaries. It is not an either/or situation but becomes a both/and one which resolves the seemingly irreconcilable. Clark insists that “marasa consciousness invites us to imagine beyond the binary” and suggests that “the ability to do so depends largely on our capacities to read the sign as a cyclical, spiral relationship” (43). In spite of my fascination with Clark’s theorizing of marasa consciousness as a stage of diasporic development, I am privileging Brathwaite’s creolization because it is grounded in a general Caribbean history of conquest and the specificity of Clark’s theory to Haitian Vodoun reduces its applicability in contexts where indigenous (African-based) practices do not offer significant cultural opposition.


Similarly, in The Novels of George Lamming, Sandra Pouchet Paquet argues that the boy G “crystallizes the experience of the entire community. In a sense, he is the village. The history of his dislocation echoes the dislocation of the village. He is a collective character” (18). In a later article on West Indian autobiography, Pouchet Paquet goes on to establish that the process of writing the self within Caribbean male literature is often linked to the writing of communal life. This point of view is itself substantiated by
Lamming in his interview with Dance. However, authorial intent is sometimes other than the reader response. Less we accept that the replacement of a collective village consciousness for that of a unified subject, Simon Gikandi in Writing in Limbo is painstaking in his delineation of what he views as Lamming’s attempt to find refuge from the besieged individual consciousness by embedding it with a makeshift communal entity. In deconstructing Lamming’s narrative of wholeness as outlined in the author’s 1983 introduction to In The Castle Of my Skin, Gikandi contends that “this kind of retrospective reading is too neat. It is doubtful whether the character of the village is collective given the class and race divisions within it and the absence of a coherent line of narration does not preclude causal connections” (74).

8 Lamming’s consideration of the folk and of women is a kinder one than G’s. See his interview with Dance where he indicates that his representation of woman becomes fuller in his later novels. As to his consideration of the folk, he argues in The Pleasures of Exile that now the peasant was more than a source of cheap labor, instead he “became, through the novelist’s eye, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It was the West Indian novel that had restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status” (40).

9 While Hodge’s responses to repeated inquires about the antagonistic relationship between her novel and the male West Indian novel have been a denial that Crick crack, Monkey is a feminist response, her novel does however unwittingly read as a female version of In the Castle of My Skin. On a related note, Sandra Pouchet Pacquet reads Annie John as a witting response to In the Castle of My Skin. I disagree, primarily because Kincaid herself admits to having read no West Indian novels at the time she was writing Annie John. However given that these writers are all responding to a similar socio-political landscape, it is hardly surprising that the same issues circulate in their writing, even while the analyses continue to be gender-specific.

10 At this point I need to justify the recurring use of Jane Eyre in most Caribbean literary projects. It is part of the canon which we as children of the empire have been educated into, have been prompted to write back to or to talk back to. Common to Cliff’s and Kincaid’s writings are the evocations of Jane Eyre -- the prototypical feminist, if for no reason but to deconstruct the master discourse which taught them admiration for Jane and disgust for the madwoman in the attic-- the creole from the Caribbean who frustrates Jane’s happiness.

11 Given my earlier establishing of the two Annie Johns, I will from this point onwards refer to the mother as Annie Sr. and the child as Annie so as to mark the mother as having an identity beyond motherhood.

12 It is this paradox which most critics seem to remain blind to, choosing instead to cast the mother as initiating the death of the child’s spirit and her individuality. See for
example Helen Pyne Timothy’s “Adolescent Rebellion and Gender Relations in At the Bottom of the River and Annie John,” where she argues that the mother is insufficient to teaching Annie how to become a sexual being and that it is this inadequacy in dealing with post-puberty as manifested by the child’s burgeoning sexuality which bring a rupture to the mother/child bond. I am reminded here of a similar demonization of the mother in the critical interpretation of Eva’s burning of Plum in Sula when she believes he is trying to re-enter her womb. I read this as an example in literature of the varying, conflictual faces of maternal love, faces which have not appeared in western images of mothering.

13 Evelyn O’Callaghan in Woman Version offers a reading of the mother as Eve because of her collusion in the imperial and patriarchal subjugation of women. I am suggesting that the mother is closer to Milton’s God, unwilling to accommodate transgression or individuality even while she recognizes herself in Annie. The fact that the mother can be herself colonized is a sign of her humanity in much the same way that Milton’s God is given to emotions of anger and jealousy not befitting to his status.

14 This reverses Freud’s position on the rupture between the mother and the daughter, Where Freud had established that with the child’s coming of age she become a competitor to her mother in sharing the father’s affection, here it is the father who becomes the competitor. In “Jamaica Kincaid and The Resistance of Canons,” Giovani Covi established this rupture as “a metaphor of the oedipal crisis with the father splitting up the dyadic unity between child and mother and the coming into existence of the speaking subject as a consequence of desire for the lost mother” (35). While Covi’s reading is an interesting one, her analysis of the subject’s relationship to the symbolic is a limited one. It is not so much that Annie is unwilling to enter the Symbolic but that she seeks to make her entrance on her own terms. Loss of the dyadic subject does not in fact bring a speaking Annie into being. Instead, the speaking subject comes into being because the mother does the speaking and the writing of Annie’s life. Kincaid in an interview with Teresa O’Connors admits: “The way I became a writer was that my mother wrote my life and told it to me” (6). While I am aware of the dangers of collapsing the identities of Jamaica Kincaid and Annie John, I am claiming that the statement also applies to Annie, and am arguing further that Annie matures into a resistance of the mother’s text so as to become the powerful teller of her own stories.

15 In her glossary, Cliff explains “buckra” as a “white person; specifically one representing the ruling class. British.” (167)

16 Annie John is a good example of this paradox. The mother and the child share the same name, the reader is forced to therefore consider who is the eponymous heroine—the mother or the daughter. Further the mother overwhelms the narrative in as much as she dominates the thoughts and actions of the child. In the retrospective recounting of Annie’s life, we remain uncertain as to whose life story is being told
“Biomythography” is Lorde’s term for her autobiographical novel. It suggests a variety of generic strategies used in the construction of an identity, in her case a lesbian identity, and seems to confirm John D’Emilio’s notion in “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (Ann Snitow et al, eds. Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality. New York: New Feminist Library, 1983, 100-113.) that homosexuals invent a mythology rather than a history and that this mythical history draws on personal experience which one reads backwards in time.

While writers such as Gloria Anzaldua have argued for a notion of the marginal subject as a destabilizing force, I am positing an unruly presence of the marginal subject within the very domain of power. Anzaldua’s resisters occupy the margin, mine lodge themselves at the center. These women find their prototype in Tantie from Crick Crack, Monkey. Her attitude in the scene where she visits Tee become the trope. Tantie makes herself at home with her greasy paper bags “polarie, anchal, roti from Neighb’ Ramlal-Wife, and accra and fry-bake and zaboca ...” (153) deconstructing the lofty note of Aunt Beatrice’s chintzy, pretentious living room. While Tantie is insensitive to Beatrice’s horror and refuses to be intimidated into a construction of herself as the vulgar outsider, she is nonetheless sensitive to Tee’s discomfort and shame, and to Tee’s own judgment of her as an outsider. Tantie’s awareness of Tee’s class-based rendering generates a recuperative strategy which removes Tee from an environment which will ultimately erase her subjectivity. Neither does Hodge romanticize Tantie. While Tantie’s is aware of the damage of Beatrice’s excesses, her own self-reflexivity permits the acknowledgment that she too is unequal to the task of bring Tee up. The arranging for Tee to live with the father in the metropolis may well be more detrimental to the child in the long run but works as a short term solution.

In her essay “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” Alice Walker makes the claim that historically, black women’s creativity has been diverted into various, unsuspecting channels: “They were Creators who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane”(233).

This is however not a phenomenon restricted to Caribbean writing. In Praisesong for the Widow, Paule Marshall depicts Avey and Aunt Cuney as participating in this spiritual apprenticeship. Often African American literature presents creative re-writes to this paradigm. Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon offers Milkman as Pilate’s apprentice and in Mama Day, it is George whom Gloria Naylor posits as the initiate. This connects back to what Merle Hodge has outlined in an interview with Karen Baluntansky where she argues that in the Caribbean, child-rearing often extends beyond the nuclear family and becomes an activity which the community takes responsibility for.
CHAPTER 2

Negotiating Exile

Take your bundle and leave an’ go
Don’t come back here no more

The Mighty Sparrow

I have chosen to begin my theoretical explorations of Kincaid’s and Cliff’s negotiations of exile with the lines of a popular 1962 calypso by The Mighty Sparrow.\(^1\) Embedded within the two lines quoted in the epigraph are the twin concepts of compulsory leave-taking and the strategic, survival apparatus which one needs to take on that journey. Exile often conjures up the image of unhoused, unaccommodated, newly unhistoried man. Yet this calypso fragment partially reconfigures these notions. While it conveys a rejection of the newly-exiled and a disregard for contributory bundles, the harsh edges of banishment are softened by the concession that exiles may take with them their bundles of possessions even while the simultaneous admonition never to return undermines the seeming generosity of that permission. This chapter will connect the ambivalence of Sparrow’s lines to the tension and contradictions implicit to the act of expatriation, considering the ways in which Cliff’s and Kincaid’s exiles relate to and differ from the various migratory movements which mark Caribbean Letters.

Migration to and from the West Indies is by no means a recent phenomenon. Indeed it constitutes the origin and essence of Caribbean society, beginning with the
movement of the Tainos, followed by the Europeans, then the Africans and later Asians. This movement of peoples from all the corners of the world has transformed the Caribbean into what Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* so aptly describes as “a geographical accident, a discontinuous conjunction” which has neither boundary nor center . . . the last of the great meta-archipelagoes” (4). With each subsequent wave of arrivants to this New World comes a widening split between the condition of migration with its possibilities of return to the center/home--one’s point of origin--and the reality of exile as the rupture of connections, the introduction to disempowerment and the erasure of authority. Where early European arrivants to this new world had sought to recreate this space, despite this unfamiliar geography--as homeplace which resembled the place they had migrated from--by the time of the movements of Africans and Asians to the Caribbean, the circumstances of their entry were such that they lacked the power to call this new place home. Violently dislocated from their cultural moorings, forbidden free access to the bundle of artifacts they inevitably carried secreted in the crevices of their memories, these migrants seem to have become perpetually inscribed in a wandering search for homeplace. But at the same time, the Caribbean, considered as a temporary location, was fast becoming home, and this paradox was ironically creating in the migrant a sense of being yet not being (dis)located.

These involuntary nomads provide a historical antecedent for the twentieth-century migratory flow. Even while the movement has reversed its geographical direction and is now a movement away from the Caribbean, the economic pragmatism which once underpinned it remains in place. However, this time, not only do the
destinations lack the corresponding sweep of the earlier movement and are restricted to Europe and North America, but the relationship with the place left is deeply etched in paradox: homeplace is at once desired center as it is maligned margin. The place left provided a context, a rootedness which however much discredited and devalued allows for a point of origin from which one can depart. Yet because this homeplace has been depreciated in the perception of it as Other to the metropolis, it is a place where one is necessarily exiled from the real world and remains a site of departure and never a destination.

Finding themselves at once migrants and exiles, as having a home yet not being at home there, Caribbean people abroad inhabit the volatile space of self-articulation and self-dislocatedness. Migration confers on them the freedom to make themselves into brave new images. Exile however reiterates a historical wandering and an absence of a foundational shape within which to mold the constructed self. Should the exiles bring with them none of the bundles which the epigraph invites them to take along on the journey they then remain culturally disenfranchised and accordingly homeless. Further in their crossing of national borders they encounter Western-generated ideologies which are themselves unequivocal in their articulation of Europe as home and insistent on the hegemony of its culture. Forced to define "self" relative to this new location, the migrant disrupts the ideology of home as a fixed space. Now home is no place. Instead one "makes herself at home" in exile and uses this condition of belonging to no fixed location, to enter into varying negotiations with liberty and creativity.
Generally, lodged in the protective boundaries of the host culture, the exile is free to engage in an imaginative border crossing back to the home left, thereby creating a bridge between these two worlds. One can therefore enjoy the material, social and psychological benefits of this new location without having to give up the emotional connections with one's place of origin. So while exile is not necessarily a privilege, or a fate willingly chosen, it is an alternative which need not be framed in loss. Edward Said contends in "Reflections on Exile," that traveling between provisional homes of the mind can facilitate the reconstitution of fragmented lives. However, Said seems to be emphasizing constant motion, that is the act of imaginative traveling, as fundamental to this process. The bridge which connects the place of exile to the community left is for Said supported by the language, culture and customs of the place left, a "triumphant ideology" which one continues to have access to through memory. For the exile, to discontinue the journey is to submit to the myth of home:

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Border and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (54)

However Said glosses over the cause and effect of border crossing. His emphasis is on the enabling space which the border provides for the willingly homeless. Liminality therefore becomes the new site of identity where one can create what Said elsewhere describes as a "scrupulous subjectivity," a posture which maintains a critical distance from both the new and original culture.
The joys of exile not withstanding, often the migrant finds himself involuntarily located on the borders of another culture. This is neither an enabling or chosen site, merely a designation the host culture applies. Therefore, while Said celebrates the liberatory power of border-crossing and its breaching of the barriers of thought and experience, one needs to be ever mindful of the potentially damaging consequences of such a hyphenated existence. Frequently, the circumstances of departure do not allow for such a creative response to displacement. In instances where subjectivity has itself been bifurcated by a colonization process which has denied one a valid language and culture—the apprehension of origins—entry into this new landscape occurs under conditions of shame and subordination which do not allow the critical engagement outlined by Said.

Often the reality of exile for the Caribbean migrant is one which has created contexts of pain as well as of possibilities, of fragmentation as well as of syncretism. This perception of exile as the paradoxical state of rupture and reconnection is reiterated by George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile*. Using his personal circumstances as a colonial writer exiled in England, Lamming constructs a paradigm of the ambivalent state wrought by the splitting of self from a familiar world:

We are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we cannot alter and whose future is always beyond us. Idleness can easily guide us into accepting this as a condition. Sooner or later, in silence or in rhetoric, we sign a contract whose epigraph reads: To be an exile is to be alive.

When the exile is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonised his history, then there are certain complications. For each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England. (24)
These interventions by Said and Lamming provide the necessary reminder that exile is not a flat, monolithic category. The instance of internal migration within the Caribbean as people moved from island to island in search of employment opportunities further substantiates this. These migratory activities differed in character if not in circumstances from the trans-Atlantic movements. The displacement fundamental to the latter was never as acutely felt by the migrants traveling through the region. And while these migrants may have carried support bundles with them to these new landscape, there was limited use for them, because they were going to places where they could blend in easily and not feel dislocated. Frequently these metaphoric bundles were the language of their mother tongue for often the migrants would relocate to islands where the official language was different from the one accustomed to. However, given the remarkable similarities between the islands, one was never totally cut off from a familiar history and culture.

This freedom of travel between the islands is repeated on a microcosmic scale in migratory activities on the islands as people moved from place to place in search of employment. Related to this phenomenon is the historical fact of translocatable houses, for often as people moved from place to place, escaping joblessness or a change in tenancy arrangements, they would move with their house, usually a wooden structure so constructed as to be easily dismantled and carried from one location to the next, where it could again be reassembled. In Treasures of Barbados, Henry Fraser explains the origins of this occurrence:
After emancipation, almost every freed slave was tied to his plantation, from which he rented land, known as tenantry land to live on. It is not exactly clear when the movable or chattel houses came into vogue but it may have been accelerated by American developments - good cheap pine boards became available and by the late nineteenth century when photography records the scene for us, standard wooden frame chattel houses, sometimes with walls of shingles were the norm in every village. (7)

The chattel house therefore mitigated against homelessness and dislocation while providing a degree of freedom and autonomy similar to the pleasures which Said’s description of exile had gestured to.

In In The Castle Of My Skin, George Lamming uses the symbolism of the chattel house to discuss the changing social order which displaces the Caribbean peasant. Specifically the demolition and relocation of Papa’s house suggests the loss of generational continuity and the unreliability of all but the castle of one’s skin.

The village carpenters dismantled the old house. Board by single board they lifted partition and roof away; we laid every inch of his wooden refuge over the wide push cart and the carpenters carried that Rock which was Papa’s Castle miles away at night and among people who would probably pass him on the street next morning: another foreign old face, wrinkled and ready to die.

Such a man would have nothing left but the richness of his skin which clearly told his age, and the wisdom it concealed from those too innocent to know. (228)

I am evoking a similarity between Pa’s moveable house and the bundles which I earlier established as the baggage which accompanies the migrant into exile. Specifically, I am arguing that when Cliff and Kincaid migrated to North America, they did not come unaccompanied. Cliff, like Pa whose castle of the skin is offered as a replacement for his fragile, dismantable house, has because of her early exile been unable to compose a bundle for her journey, but has the castle of her mulatto skin as the source of
supplemental shelter. Kincaid brings with her a metaphoric house, constructed from West Indian cultural mores and values and disassembled into a bundle.

The migratory activities of Cliff and Kincaid participate in the traditions of Caribbean travel as outlined earlier. Each transfers features of intra-regional migrations into a more international enterprise and in so doing carry over a support structure which undermines the foundational perception of home as the antithesis to exile. Nonetheless, because the concept of home is tied to identity, then given their identities, as rebel daughter and aspiring artist, both women experience a sense of being foreigners in any space demarcated as home, in this case Antigua and Jamaica. There they are in the Kristevan sense “other to the family, to the clan, to the tribe” (95). There they are compelled to give backchat. In their struggle for an artistic selfhood in a society which has yet to make a space for the woman writer, home is ultimately a place separate from the West Indian community, a place where the world of the imagination and self-representation can be creatively fused, a place where there is an appreciative audience for their backchatting.

Specifically these women writers exiled in North America create particular strategies for surviving the interstices, the space between the community left and the one gained. They assume a right to be there and are not unduly worried about having to defend their right to creativity in this landscape. Furthermore, the cultural expectations are different. The United States has been constructed in the West Indian imagination as the land of the free, the place of opportunity, a site where one can remake self in a variety of ways. Favoring spaces which allow them autonomy and
flexibility, these two West Indian writers reconstruct their piecemeal psyche on foundations which may well never be adequate to prolonged support, for regardless of the accommodation this new homeplace offers, it never assumes a permanence. For Cliff and Kincaid, no one community can ever be sufficient to their multiple identities. Migrations are ongoing.

The notion of the artist as solitary wanderer is a recurring one in West Indian literature. In “The Muse of History,” Walcott identifies the New World writer, in the tradition of Perse, Whitman and Neruda, as adamic man possessing nothing, not even history: “What the poet glorifies is not veneration but the perennial freedom, his hero remains the wanderer, the man who moves through the ruins of great civilizations with all his worldly goods by caravan or pack mule, the poet carries entire cultures in his head, bitter perhaps but unencumbered” (3). Here, I am also proposing the Caribbean woman writer as wanderer, but in another tradition, that of Caribbean peasantry committed to a necessary vagabondage, searching for the chance to make something of one’s self, to make one’s self anew, yet always carrying her past into her present and future. Further, while the Walcottian wanderer glories in his unencumberment, I wish to suggest that for Cliff and Kincaid it is this very encumberment as imaged in their ubiquitous bundles which keeps them connected, grounded in a culture, a history and a presence out of which they can create. Ultimately it is these bundles which make reterritorialization possible.

In “What is a Minor Literature,” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari present the concept of deterritorialization. They argue that the defamiliarization born out of
displacement both enables and alienates the imagination and that this process facilitates the opportunity to “express another potential community, to force the means of another consciousness and another sensibility” (17). Where Deleuze and Guattari have focused on the displacement engineered by deterritorialization as a creative opportunity and a site of empowerment, the theoretical positions adopted by Cliff and Kincaid present a challenge to those assumptions. For while there is certainly potential in displacement for peoples who have always been displaced, who may never have felt at home anywhere, who have always been told to go home or asked where is home, deterritorialization is a traumatic experience, one which breeds further fragmentation and dislocation, a surrender of whatever fragile authority one has assumed. Furthermore, for diasporic people intimate with dispossession, bundles of possessions take on a signal importance, becoming a grounding force, a means of empowerment. Hence while Cliff and Kincaid are aware that the intersection of race, class and gender renders them multiply located, and that the house which they carry can never simultaneously occupy these varied locations, ownership of a castle of one’s skin or a bundle/house and what that signifies is as important as finding a location within which to re-site it.

No Telephone to Heaven and Lucy are examples of Michelle Cliff’s and Jamaica Kincaid’s various theoretical performances as they seek safe homeplaces in which to locate their houses. Exile allows them to participate in the questioning of genealogy and identity as have other postcolonials, for Cliff and Kincaid also inhabit the traumatized and traumatizing colonizing world. The narrativizing of that anguish
allows Cliff and Kincaid to play out through Clare and Lucy certain survival options available to the exile. In this chapter I read Lucy and No Telephone to Heaven as part of a never-ending process, as sign of the still unsettled questions about where to live and what kind of place to call home. My exegesis of these two novels argues that each writer is involved in an ongoing act of reterritorialisation—the search for safe and suitable social locations. Ultimately these writings are examples of a developmental process where the metaphoric houses are dismantled and reassembled in a variety of psycho-architectural styles suitable to the changing locations which they call home.

Common to both writers is the security and power which the metaphoric house and the castles of their skins afford. However the personal circumstances which shape each writer’s exile are such that, the architecture and contents of these metaphoric houses are markedly different. Each woman is to some extent an internal and external exile. Though both writers feel alienated from their local/Caribbean communities, their particular material and psycho-social histories shape this isolation in distinctive ways. Furthermore, migration to the United States generates vastly different responses to the place left, and this is largely a factor of the economic conditions under which each writer left the Caribbean homeplace. Issues of race as ambivalently empowering and disempowering assume a prominence in Cliff’s writings. So too does her desire to belong to communities which authorize her various locations. Jamaica Kincaid, on the other hand, engages differently with the issue of power: its varying sources, its fields of influence and her distance from it. Nevertheless, integral to their negotiations of exile is the understanding that in the constant change of locations, in the dismantling
and reassembling of these metaphoric houses lies the potential for both self-
empowerment and self-annihilation. The means by which these potentialities can be
realized becomes the subject of Lucy and No Telephone to Heaven. Thus these
prevalent thematic considerations bring Kincaid and Cliff into closer literary kinship
with an earlier generation of similarly exiled Caribbean writers and the first movement
of this chapter provides a literary and historical background to this connection.

Building Castles . . .

The notion of independence implicit to house ownership is a recurring theme in
literature. However in West Indian literature, the house has gained an additional
prominence because of its evocation of rootedness, a condition which for the diasporic
subject has compelling appeal. In his essay “Roots,” Edward Kamau Brathwaite makes
a stirring case for the political implications of roots to the colonial subject and offers
the house as a symbol of a grounding cultural artifact:

. . . [T]he community of the household represents something larger and
more enduring than any individual. It represents a cultural base. It
represents the tenacious, traditional, socio-cultural matrix . . . the
‘modern’ wants to escape from; and having ‘succeeded’, wishes to relate
back to . . .(46)

The cogency of Brathwaite’s claim finds narrative validation in A House for Mr.
Biswa. In this novel, V.S. Naipaul explores the protagonist’s desire for a house as a
means of claiming a space, where having a possession marks his presence, registers his
being, and save him from existential nothingness. Although as son-in-law, Mohun
Biswa becomes sheltered in the ample embrace of Hanuman House, his spirit is
suffocated in the feminized role which living there requires. In much the same way, his manhood is denied in his assumption of the ritualistic role of the newly wedded Hindu female. Attempting to lay claim to his portion of the earth, Biswas becomes a wanderer both in space and time and his travails through the Chase, Shorthills and Green Vale, punctuated by his re-absorptions into Hanuman House, are all signs of his being, what Naipaul in his retrospective prologue to the novel calls “unnecessary and unaccommodated” (14). A house of his own becomes proof that Biswas can survive the hostile world without Tulsi patronage and the tall, square, badly built house on Sikkim Street which he finally acquires is, despite its structural frailty, proof of his manhood and the termination of a former nomadism.

While *A House for Mr. Biswas* does not concern itself directly with the escape from a colonial outpost to the brave new world of the metropolis, Hanuman House tropes as a sign of the narrow, insular world which imprisons Mohun Biswas’ individuality. The protagonist’s repeated attempts to define himself as an independent man, as what the Tulsis mockingly refers to as “the paddler,” helps to locate the novel within a discourse of rootlessness and exile. Biswas’ struggle is as much an enterprise to establish an identity outside the anonymous sameness of ritualized Indianess as it is a desire to create a personal history which imitates the dynastic power of the Tulsis. But where Biswas had once been exiled because of his persistent attacks on Tulsidom, now in his rendering of self as patriarch of a smaller-scale version of Hanuman house, he creates a world which approximates the power he had once rebelled against.
Biswas’ sense of homecoming to my mind echoes the migratory experience of many West Indians to Europe. Metaphorically the West Indian is escaping his Hanuman House even while he is unconsciously seeking to reconstruct it elsewhere. Great Britain becomes home—a real place which one was constantly educated into awareness of and to which the West Indian gravitated towards so as to find an answer to his persistent question: Who Am I? This is a question Biswas himself had asked and his own psychological state of estrangement becomes reflected in the anxieties of other exiles as they seek a place wherein they can begin anew. Great Britain, for many of the now lonely Londoners becomes, like the house on Sikkim Street, the answer to these wandering, the fulfillment of a dream. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* offers support for this notion in his description of this new relationship with metropolitan Europe as entry into a magical state of power created by the new distance from the colony and the exile’s new connection to the metropolis—the omphalos of the world.

The circumstances which breed this kind of dependence can be traced in colonial education and in the economic dependence which is such an integral part of colonial management. Metropolitan theories of culture and tradition had long migrated to the colonies and shaped the pattern of educational life there. The Caribbean schoolboy had migrated mentally as he was later to do physically, to the world of the English text and had as Lamming depicts in *In The Castle of my Skin*, said “farewell to his land,” the barren and unworthy place he reluctantly inhabited. Thus, in a society weaned on curricula heavy with Matthew Arnold’s intellectual legacy, Caribbean
subjectivity and its fondness for the sweetness and lightness of the culture of Western Europe becomes shaped by what C.L.R James acknowledges in Beyond the Boundary as “the gospel according to St. Matthew, Matthew being son of Thomas, otherwise called Arnold⁹ of Rugby” (29).

The Caribbean schoolboy, now a grown man, was to discover all the paradoxes of being at home in Europe. His experience of exile has been documented both sociologically and fictionally. Bonham C. Richardson in “Caribbean Migration” lists the socio-economic circumstances which prompted interregional and international migration of Caribbean people. Specifically Richardson details the relationship between the largest migratory event in the 1950s and the corresponding impact on the communities left. Focusing on the consequences of such an exodus on small island economies, he explains how Caribbean migrants helped to rebuild and repair Britain while simultaneously and unwittingly initiating socio-economic death in these small islands:

Travel itself was accomplished on steamers and charter flights. Husbands and fathers went alone and established an economic foothold in England before sending for the rest of their families. A disproportionately large number of skilled workers--carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians - left the islands for higher paying British jobs, thereby depleting insular work forces and . . . draining away the most capable and productive local inhabitants. (217)

Significantly, the fact that initially Caribbean people were able to travel to England on a British passport allowed for unrestricted immigration until a saturated labor market and the prevalence of accelerating British resentment led to the passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act which restricted the indiscriminate entry of unskilled
labor. On the other hand, migration to the United States was never marked by the 1950s rush which Britain had experienced, occurring instead against a constant backdrop of legal sanctions and immigrant quota laws. Richardson continues with a comparison of how British migratory activity differed both in character and in impact from travel to North America and his explanation of that phenomenon is worthy to be quoted in full:

Whereas hundreds of thousands of Caribbean migrants and those whose parents are West Indians live in Western Europe, Caribbean peoples now residing in North America (mainly the United State) can be counted in the millions. In the past twenty years, ever since the US immigration act of 1965 modified the 'national origins' system that favored Europeans, Caribbean migrants and others have poured into the United States. These voluminous movements of people are only partly because of changed immigration laws in the United States. Stories from returning friends and relatives, combined with extraordinary advances in communications and transport technology, have made migration seem altogether less risky than staying at home to face relative poverty on a West Indian island. (219)

While the West Indian in America could take refuge against racism by immersing self within black communities, the West Indian in Britain had no such recourse and was to be constantly pitted against a formidable culture against which he had learned to judge himself inconsequential.

Much of West Indian literature grows from the root of painful-leave taking and the constant sense of void and deprivation engendered by the experience. Many Caribbean writers, among them George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, had sought self-exile in Britain because of a desire for higher educational opportunities and the belief that the “mothercountry” would provide more conducive writing conditions -- a place
where they had publishing access and a reading public, a place where writing could be a career. Metropolitan locations had always offered a sizable audience and access to publishing. With the increase in migrant populations, there was also a wide enough black readership with disposable income to convince mainstream publishers of the economic viability of investing in minority writing. Moreover there had always been the sense of England as site of tradition, historical stability, and cultural identity, the ingredients essential to artistic development and a substitute for the lack experienced by the diasporic subject.

Paradoxically, the West Indian had undergone an education which had already facilitated a syncretism of his native experiences and the civilizing discourse of Western culture. Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education” had produced mimic men in the Caribbean as it had in India, and the intellectual legacies of this colonial interpellation were to create a disturbing tension within the educated subject. C.L.R James provides one such example of the instrumentality of imperial governance in the shaping of West Indian subjectivity. In “Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The 1930s,” James describes the intellectual and cultural genealogy of this generation thus: “The origin of my work and my thoughts are to be found in Western European Literature, Western European history Western European thought . . .” (237). However while he was responsible for being what Jenny Sharpe calls “an ideological alibi for colonialism” (100), the colonial subject, as represented by the West Indian artist was occupied in interrogating, inverting and re-deploying this text of civility, in order to
“turn the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention”

(Bhabha, Signs 173)

And even as their experience of unbelonging negated previous assumptions of Britain as Home, the West Indian writer exiled in England, found substitute communities to buffet him against the wider alienating British landscape. The Caribbean Artists Movement was one such example of a grounding for the West Indian migrant. It provided the context for discussions, talks and literary examples of West Indian culture and in so doing helped remind the migrant that he had an originating space.

These male writers had also carried their bundles into exile. Given the historical time frame for their migration and the place of their exile, the baggage they carried was necessarily different, and it is the content of those bundles which they carried which was to distinguish them from the later literary activities of West Indian women writers. For these male writers carried a polemical pen which was to inscribe their public agendas of self-fashioning within the context of communal liberation. Where once he had identified himself as Afro-British, the experience of migration to Britain had forced a recognition of the West Indian self as merely replaceable and disposable “factory fodder” and had further aggravated his sense of being homeless. Not having a home, the West Indian male writer was intent on re-writing himself into the place left and this displaced longing for physicality and rootedness created a literature which fluctuated between romanticizing the Caribbean on one hand and a scathing portrait of nihilism in technicolor on the other.
Much of the literary criticism of early West Indian literature has documented those ambivalences about location. Michael Gilkes in *Wilson Harris and The Caribbean Novel* describes West Indian literary anxieties as follows:

And indeed, the view that Caribbean writing embodies a search for identity, the result of racial, cultural and psychic disorientation—has already become a dangerous cliche in criticism of Caribbean literature. Yet the idea of a ‘division of consciousness’ is clearly a preoccupation with Caribbean writers, affecting both the subject-matter and the literary quality. (x)

Gilkes goes on to establish a connection between these anxieties and the literary configurations of home and exile, arguing that there was a resultant crisis of identification because the writer needed the Caribbean as a context for his art even though his art could never survive in such a setting. Gilkes does not focus on the particularities of a female consciousness.

Neither does Richardson’s survey of migratory trends include an analysis of the viability of Britain as a migratory destination for Caribbean women and his delineation of the employment needs of the post World War II economy suggests that when women migrated to Britain they did so merely to look after their working husbands and fathers. While there is sociological evidence that many West Indian women in Britain worked outside the home, West Indian literature up to 1980 did not validate the reality of the female migrant. It was the male protagonist who was reiterating the Dedalusian claim “I go to create in the smithy of my mind the uncreated conscience of my race.” And while his travels, given the matrifocality of Caribbean society, may have been
facilitated by a female community, the smithy of his soul was fueled largely by a masculinist support system.

Caribbean migration has produced vibrant literary portraits of these traveling men. The Lonely Londoners is one such example. In this novel, Samuel Selvon explores the ways in which masculinist anxieties about belonging manifested themselves in an attachment to small rooms of boarding houses as fixed sites of comfort, self-definition and power. This conscription to what has been analogized as domestic space reflects the loss of boundaries caused by the voyage out and the undermining of previous certainties as to what constituted manhood. Alternatively, within this new and narrow space, Selvon’s lonely Londoners are often depicted as a community of men who find safety in laughter and shared misery. Moses, the observer/participant in this adventure of migration admits:

Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what happenings, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand. The spades jostling in the crowds, bewildered, hopeless. . . . As if the boys laughing because they fraid to cry. They only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a calamity. (170)

Selvon’s England is reduced to this world of loss and longing. The only specificity offered of the English landscape relates to the layout of boarding houses. Britain is metonymically represented as a collection of streets which link boarding houses to pubs, places of employment and parks where they pick up white women. Seasons are important in so far as they present yet another adversity: the expenses of shilling-fueled
fires and the cost of winter clothes, and the reminder of how far away from home and the heat of the sun they now are. It is this reduced world which constitutes the boundaries within which the exile is located, boundaries which exclude female participants as fellow travelers and sufferers.

Caribbean literature offers a partial image of the female in exile in the writings of Jean Rhys, a white West Indian whose own position of double alienation on the grounds of race and gender rendered her contribution to the ongoing Caribbean discourse of exile marginal. Significantly, the issues which Rhys preoccupied herself with were personal rather than communal. Her emphasis was on female experiences within communities rather than on interaction with a physical environment. Her subject matter focused specifically on psychic and cultural alienation and the difficulty of achieving artistic stature in a society which was unsympathetic to that particular notion of female self-fulfillment. Departure from the Caribbean, like it had been for her male counterparts, albeit for vastly different reasons, was both a necessary action and a situation of lamentation. The Caribbean, however was home regardless, a personal, safe space which paid little attention to the wider politics of its precarious location. Where the typical subject in exile had been the Black West Indian, in Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys presents the fate of the White West Indian who identifies with the powerless blacks even while her skin color is a mark of privilege and the cause for her frustrated solidarity with a black nurturing community.

In many ways Rhys was articulating a feminist polemic which was to be later adopted by other women in exile. Primarily her writings had identified the need to
name self as a visible, speaking, female subject in search of a community which could assist in her fuller self development and compensate for the lack of an affirming mother. Particularly, Rhys’s narrative strategies of resistance to the dominant culture were related to psychological dramas where the mother/daughter relationship became a space within which to articulate a larger statement on the relationship between motherland and colony. The means of exploring this polemic were limited because Rhys had brought no bundle into exile. Her autobiography details her psychic dispossession in the Caribbean and her alienation in Europe. Thus her barehanded travel provokes a literature of mad women, the ultimate outsiders living dislocated lives outside of community, yearning for a Caribbean homeplace which is re-imagined as welcoming.

**Constructing Houses. . .**

At the instance where and when Kincaid and Cliff enter the discussion on exile, the current feminist climate and the waning of what Arthur Paris calls “romantic macho militancy” allows for a different type of encounter with issues of history, migration and identity. Where earlier there had not been a large enough island readership for Caribbean literature, with advances in mass education and literacy efforts, literary voices, by and large female voices, were now given wider play both within the Caribbean and the Metropolis. Paris goes on to explain the ways in which the precise socio-economic location of the migrant had much to do with reception into North American society. While Richardson had dealt partially with this issue, Paris makes a far stronger case:
The higher the socio-economic standing of the in-migrating population, the better equipped they are to confront the larger metropolitan culture within which they find themselves and the faster they are able not just to acculturate or assimilate but also to appropriate resources for their personal and communal needs . . . (83)

Migrating women, beginning with Jean Rhys, continuing with Beryl Gilroy, Merle Collins and Joan Riley, and extending to Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand and Marlene Nourbese Philip were registering their militancy in distinctive ways. Theirs was an oppositional discourse which was markedly different from their male predecessors. The ways in which these women appropriated the resources discovered in exile to the enterprise of self-construction however varied, was to have as significant an impact on West Indian literature as had the 1950’s migration to Great Britain.

Migration to the United States afforded similar opportunities. Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid were both privileged to resources made available through migration. Because they are able to pass for white, Michelle Cliff’s family is easily integrated into North American society. The economic standing they consequently enjoy, and the education which Cliff has access to, facilitated her assimilation into white America and for much of her formative years a denial of her mixed ancestry. Jamaica Kincaid on the other hand participated in privilege by virtue of her social location, first as au pair to a well-to-do New York family and later as protégé of William Shawn, the editor of The New Yorker.

Kincaid seeks exile as the distance from her mother which will afford her a distinct personhood and a space where she can dare to be a writer. Cliff on the other
hand, accepts exile as a consequence of her racial origin, as an identity which she must perform by virtue of her hybridity. Their relationships with the place left varies. While Kincaid seems to have had her fill of community, Michelle Cliff remains ambivalent about the Caribbean community which has been denied to her and vacillates between yearning for an originating space and acceptance of her creole destiny of annexation. For both women, rootedness is both a curse and a blessing, a desire and a rejection. Accepting themselves to be multiply located, each sees commitment to one particular site as frustrating the conditions of possibilities necessary to artistic growth.

Significantly, the dismissal of the West Indian female as artist connects Cliff and Kincaid to the wider West Indian literary community where the artist had lacked social validation and had sought in exile, a home where he could write and publish freely. Exile provides both women with access as it had earlier allowed writers like Lamming and Naipaul to develop an uninterrupted artistic voice. Michelle Cliff speaks at length of the Caribbean as a place where her artistic self is cramped. Specifically, she locates her silencing within a familial setting. In an interview with Opal Palmer Adisa, Cliff recounts an early violation of her privacy where her parents break into her bedroom and her diary. Not content to have violated her on that level they stage a public reading of the young girl’s secrets:

My father and mother had my diary in their hands and sat down to read it out loud in front of me, my aunt and everybody else. My sister was there. There were very intimate details; there were a lot of things about leaving school and not going to classes and playing hookey, but there was also the experience of the first time I menstruated and I remember being shattered. (273)
Her reactions, her screams that she has no rights mark her initial separation from her familial community, the early dismantling of the walls of the house of her fledgling artistic spirit.

Her family’s scornful dismissal of her childhood creativity foreshadows the later charges leveled at her by Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson in their introduction to Her True-True Name. There, they indict Cliff as outside the Anglophone Caribbean consciousness and criticize her assumptions that she belongs to a West Indian community. They judge her near-white skin as locating her within the realm of privilege and go on to charge that “one of the prices she has paid is a compromised authenticity in some of her renderings of the creole” (xvii). I do not share this essentialist perception even while I agree that there are instances of some degree of inauthenticity, the source and explanation of which I will later explore. The question which begs to be asked is: Who is the authentic creole? The issue which Mordecai and Wilson make of Cliff’s near-white racial composition and her ability to pass for white speaks to a myopic and narrow-minded concern which is as classist as it is racist. Olive Senior, a well known Jamaican writer shares Cliff’s racial hue yet does not suffer the same critique. What seems to make Senior uncritically Caribbean is her autobiographical alignment with poverty and deprivation, her detailing of loss and dislocation, her rendering of the dispossessed in a voice which captures their plight with amazing verisimilitude. Where Cliff focuses her narrative on a similar landscape, the resulting image is differently configured primarily because Cliff’s early migration to the United States has affected the angle of the cast of her narrative eye.
Pamela Mordecai’s and Betty Wilson’s identification of Cliff as an outsider is one with which Cliff herself has been preoccupied. Growing up publicly crossing borders—the national ones separating Jamaica from the United States, the racial ones separating her black grandmother from her white father—Cliff is intimate with the insider/outsider paradox. The position she therefore adopts in many ways reflects that articulated by bell hooks in Feminist Theory: From Center to Margin: “Living as we did on the edge - we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from both from the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both”(x). But where Mordecai and Wilson see this “outsiderhood” in condemnatory terms, Cliff, like hooks, transforms it into a liberatory condition. But in Cliff’s case, her outsider condition is not framed solely in celebration. The margin is a volatile space. Furthermore, Cliff’s migration between these identities have not been facilitated by a supportive bundle. In neither space does she accrue a sufficient sense of belonging, and her writing continues to articulate an anxiety to be part of a community.

Cliff is, however, not seeking location in any one space for the reality of her hybridity requires that she has various identity locations. To some extent, Cliff made strategic use of her partial outsider status by siting herself in different literary communities. In an interview with Judith Raiskin, Cliff admits “I don’t think I’m just a Caribbean writer. I think I am also an American writer in a certain way of being of the Americas at least. . . . I wouldn’t want to narrow my self description to Caribbean” (57). But the castle of her skin which Cliff carries with her from one location to the
next is made up by her various experiences as insider and outsider. Her sense of an oral tradition develops from her temporary participation in her grandmother’s community, and her emotional distance from her immediate family has caused Cliff to develop a necessary self-reliability. She accesses a sympathetic literary community when as an avid reader she made contact with a world outside her racial and national borders. Finally, her colonial education while it has trained her into denial of her native history, has also given her the tools to critique the structures which rendered her silent.

Where the difficulty of being multiply located has occasioned a wide body of what I would call distress literature, a lamentation at loss of voice and identity, Cliff has moved beyond this to proclaim the benefits of the choices wrought in exile. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff uses Clare Savage, her alter ego, to illustrate the consequence of having to choose a specific location--a place where one can call home. Configurations of race having bestowed a dubious privilege on her, Cliff is linked racially to the exploiter even while issues of gender and sexuality combine to exclude her from full identification with the hegemonic group. At home in none of these locations, rejected by the counter-hegemonic as a suspicious outsider, uncomfortable with the hegemonic because of its exclusionary politics, Cliff chooses liminality as viable strategy for survival. Developing the themes of alienation raised in *Abeng*, Cliff tests liminality as a strategy for survival by exploring its antithesis. Political engagement is proposed as a way into belonging. The protagonist of *Abeng*, Clare Savage, reappears in *No Telephone to Heaven* as a more severely alienated young
woman, who suffering the anxieties of the outsider, chooses to join a rebel faction intent on creating socio-political change to Jamaica. At the end of the novel, Claire is burnt into the Jamaican soil by a volley of government backed gunfire. This is the price she pays for abandoning safe liminality and engaging with the center. Her unwitting sacrifice is marked as an empty gesture, witnessed and acknowledged only by the mad Christopher performing for the movie cameras. The hopeful social change which her revolutionary engagement was to create never materializes. Clare’s fate is a warning against direct political engagement. It is a condemnation of facile resolutions.

Cliff herself has admitted to a frustrated political life while growing up in Jamaica and the United States. Although she was well aware of civil rights activities raging around her, her family had cautioned her against involvement in what was deemed to be an black / African American fight. As she matured, Cliff learned that revolution can take different shapes and that writing itself is a highly political activity. But to write, that is to be political, Cliff needed to return to Jamaica, to relocate the castle of her skin within its original landscape. In The Land of Look Behind, Cliff considers substituting pilgrimage home for exile:

I wonder if I’ll return - I light a cigarette to trap the fear of what returning would mean. And this is something I will admit only to you. I am afraid my place is at your side. I am afraid my place is in the hills. This is a killing ambivalence. I bear in mind that you with all your cruelties are the source of me, and like even the most angry mother draw me back. (103)

No Telephone to Heaven demonstrates these killing ambivalences. Clare’s final return to Jamaica is part of the triangulated journey towards discovery of an elusive self.
Coming home to Harry/Harriet, the ultimately split subject, divided both in his blood and in his sexuality, Clare is encouraged to find wholeness in political choice. For as Harry/Harriet insists: “... the time will come for both of us to choose. For we have to make the choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world” (131). Her adventures with the rebels “she hopes, is her restoration” (87), the means of bringing all her fragments together. Yet what Clare learns deep in the Jamaican countryside is that the hills are not joyful together and efforts at community, be it that which exist between god and man, between the rich and poor, man and woman, nature and culture remain denied.

While Clare’s demise suggests the non-productivity of direct political involvement in Jamaican society, artistic access remains available to Cliff. Liminality allows her to exploit the range of narrative forms embedded in that culture and to meld it to other styles available through exile. Also as split a subject as Clare, Cliff is, unlike Clare, not however prepared to choose, for choice means the death of possibilities. As she admits in her interview with Raiskin:

I think that when you come from a culture that is not mainstream, when you’re not expected to be a mainstream cultural person you can really use that to admit that you don’t have much loyalty to [the tradition] and that you can play with forms more. You can be much more experimental. You can mix styles up, you don’t have to be linear, you don’t have to be dichotomous and believe it’s either poetry or prose or whatever. You can really mix the media. (58)

Cliff’s denial of fixed, static identities, shapes the rhetorical posture she adopts in No Telephone to Heaven. Not only is the narrative voice ideologically elusive, its linguistic identity remains uncertain. As prime manipulator of characters and events,
Cliff is above and apart from many of the events being described. She is consciously marking Clare’s return in ways which suggest that the protagonist’s attempt to rediscover the Africa buried in her ancestral memory is a doomed enterprise, as much an elaborate game as the rebels playing at being soldiers. The soldiers clothes proclaim their activities unreal. Wearing army fatigues and camouflage jackets stolen from rich American who had bought them from shops like Banana Republic, The Gap and J. Crew, these soldiers are as much mimics as the cotta-wearing Clare is. For the rebels, self-representation comes from without, from the cinematic construction of what a real soldier looks like rather than from the archives of Nanny resistance. For Clare, being Jamaican comes from wearing an “imitation” cotta purchased from a curio shop in England.

The voice which Cliff uses to record these revolutionary antics vacillates between the clipped and often sardonic reportage of a news broadcast rendered in the Queen’s English and a sympathetic commentary in Jamaican English interspersed with patois as the soldiers articulate the circumstances which has brought them to this revolutionary moment. In places, the Jamaican patois rhythm is itself inconsistent and inauthentic, falling short of evoking a folk consciousness. Although Cliff is committed to a multi-voiced discourse to reflect her own multiple locations, her Jamaican voice has already been modulated by time and distance. The free play between language registers which the narrator participates in has no stylistic or structural justification. As readers we can surmise that Cliff’s limited experience of Jamaican life has created such a chasm of representation. Given that much of her formative years were spent in
New York and given the stigma attached to speaking patois at that time, it is hardly likely that Cliff’s family would have been validating that Jamaican tongue. The castle of memories she moves with from location to location contains only the faint voice of the grandmother, struggling to make itself hear amidst the clamor of all the other influences.

Furthermore given the infrequency of her return to Jamaica, much of Cliff’s portrayal of homeland depends on newspaper clippings or word of mouth news from the Jamaican community living in the United States. In her imaginative reconstruction of home, Cliff seems to confirm the literary characteristics which Trinh Minh-Ha describes in “Other than Myself/My other self” as peculiar to the diasporic subject:

. . . [W]riters of color, including Anglophone and Francophone Third World writers of the Diaspora, are condemned to write autobiographical works. Living in a double exile - far from the native land and far from the mother tongue - they are thought to write by memory and to depend a large deal on hearsay. Directing their look towards a long bygone reality, they supposedly excel in reanimating the ashes of childhood and the country of origin. The autobiography can be said to be an abode in which the writers . . . takes refuge. (10)

Not only is her narrative voice inauthenticated by the passage of time and distance, but her portrayal of Kingston seems to rely heavily on other fictional renderings such as Patterson’s Dungle in The Children of Sisyphus and Mais’s Brother Man.

The Jamaica Clare remembers as beautiful is romantically drawn. In the opening scene “Ruinate,” Cliff conjures up a scene of her grandmother’s estate, where nature undisturbed has returned to its original state of beautiful wildness, where everything has lapsed back to bush. But the power of nature is ultimately rendered
conditional for the intruders are soon able to tame the land into functional productivity, and it returns to domesticated farmland which supports them and provides a surplus for bartering. Interestingly enough, not only does nature lack true power but so do the peasants. In spite of the land not being used or claimed, the peasants never squat on it, always mindful of their social place. Power instead resides with Clare, daughter of landowners, who not only gives the rebels permission to farm the land but in true “lady of the manor” fashion distributes the surplus food to neighboring peasants who do not have similar access to agricultural bountifulness.

The romanticization is restricted to the rural person primarily because of the place of pride which Cliff’s maternal grandmother occupies in the memories which Cliff carries into exile. In her childhood years it was the grandmother who made her life bearable, who had provided a satisfactory anchorage for a rapidly unmoored identity. The grandmother as she appears in Cliff’s writings is the quintessential woman, nurturing and life giving, fixed within community rather than part of the changing social and economic order which makes migration a reality. In Woman and Change in The Caribbean, Janet Morrison provides a historical description which supports this image. She explains that: “Females were more likely than males to spend most of their lives living in one yard. The changes wrought by maturation, mating, motherhood, the birth and death of kin, work, migration, eventual marriage and finally aging, create consonant changes within the yard” (53). The particular rural landscape which the grandmother occupies has not participated even in the internal migration which marks rural life. Typically, in the migration of men to England and North
America, women became sole bread-winners and had to relocate to urban centers in search of employment. As a landowner, the grandmother has a literal and metaphoric rootedness which her daughter attempts to approximate and which her granddaughter admires but never attains.

Cliff’s adult narrative perception returns to the youthful consideration of her grandmother’s role in her community. Ignoring the disparate relations of power within the group or the ways in which economic privilege marks the grandmother herself as a partial outsider, Cliff focuses instead on the womanist theology which the grandmother embraces as she hold church in her house and provides a healing center for oppressed women. Significantly, this romanticizing of home is repeated in Kitty’s evocation of home in No Telephone To Heaven. Faced with the color barrier in the host country, Kitty holds on to the notion of home as different and better than elsewhere, where to quote Bob Marley “the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes.” But, deliberately, Cliff presents the Jamaica which Kitty conjures up as home is as different from the Jamaica which Christopher and his grandmother exist in. The Jamaica which Christopher and his grandmother live in is a world where a black skin condemns one to poverty, one where there are invisible signs reminding them to keep to their places, to be servile and self-effacing. Kitty’s mango-colored skin has given her freedom of movement in Jamaica and a strategic amnesia about the fate of darker-skinned people. Race and privilege are inseparable. As daughter to a landowner, Kitty is treated with courtesy and deference in Jamaica. In New York she yearns for this comfort group she has left and attempts to recreate home in the cultural
habits she once had. She tries to cook meals similar to what she had had in Jamaica until the complaints of her neighbors force her into a less pungent cuisine. Kitty cannot live without community. However she is frustrated by her husband, Boy from recreating home in New York among other Jamaicans and West Indians. Further, her dreams of aligning herself with the African American community are foreclosed by her pale skin and her lies about her origin. Return to Jamaica is her only option. After her small act of sabotage where she substitutes Mrs. White for an activist Mrs. Black, unwittingly causing the African American workers to lose their jobs, Kitty abandons exile for return to Jamaica with her darker-skinned daughter.

Return to Jamaica is imagined as regaining a voice. This applies to both Kitty Savage and Michelle Cliff. Kitty has been silenced by her complicity in Boy’s plans to pass for white and by her refusal to speak in public places, lest her musical voice betrays her as the exotic and usually racially tainted, island girl. This silence extends to her relationship with Clare and her unexplained abandonment. The un-bridged spaces in the mother /daughter relationship, the marked absence of the mother in the castle of Clare’s memories, suggest that Kitty’s recovered voice still lacks sufficient range and can not reach both her daughters. She remains voiceless to Clare, thereby provoking in her elder daughter a systemic fragmentation, and a structural weakness in the walls of the metaphoric house which Clare has built herself. Clare has no useful bundle to take with her into exile. She has established no community with her mother and in passing for white in New York denies both her racial and cultural ancestry. In following Boy’s assimilationist behavior, Claire accepts a new homelessness even as she yearns to
return home. Without her mother’s support, Clare is uncertain of its location and in search of her mother’s country finds instead the safety of the mother country—England. There she can continue to live the lie which Kitty could not. She has no bundle to betray her origin.

Having no identity of her own, Clare is anxious to find substitute ancestry in the much venerated British literary tradition. But the shabby, second-hand book, symbolic of the British literary canon, explored and discarded by other readers cannot offer Clare subjective valorization:

The fiction had tricked her. Drawn her in so that she became Jane. Yes. The parallels were there. Was she not heroic Jane? Betrayed. Left to wander. Solitary. Motherless. Yes and with no relations to speak of except an uncle across the water. She occupied her mind.

(116)

Clare’s negotiations here are an echo of Michelle Cliff’s where in *Claiming An Identity* she too tries on Jane Eyre’s identity. But Cliff has progressed beyond the heroic Jane Eyre syndrome to embrace the rebel Bertha complex. So too must Clare:

Comforted for a time she came too. Then with a sharpness, reprimanded herself. No she told herself. No she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English. No she paused. No my girl, try Bertha. Wild-maned Bertha. Clare thought of her father. Forever after her to train her hair... he called her Medusa. Do you intend to turn men to stone, daughter? She held to her curls which turned kinks in the damp of London. Beloved racial characteristic. Her only sign, except for the dark spaces here and there where the melanin touched her. Yes, Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cimmarron. All Bertha. All Clare. (116)

Clare Savage continues to link her identity to her relationship with a definable space, one which is officially constructed as a nation, an island to which one must return. For
her, return to Jamaica, and her dead mother, becomes a terminal point, a place where because of her political choice, she embraces death and closure. Participating in a discourse of nationalism which supports a literal spatial configuration rather than an imagined one, Clare makes a choice for what Mirielle Rosello elsewhere calls an “insular identity”. Cliff, on the other hand arrives at what Rosello describes as an “ironic” relationship between identity and land, one which is always in danger of being dissolved. Cliff, in exile, can safely write herself into belonging, to whatever site she sees as useful to the location of the castle of her skin

Jamaica Kincaid carries a bundle into exile even as she shares Cliff’s passion for self-fashioning. Her bundle allows her to make different use of her self-fashioning.

In her essay “Putting Myself Together”, Kincaid describes her early years in New York, her love for clothes, the passion and care she would take creating a particular ensemble, the rituals of elaborate dressing: “It took me long time to get dressed, for I could not easily decide what combination of people I wished to impersonate that day” (98). This enthusiasm for ‘impersonation,’ a keenness to become another person who is not Elaine Potter Richardson makes for an interesting segue into Lucy. In the earlier dressing up scene, Elaine Potter Richardson, a naive nineteen year old is unaware of the psychological underpinning of her transformative efforts:

I did not know then that I had embarked on something called self-invention, the making of a type of person that did not exist in the place where was I was born—a place far away from New York. I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to be a writer, I was a person with opinions and I wanted them to match to other people. (100)
But the act of writing *Lucy* is another version of this dressing up scene, an identity which can be pulled out of her metaphoric bundle. Elaine Potter Richardson set herself up as both designer and model and it is the manipulation of these two roles which constitutes my critique of *Lucy*. Jamaica Kincaid has a lot in common with Lucy, the eponymous narrator. Both migrated to the United States in their late teens to work as *au pairs*. They share the same personal history and the same fixation with the maternal presence in their lives. But *Lucy* is not an autobiographical sketch. Instead it is an example of what Paul Gilroy in his exploration of the counterculture of modernity describe as artistic expression which expands freely and forcefully into “individual self-fashioning” manipulating conventional novel forms in order to create “new contexts for social self creation . . .as a centerpiece of emancipatory hopes” (40).

Autobiography is the genre which Kincaid radicalizes, and exile provides both the occasion and the motivation for this re-configuration. In a November interview with Louise Kennedy of *The Boston Globe*, Kincaid admits: “I’m trying to discover the secret of myself. If that connects to the universe, I’m very grateful. But for me everything passes through the self” (89). This self, “a collection of people [she] used to be and the things [she] used to do” (137), functions like the bundle with which the exile migrates. Within it are the multiple identities which constitute the secret of herself. And it is within this bundle that we must locate Lucy, one native of Elaine Potter Richardson’s person. But there are other identities enfolded in the bundle which Kincaid has carried into exile “board by single board” (228). Annie John and Jamaica Kincaid, rebel daughter and successful writer can be founded therein.
These identities merge and separate in the hyphenated space wrought by exile. Elaine Potter Richardson, also known as Jamaica Kincaid, also known as Lucy, also known as Annie John, is never wholly of one place or wholly any of these personas. In an interview with Moira Ferguson, Kincaid issues the following statement in response to a query as to whether her writing is or has been autobiographical:

My writing has been very autobiographical... For me it was really an act of saving myself, so it has to be autobiographical. I am someone who had to make sense out of my past. It was turning out that it is much more complicated than that when I say my past, because for me, I have to make sense of my ancestral past—here I am from, my history, my group’s historical past, my group ancestry. (176)

This is a point which has been made and remade, as have her stories of becoming “Jamaica Kincaid,” once unhappy colonial subject who migrated to the United States, cut off all ties with her mother, and lived in a New York garret subsisting on a small liquid diet because nothing could satisfied her appetites, any of them, determined to be a artist, suffered through some rejection and, now a respected writer. The story of Jamaica Kincaid, told through numerous interviews, like the story of Lucy is a cover story. It sells copy and secures reader interest in its rags-to-riches structure. The renaming process which transforms Elaine Potter Richardson to Jamaica Kincaid is established as a public act of triumph, the gesture of the victorious. However both stories—Kincaid’s of becoming and Lucy’s of escaping to become—are the literary equivalent of trying on different costumes. The truth value of both is not an issue and any attempt to interrogate brings the reader to yet another Kincaidian perception: “There is no truth.”
Lucy’s exile to the United States bears this out. The protagonist sets out in a
a na ve search for the real and the true. But Kincaid is careful to show how her
protagonist feels fear even as she feels excitement for this new adventure, for what
Lucy encounters in America is quite different from what she had imagined.
Paradoxically, Lucy misses her mother whom she has perceived as a threat to her
individuality: “I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to
make me an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt I’d rather be dead than
become just an echo of someone” (36). Caught within the anxieties of charting a new
future for herself, Lucy creates one which allows her self-invention to occur outside the
center/margin paradigm which her status as black immigrant had conscribed her. She
dismisses traditions so as to separate herself from the expectations of both her family
and her race—her mother’s required devotion, her cousin’s posturing dutifulness, the
loyal Antiguan. Neither does she yoke herself to the dreams of members of her host
community in an assimilationist move which usually run alongside rejection of home
values. Mariah’s feminism is dismissed as a fad which has little bearing on Lucy’s
reality, Peggy’s rebellion against her family marked as trite and inconsequential against
the cataclysmic confrontation with the Antiguan mother, and Paul’s artistic perception
is judged as a self-indulgent move to contain Lucy’s essential spirit within a safe
exoticism.

Lucy’s first indication that her quest is imperiled comes in the realization that
migration has not brought the hoped-for freedom and the escape from bad feeling, but
has instead initiated an experience of dislocation and a reminder of how painful the new
can make one feel. In her admission of imperfect vision: “I could not see anything clearly on the way in from the airport, even though there were lights every where” (3) lodges the recognition that living in the imagination, reading about places and activities never add up to the actuality of living the experience. The arrogant assumptions of the seemingly knowing migrant are disrupted in this alien space, the place once experienced in the life of the mind is now transmogrified into places which are “ordinary, dirty, worn down by so many people entering and leaving them in real life” (4). This sets in progress a chain of other disillusionments as Lucy continues to search for the truth behind her desires and the expectations of others: the shining sun can be cold, weeds at home are houseplants here, the lake is not blue but instead a gray body of dirty water, migration does not confer automatic joy and family is something one loves and hate. These truths bring her to a larger one: There is power in knowing, even if it is knowing how wrong you once were.

The mother, believing her daughter has migrated and hence will one day return, continues to hold out the image of home as safe space and elsewhere—in this case New York—as life-threatening, the place where an unsuspecting young girl is brutally murdered. Bravely exiled with no intentions of returning, Lucy counters with her narrative of the place left as similarly life-threatening: there an unsuspecting girl is possessed by the devil and comes to grief because of it. Further, the binary which the mother sets up between “home” as safe and “away” as dangerous is dismantled, for already Lucy has learned that safety and danger are perceptions which change with location. Obeah is commonplace to Antigua and subway mugging typical to New
York. Each society would consider the activities of the other place to be dangerous. The memories Lucy carries around with her has made this a certainty. While Antigua did not offer the required safety, she is sufficiently wise to the reality that neither can New York. Hence to be confined to those binary possibilities is to undo the privilege of migration and to deny the free play of possibilities which allegiance to no location can bring.

The room which Lucy is given in Mariah's house is imaged as a box carrying cargo. Yet having resisted being confined by aspiring bourgeois respectability in Antigua, Lucy has no intention of suffering the same fate in New York. She refuses to be contained by slavish devotion to her employers, commodified into the exotic—"the girl from the islands," labeled as "houseslave" by the African American maid, or boxed into her mother's migrating conventionality. Lucy's counterdiscourse continues to assume a variety of forms. It surfaces in her angry response to Mariah's daffodils and in her watchful critique of marital bliss as performed by Mariah for her benefit. Further it allows her to reject the maid's condemnation and subsequent classification of her as an "Aunt Jemina." When challenged to perform as a way of proving herself, and as an initiation in African American community, Lucy counters with an individualistic discourse of her own—a calypso about transgression, escape and migration.

Lucy's voyage out is also a reconsideration of the power nexus which home represents. In Antigua, living imprisoned in her mother's immense and powerful love, Lucy is forced to disguise her fury of this powerlessness in a two-faced masking. In
New York, not only is she free of the mask but considers that she has moved beyond the confines of her mother's love and power. Lucy has left home/Antigua consciously bundle-less, determined to escape the influences and style of her mother. She believes herself to have no need for the social, cultural and historical moorings which such a bundle would afford. In bundle-free exile, Lucy hopes to acquire the power to name herself in whatever way she pleases—the prerogative of the victorious. Yet, even as she takes no bundle, the castle of her skin which Lucy inevitably carries has secreted in its walls the influences and power of the mother and the folk community to which she belongs. And these are powers which name Lucy as connected to a community.

In Antigua, Lucy had attempted to rename herself as sexually powerful. Her experimental tongue-kissing of hapless boys whose loss of control she could orchestrate at will speaks to a larger issue of "Jammette Politics" as a means of reconfiguring relations of power with her mother. While there is the sense that the mother imprisons her will, Lucy believes herself to be in control of her body, her female, desiring body. Sexual promiscuity (as a socially defined concept) is an issue over which the mother has no control. Promiscuity allows Lucy to flaunt her burgeoning power, to prove the limits of her mother's influence, and to claim a sexual identity which lies far removed from Caribbean conventions of womanhood. Lucy chooses to focus on the woman as desiring female rather than the image of woman romanticized as nurturing, inspirational, and indomitably maternal.

The sexual self which is being fashioned comes into being in the uninvention of another, that of the dutiful daughter, and the circumspect woman. The process is
initiated in Antigua. However, in a small place, confined to her mother’s respectability, Lucy can only be the young miss who responds in a voice which is a direct imitation of her mother’s (107), a forty year old voice which precludes any prospect of a secret rendezvous. Wishing for total immersion into life, Lucy seeks experiences which will mark her, proclaim to the world that, like Sylvie with the rose scar on her cheek, she has lived:

That is how I came to think that heavy and hard was the beginning of living, real living; and though I might not end up with a mark on my cheek, I had no doubts that I would end up with a mark somewhere. (25)

Life in New York affords her the chance for a fuller encounter with the hardness and heaviness of life, a chance to develop her own powerful odor, and not care if it gave offense (27). Neither does she surrender her sexual agency to the amatory traveling of white men who see her as an adventure. Instead she treats these men as samples of life which having been tasted, have no further use.

Lucy criminalizes herself in her identification with Lucifer and in her perception of New York as a new Australia. And in linking exile to crime, Lucy recontains the possibilities of her exile into punishment for transgressing the rules and established moral and social order. In self-fashioning herself into the deviant, Lucy’s resistance to her mother subsides into puerile ineffectiveness—weak punches against the mother’s mighty frame. She is merely reacting to her mother’s rules and conventions and the house of spirit she fashions in New York is haunted by her mother’s authority, however dubious Lucy may pretend that power to be. Leaving her mothers’ letters
unopened is an act of resistance and liberatory politics. However Lucy’s actions are too rehearsed, too self-conscious to bring her to the emancipation she seeks. The very presence of the letters, her wavering about returning them to her mother with their four corners burnt, in the tradition of a rejected lover suggests a continuing though muted discourse with home--Antigua and the mother--and the silencing of an exilic voice. Unlike her appropriated namesake, Lucifer, Lucy’s defiance does not bring her to the construction of a new and powerful identity, nor does it confer upon her the power to muffle her mother’s voice in the noise of her own individualism. Rather it diffuses her energies and thus renders her vision myopic.

What should have been configured as a dismissable monologue is instead a ghostly echo which Lucy carries in the castle of her skin. It become amplified in the narrow space which Lucy finally claims for herself. It is the mother’s hand which arranges Lucy’s dresser, which washes her underwear, scrubs the stove, washes the bathroom floor and attends to personal hygiene (163). The apartment she shares with Peggy falls short of Lucy’s expectations and desires. It is small and the bars across the window suggest imprisonment, for symbolically Lucy is indeed imprisoned in contrariness and unproductive defiance.\(^{15}\)

While she does not wish to call Antigua home--or any other space inhabited by the mother, Lucy is unaware that it is her own loving attachment to her mother which evokes her continuing presence. I am maintaining that the attachment is unavoidable for the mother constitutes a significant part of the community which has shaped Lucy. While Mariah, Paul and Peggy can assume the role of a substitute community, Lucy
forecloses that possibility by holding them at emotional arm’s length. Further Paul’s and Peggy’s devotion to self-pleasuring make it difficult for them to move beyond individualism to sharing. Because Lucy is less like them than she is willing to admit and because Mariah is still too untouched by the hardness and rawness of life to earn Lucy’s respect and therefore love, the mother remains the unchallengeable source of that community. Ultimately the mother’s claim remains supreme: “She would always love me, she would always be my mother, my home would never be anywhere but with her” (128).

Lucy’s castle of her skin is finally uninhabitable because she cannot live comfortably with the ghostly presence of her mother. Exile does not bring the freedom she sought, and in her search she becomes aware that one can find death as well as riches from this freedom. What she finds in exile is closer to death than riches. It is ultimately the mother’s hand which guides Lucy’s writing hand, the hand which writes the name “Lucy Josephine Potter” on a clean page in an empty notebook and overwrites this tenuous identity with “I wish I could love somebody so much that I would die from it” (164). The novel ends on a deliberate note, the dissolving of a fragile identity into a blurred spot on the page: “And as I looked at this sentence a great wave of shame came over me and I wept and wept so much so that the tears fell on the page and caused all the words to become one great blur” (164).

Kincaid often intrudes into the narration, overlaying Lucy’s naive struggles against the mother’s hegemony with the perception gained from her own frequent
confrontations with the formidable mother. Witness one obvious example of authorial intrusion. Lucy claims:

Oh it was a laugh for I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother, that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother - I was my mother. And I could see now why, to the feeble attempts I made to draw a line between us her reply always was “you can run away but you can not escape the fact that I am your mother, my blood runs through you. I carried you for nine months inside me.” (90)

But she has yet to accept that she is her mother. Her narrative continues for another seventy pages to detail her struggle to separate herself from her mother. The narrator stands separate from the writer. Kincaid recognizes the mother as an inescapable presence which she carries in the house of her mind and therefore distances itself from the protagonist’s resistance and blindness to the mother as a constant amidst her shifting locations.

At the end of the novel, the author’s separation from her protagonist is now complete. Lucy’s failed negotiations with power as manifested by her inability to permanently name herself is disconnected to Kincaid’s own activities to remove the mooring of her past. The mature Elaine Potter Richardson who has managed to gain a creative distance from her mother by changing her name to Jamaica Kincaid can read the activities of a younger self thus:

But the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on - these things had changed and I did not yet know them well. I understood I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than a scientist. I could not count on precision and calculation, I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exactly in mind but when the picture was complete, I would know. I did not have position, I did not have money at my disposal. I had anger. I had despair. (134)
Where Lucy is not able to fully convert despair and anger into a creative power, Jamaica Kincaid, the other emerging artist can, simply because she does not weaken herself with battles she cannot win. While Lucy torments herself with plans of escaping her mother’s influence, Jamaica Kincaid accepts her mother’s constant voice as a given and uses it to propel herself into further artistic consciousness. Further, as Kincaid reassembles her metaphorlic house in a new landscape, she prudently extracts selective memories of home in Antigua from her ubiquitous bundle so as to construct a substitute community which in turn provides her with a sense of being anchored somewhere. Kincaid has also taken into exile the knowledge that she is part of the cultural matrix informed by her mother and grandmother and that these maternal ancestors have helped in her identity formation. Even as she is unwilling to allow these women a final say on what shape her individuality or artistic consciousness will ultimately assume, Kincaid nonetheless, is aware that she can now write because her maternal community has been having its say.

Like Lamming’s Pa, the castle of Michelle Cliff’s skin and Jamaica Kincaid’s bundle reveal the richness of their minds and the wisdom they have accumulated from their many migrations and locations. Cliff, having less sustaining baggage seeks discursive and hybrid communities with other diasporic exiles as a way of collecting connections, and creating new genealogies. However, for Kincaid the “board by single board” which can be pieced together to make a new house offers a more secure shelter because its composition is more durable. Forged within the smithy of female
community, the partitions of this house remind of her mother and grandmother, their generosity with their language and their artistry. Yet Kincaid is not safe from the marginality which Cliff’s personal history creates. Like Pa’s easily dismantled chattel house, Kincaid’s metaphoric house proclaims her precariousness and the reality that she is not settled in space or time. Nonetheless, the house troping as the province of the imagination affords Kincaid a private space which she can choose to consider part of the public domain of community. It is in its location within a viable community that the house becomes home—makeshift yet durable. Should these associations prove to be restrictive, each writer has the freedom to relocate to new sites, new communities, new homeplaces.

Making Homes

Home is more than a house—physical structure. Home is more than a bundle or the castle of one’s skin. It is instead an idea, one laden with associations of belonging, of connectedness, of psychic wholeness and spiritual growth. Home is community. Jamaica Kincaid herself attempts to articulate the conceptual differences between house and home. In “Homemaking” she writes about her residence in Vermont and her sense of having come home to this house: “A house has a physical definition, a home has a spiritual one. My house I can easily describe . . . my home cannot be described so easily. Many things make up my home” (54). Together, house and home amount to a
resolution of the anxieties about home and location and become what Kincaid calls
"external metaphors" of an "internal restfulness."

Cliff's liminality, reconceived as a strategic dislocation, allows her to transform
the castle of her skin into a restful location, a place wherein she is at home with her
ideologies, her belief systems, her political and sexual choices. Kincaid's metaphoric
house participates only provisionally in this ideology of restful locations for even while
it offers partial comfort, the house remains inadequate to the fullest representation of
home which is as yet undefined. In *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Lucy*, Cliff and
Kincaid offer various manifestations of what constitutes home in the repeated emphasis
on the materiality of the physical spaces their protagonists occupy. Tiny rooms,
basements, apartments, plantation houses, all remind of their negotiations with
dispossession and their rescue mission from the trauma of deterritorialization.

Victor Turner, a widely acclaimed anthropologist known for his contribution to
transition theory, establishes the nature of social relationships existing among liminal
subjects as pivotal in creating contexts wherein the exile survives the experience of
dislocation. In *Drama, Fields and Metaphor* Turner suggests "communitas" as part of
the rites of passage or initiatory rituals which the transitional subject undertakes.
Turner defines "communitas" as a type of bonding based on shared experience, and
which does not like other modes of human relationships, depend on class, economic
standing, race or sexuality. Instead "communitas" is comradeship engendered by
liminality and has as its defining characteristics, equality, spontaneity and
heterogeneity.
In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff's manipulations of liminality reminds of Turner's "communitas." In her reconceptualization of dislocation, Cliff shows how Clare attempts at "communitas" are frustrated in some cases, or only partially successful in others. In joining the rebel group, Clare reads their liminality, one created by race and class-based circumstances, to be similar to the outsiderness she endures because of her pale skin and her association with white privilege. Yet, her social past and her self-conscious alignment with ancestral guilt does not facilitate a spontaneous or egalitarian association. In joining the group, Clare sees herself embarking on a pilgrimage which she hopes will cleanse her of the foulness of history which she carries so that she will be transformed into a new person, part of the undifferentiated group of resistors. Yet, no matter how silently Clare manipulates the advantages of her birth to assist in the struggle, she remains a white-looking woman huddled by herself in the corner of the back of a truck, the object of curiosity and speculation rather than a fellow-sufferer:

The longing for tribe surfaces--unmistakable. To create if not to find, She cannot shake it off. She remembers the jungle. The contours of wilderness. The skills are deep within her. Buried so long. She fears they may have atrophied. Distant treks with her dark-pelted mother. With a solid urgency they may emerge but she must also give herself to the struggle. She belongs to these hills. (91)

Interestingly, it is not the pelt of her dark mother which permits Clare to participate in the struggle but rather her association with the hermaphrodite, Harry/Harriet.

Ironically, it is Harry/Harriet, the ultimate liminal subject neither black nor white, neither man nor woman, who achieves the desired "communitas," extending the
comradeship which the rebels feel for him/her to include Clare. But their differing histories cannot be elided in such an inclusion. In making an early choice to identify himself/herself as the child of a black maid rather than offspring of a white master, Harry/Harriet circumvents biological determinism and creates a self-identity which allows him/her to participate in the political and sexual alliances he/she believes in. Harry/Harriet becomes “Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity” (171) apart from racial and sexual hierarchies, free of fixed representations yet at the same time committed to a poetics of resistance, detached from classification yet connected to community.

Whereas Clare participates in “communitas” via Harry/Harriet, Cliff achieves communitas by using a Harry/Harriet identity to perform her theoretical and ideological alignments. Like Harry/Harriet, Cliff divests herself of the pain of psycho-social hyphenation and re-writes this condition as inevitable and enabling. Reading her dislocation as what Benita Parry calls a “postcolonial cosmopolitanism,” Cliff situates the castle of her skin at “the borders and boundaries of knowable communities, intellectual systems and critical practices” (19), thus achieving the anti-essentialist stance similar to that which Harry/Harriet so dramatically arrives at in No Telephone to Heaven, in his/her reconciliation of his/her initial exilic condition. As inevitable exile, Cliff deploys a vocabulary of possibilities which remind of Said’s earlier celebratory articulations and which confirms Bhabha’ formulations in Location and Culture that “it is being on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race
and gender, that we are in a position to translate differences... into a kind of solidarity” (170).

Similarly, Abdul JanMohamed, in “Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of The Specular Border Intellectual” explores the ways in which the migrant differs from the exile. Fundamental to his analysis is their differing responses to the host culture. For Jan Mohammed, the exile maintains a negative attitude born out of a sense of a forced rupture with homeland, while:

[T]he migrant is often eager to discard with deliberate speed the formative influences of his or her own culture and to take on the values of the new culture; indeed, his or her success as an immigrant depends on what Said calls ‘uncritical gregariousness’, that is, on an ability to identify rapidly and to merge with the structure of the new culture’s collective subjectivity. (101)

Cliff’s and Kincaid’s response to their exile make it difficult to locate them within the categories outlined by JanMohamed. This is particularly applicable to a classification of Jamaica Kincaid. She appears to be the prototypical migrant who through a change of name and clothing transforms herself, all in the American spirit of individualism. Indeed, much of her reaction to New York lacks the “structural nostalgia” which JanMohammed earlier establishes as the mark of the exile and she seems closer aligned to JanMohammed’s immigrant. But the slipperiness of Kincaid, her resistance to classification does not encourage such a reading. For while she shares the immigrant’s purposive selection of the host culture as her new home, there remains always the proviso which affords an interrogation of this new home. For if as the mother in Lucy intimates, home is always with the mother, then no matter what physical space the
writer occupies, it is shared by the mother who in turn brings to that space her own cultural baggage--the very things Kincaid speaks and writes at length about escaping. It is this paradox which lies at the center of Elaine Potter Richardson's identity developments, and though her change of name establishes a partial rupture with the mother and her originating community, she remains, at the same time, bound to a rhetorical delineation of the ways in which the mother remains an occupant of her metaphoric house in as much the same way that Lucy continues to react against maternal tenantry.

The windows of Kincaid's house remain strategically closed to the racial community within which it is located. Although she arrives in the United States during a period of great agitation for civil rights, her writings never assume a political character, in spite of her insistence that she is interested in the relations of power between the mighty and the powerless. Race is an issue Kincaid chooses to ignore. The color of her skin is of no importance to her so comfortable is she in this castle of her skin, a comfort provided albeit by a loving mother who for a long time had made the child believe herself to be the center of the universe. Blackness for Kincaid is not a badge of difference, even though she is sufficiently politicized to recognize it as an alignment with the powerless. Operating throughout her works however is the assurance that she can rewrite both her personal story and the larger social history of domination within an alternative triumphant discourse. Moreover, the battle for hegemony which Kincaid chooses to fight is a domestic one. Yet the peace arrangements which she makes have larger societal implication given that in many
instances in her writing, the mother/daughter conflict represents the battle between colonizer and colonized.²⁹

Where much of West Indian literature of exile speaks at length to the new sense of community which West Indian migrants develop as a means of securing themselves against the hostility of their new world, Kincaid never acknowledges this community. Where writers like Ruby Guy and Paule Marshall have written at length on the West Indian in New York, in *Lucy* we get the sense that she is the only West Indian abroad—with the exception of her cousin Maude, that is. In her eagerness to learn all about the host culture, *Lucy* emphasizes the newness of North America and how different it is from the place she is from. Yet Kincaid never allows her to go into specifics of Caribbean culture. It is never Kincaid’s intention to explain her Antigua to her reader, nor does she do the guided tour description. There are no long descriptive passages about Antigua, and it is as if Kincaid is unwilling to open it up to the readers’ touristic gaze less after reading *Lucy*, one can say “I know Antigua.” Nonetheless, Kincaid’s artistic rendering of home leaves the reader with a keen sense of the type of place she is from, and the rhythm of life there. Kincaid’s Antigua is more than a place where tourists with nondescript names like Jones and Brown can dismiss in the phrase “Oh I had fun there.” Finally, where Lucy remains caught in the ambivalence of longing for the place left and joy at finally having escaped to freedom, Kincaid, as her interviews detail, has moved beyond nostalgia and anguish to a pragmatic acceptance that her artistic self can best be fashioned away from Antigua—a small place where her dreams to become a writer would have been laughed at and dismissed as pretentious. She
chooses to make a home in Vermont, a new, small place where nobody knows her name.

Ultimately, both Cliff and Kincaid create main characters who fail at exile. Neither Clare nor Lucy presents successful performances of migration. Where exile has brought Cliff and Kincaid home to multiple discursive communities, it has brought their protagonists to death or destabilizing despair. Yet Cliff and Kincaid can represent the failure of these protagonists because these are not the realities which the writers themselves face. Simply put, Cliff and Kincaid can only represent failure from the safety of their success. Both writers remain connected to a West Indian community, however tenuous these links may seem. Cliff has the castle of her skin which, while it has access to privilege is also supported by strong maternal antecedents. Kincaid has her bundle of memories, tied by the powerful cords of her mother’s devotion.

Kincaid’s upbringing allows her to envisage a house as a space within which to demonstrate female power. The house is the consistent setting for the mother, the domain from which she can administer power. It is inevitable that the reassembled contents of Kincaid’s bundle take the form of a house in Vermont where she can wield her authority, one with a garden which she can shape in her own distinctive style. Now she become the woman of the house. Cliff, on the other hand, is suspicious of houses. Her connection with the slave master affords the association of houses with exploitation and privilege. Once tenant of the great house, Cliff’s exile is an abandonment of that unwieldy history. She chooses instead to share the chattel of the slave and has learnt the benefits of traveling light from Nanny the historical Jamaican
heroine with whom she has claimed kin. Further, Cliff has learnt from her maternal grandmother that man-made structures no matter how securely reinforced by community, give way to ruin.

Instead, Cliff chooses to travel with a polemic pen. In so doing she is related to the community of West Indian male writers who had traveled similarly to England. Furthermore, in her deliberate identification of herself a political writer, Cliff joins an international community of literary resistors. Yet these connections are necessarily loose ones. Her continuous exile reminds her of the privileges of strategic alliances and the opportunity to perform her various identities--to become a “border intellectual” whom as JanMohamed describes, participates in a variety of experiences by virtue of geographical and political location. Cliff’s border activities extend to necessary returns to Jamaica. These travels, while they may be conducted largely in memory, are necessary to the maintenance of the integrity of the castle of her skin. At the end of No Telephone to Heaven, Clare’s dying validation of Jamaica as connected to language “She remember Language. Then it was gone”(208) becomes symbolic of Cliff’s own return. Her exile becomes undone by her return to Jamaica, for in remembering language, the voices of her maternal past she is building a bundle which she can take with her in her future migrations. Contrastingly, Kincaid’s bundle remains sufficient to her survival. Continued access to it nourishes her creativity, so that like Cliff she can remember the language of her mother and make it her own.

The recurring quest motif in their writings in turn link Cliff and Kincaid to the wider body of West Indian literature. Of note however, is their particular
configuration of this motif. Where male writers had a generation before used quest as
a way of providing identity within a group so as to justify self as part of the whole,
with Cliff and Kincaid, quest has a decidedly individualistic cast. At the end of
“Dissemination,” Bhabha establishes London as “the city that the migrants, the
minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation” (169-70). While
this commentary may well be applicable to the generation of West Indian writers
who had migrated to England in the 1950’s and who had constructed their quest for a
new narrative of the nation as a means of gaining identity as part of a whole; New
York never generates the same impulse in Cliff and Kincaid. The history of the West
Indies as nation has already been written and re-written in ways which have not been
faithful to the hybridity of intervening personal histories, or to the ambivalences of an
informing folk culture. Cliff and Kincaid are as yet uninterested in transforming those
narratives of nation. Their quests have a decidedly individualistic cast and are instead
preoccupied with creating spaces in the geographies of this metropolitan spaces which
can sustain personal iterations rather than national testimonies. Similarly where houses
had meant fixed loci of self-identification, the delicate evolution of personhood in
which Cliff and Kincaid are each involved does not allow for these singular
representations.

Ultimately, Cliff and Kincaid share a vision which, as Caren Kaplan explains
in “Deteriorializations. . .” “points towards a rewriting of the connections between
different parts of the self in order to make a world of possibilities out of the experience
of displacement” (368). Language, defined as a maternal legacy, enables this rewriting
as Cliff and Kincaid continue to cross the borders between home and elsewhere so as to ensure the safe passage of their past into their future. In so doing, both writers become “long-memoried women” who can claim, like Grace Nicols, another West Indian woman in exile: “I have crossed an ocean / I have lost my tongue / From the root of the old / one / A new one has sprung” (87). These new tongues need nonetheless to return to the source of memory--the West Indies in order to sustain their creativity.
1 The Mighty Sparrow is a Trinidadian calypsonian. Coincidentally, he is a Grenadian living in Trinidad. Sparrow’s contribution to calypso has earned him an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies.

2 Given that exile is a global phenomenon, there are many other conceptual frameworks which offer a definitional distinctiveness between exile and migration. Mary McCarthy in “A Guide to Exiles, Expatriates, and Inner Émigrés” labels the exile as one who yearns to return home but cannot and the expatriate as the migrant who having made elsewhere home has no desire to return to the place left. In “Worldliness without World . . .” Abdul JanMohammed troubles such a neat categorization in his analysis of what constitutes the exiled diasporic subject. In this chapter I am attempting a further interrogation of the notion of exile by focusing on collapsing what is I believe to be an artificial difference between the two concepts.

3 I am using the word homeplace here rather than homeland because I want to avoid the fixity of geographical concreteness embedded in the word homeland, even while I am evoking the sense of security and belonging which homeland suggests. bell hooks has also given currency to the term homeplace. In her essay “Homeplace: Site of Resistance” she describes homeplace as a safe, liberatory space - a woman space “where all that truly mattered in life took place. The warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our minds” (41). Ultimately, hooks’ homeplace is the site wherein one develops habits of resistance and enthusiasm for liberation struggles. I am not however suggesting homeplace as solely a gendered or political space, but also as a representation of diasporic yearning. My definition partakes liberally of Valerie Lee’s conceptualization of homeplace as both a cultural and theoretical community.

4 In Treasures of Barbados, Fraser explains chattel houses thus:
The term chattel house is an archaic or old-fashioned term. By definition a chattel is movable like the rest of a man’s goods and chattel is a common phrase in the King James version of the Bible. Changing your job meant moving your house, on a mule cart in the old days, on a truck today; and every house can be stacked up section by section and moved in a few hours usually on Sundays.(9)

5 In “Strangers to Ourselves,” Julia Kristeva explores the concept of who constitutes the foreigner. She discusses a person’s sense of being different both in external appearance and in terms of perception of self, and the ways in which the foreigner, the visible other, the unbelonging, reminds one of the boundaries of community, the group from which he remains barred. While I am indebted to her analysis, I am using foreignness to discuss how Kincaid and Cliff as artists in a small society experience this condition not only outside but also within their communities.
See for example Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* where the house reflects the attitude of her characters to social acquisitions, E. M. Forster’s *Howard’s End* where the house is gendered as a spiritual home which can best maintained by a female heir and thus transgresses masculinist property laws and entitlement. Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* where independence is envisaged in isolated spaces where the artistic spirit is uninterrupted.

It is useful to note that traditional Hindu customs require that the bride goes to her husband’s household where she submits to the authority of her mother-in-law. Naipaul inverts this custom so as to mark the nature of Biswas’ humiliation and his subsequent search for personal dignity.

Travel and Travail both derive from the Latin word *trepalium* - a three pronged instrument of torture. Given the difficulties attendant to Biswas’s travels, I am evoking both senses of the word here.

T.S. Eliot also had a significant influence on Caribbean literary theory. Much of the region’s early negotiations of an Aesthetics is a revision and reconfiguration of Arnold’s and Eliot’s perception on culture and tradition. See for example Wilson Harris’ “Art and Criticism” (1951), Edward Braithwaite’s “Sir Galahad and the Islands” (1957/1963), Edward Baugh’s “Towards a West Indian Criticism” (1968), Gordon Rohlehr’s “Literature and the Folk” (1971) and Walcott’s “Culture or Mimicry” (1971). Their revisionist project seems to bear out Said’s claim in “Traveling Theories” that in the migration of ideas to new locations is an ensuing “processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin” (226).

It is also interesting to note the ways in which the luggage men travel with always differ from that of women. In the Caribbean, women seem to take all but the kitchen sink with them. Inevitably, food forms a large part of their bundle and many stories detail the humorous consequences of explaining to Foreign customs officials the necessity of fried fish, roasted breadfruit etc. Louise Bennett’s poetry has focused on the colonization of the British palate to Caribbean cuisine.

Samuel Selvon *The Lonely Londoners* confirms this portrayal of female migration. So too does Louise Bennett’s “Colonization in reverse”.

While I am reluctant to use biographical speculation as substantiating evidence, I am however contending that Cliff’s involvement with Adrienne Rich, to whom *No Telephone to Heaven* is dedicated, and her deep admiration for Audre Lorde places her within an ideological landscape which supports this notion of her as a literary activist. And while Cliff herself has not written directly to this issue, *Claiming an Identity* is in many ways a political manifesto on the coming to voice.
Rosello discussing identity formation in the works of Maryse Conde advocates the insularization of identity as a positive alternative to insularity. Her argument proceeds as follows: “Insularity (the negative side of insularization) is . . . seen as continually conservative because it sees itself as equivalent to identity with an island. Insularization on the other hand, means inventing islands and identification; it remains an unfinished and open-ended process. It could not be equated with the successful quest for identity . . . The process of re-imaging the relationship between identity and land must perhaps be more ironic, tentative, as it is dissolution rather than solution” (576).

A “jamette” in Caribbean parlance is a sexually promiscuous woman. She obeys no rules, respects no boundaries and subscribes to an ethos of abandon. While the word “slut” approaches the concept of “jamette” it is not sufficiently nuanced. Slut conveys a negativity which “jamette” does not have. For a slut breaks the rules - be it of morality or personal cleanliness while a jamette operates outside of the rules. It is this sense of total and unselfconscious transgression which Lucy hopes to achieve. I believes she fails and is so doomed because of the self-consciousness, manifested as defiance, which mark her efforts. Kincaid on the other hand succeeds. Her article “Putting Myself Together” is proof for this claim and her accounts of these adventures confirm the spirit of unself-conscious transgression.

Ordinarily in Caribbean society, there is a physical gesture which marks rude or defiant behavior. This physical gesture, the sucking of the teeth is popularly called “Cheupps” is a fillip of defiance for which children are usually punished. Out of her mother’s reach and therefore out of the range of her punishment, Lucy’s behavior in New York become a long, loud “cheupps.” She no longer enjoys Peggy’s friendship but agrees to share a house with her primarily because living with Peggy will put her further away from her mother’s reach and stop the flow of her letters. Further, Peggy’s lifestyle runs counter to her mother’s system of beliefs and thus provides the ultimate fillip of defiance. So too does letting Paul spend the night in her bed, although this event does not occasion the hoped for satisfaction and is merely something to be made note of as a sign of how far removed she now from the girl she once was.

Her many interviews cite her mother as the source of the stories Kincaid tells and establishes a connection between the mother’s tradition of story-telling and how it informs Kincaid’s exile, for as she admits in her interview with Kennedy: “Everyone is a great artist. They spin these tales they make the terrible things that happen into an act of fiction. To be writers they have to leave. They would have to make an object of it, and they are opposed to that.” [emphasis added] (89)

See Laura Niesen de Abruna’s essay entitled “Family Connections : Mother and Mother Country in the Fiction of Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid” in Motherlands, for a discussion of the ways in which motherhood in Caribbean Literature has come to symbolize the colonized child’s relationship with England -- the colonial mother. Further
Lucy’s angry response to the daffodils recitation and her awareness that this episode marks the beginning of her two-facedness merge easily into an analysis of her two-faced response to her mother’s affection. To my mind, the two episodes read as an extension of the other constitute a critique of colonial interpellation.
CHAPTER 3

Slippery Tongues\textsuperscript{1}: Re/claiming Orality as a Tactic of Intervention

Tongue mother
Tongue me
Mothertongue me
Mother me
Touch me

Marlene Nourbese Philip, “Discourse on the Logic of Language” (3).

The epigraph which frames this chapter evokes the desiring cry of the migrant who returns to the mother, to the comfort of her tongue, to her voice, to the magic of her words, to her love, home. The Land of Look Behind and At The Bottom of The River both return to the maternal home and to an appreciation of this site as the source of a literary voice. The Land of Look Behind returns to Cliff’s first published piece, Claiming an Identity They Taught me to Despise and substitutes its controlled, structured language with the vigor of native language, the power of the tongue. At The Bottom of The River is, however, a metaphoric return to Antigua. This collection of short stories written in Kincaid’s early years in the United States, is her imaginative reconnection with the island community she has left. In both cases, the engagement now being sought with the maternal tongue is a new one. Formerly, it was rebellion against this mothertongue which had generated backchat. Once the mother had been
read as engendering silence, now with return, she is re-read as necessary to the journey towards full self-recovery.

Talking back replaces back talking as a means of coming to truly liberatory speech. Furthermore, the defiance which had been intrinsic to back talking, as defined in an earlier chapter, is not characteristic of talking back. Talking back is not antagonistic. This formulation differs somewhat from bell hooks’ use of the phrase. In her essay by the same name, hooks defines talking back as “the gesture of defiance which heals and makes new life and growth possible” (9). hooks cites the personal recovery of her tongue as born out of her choice of intellectual ancestor--her great-grandmother, a woman who was never afraid to say what was on her mind. This reclamation provides an energy charge which propels hooks into talking back, loudly, insistently and incessantly. Investing this act of talking back with the power to move one from the invisibility of silence into speech, hooks goes on to claim that to move into speech is to move from object to subject, from fear to courage, from dehumanization and despair to strength and power.

In this chapter, my use of the concept of talking back pushes hooks’ definition outward to accommodate the notion of dialogue and interaction. Coming to voice (what hooks calls “talking back” and what I prefer to call “back talking”) has in the writings of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid, been often represented by stymied communication, unopened letters, defensive silences and stillborn conversations. On the other hand, talking back is the embrace of the “mothertongue” and “me,” “mother” and “me,” “tongue” and “mother.” Once womantalk was dismissed as
background, inconsequential noise and the messages it carried ignored. Talking back reclaims womantalk. Once the maternal tongue was seen as twisted into habits of colonial complicity. Talking back invests the maternal tongue with a new, compelling authority. With talking back comes the confidence of entitlement that moves one to righteous speech within community, in order that as hooks testifies in *Breaking Bread*, one can perceive oneself as:

[L]iving examples of the will on the part of both black men and women to talk to one another, to process, and engage in rigorous intellectual and political dialogue . . . with one another, to participate more fully in a world community . . . to give one another that subject-to-subject recognition that is an act of resistance that is part of a de-colonizing, anti-racist process. (5)

The community engaged in dialogue is specifically a woman based one -- one embedded in the oral traditions which contour Cliff’s and Kincaid’s life. Each writer returns to the memories of her mother’s voice and uses her mother tongue, that is the language she learns from her maternal ancestors, to build a bridge to a formerly eschewed community. Cliff and Kincaid now link self-recovery to the “ancient properties” of Caribbean culture, and to a recurring maternal voice which validates the oral tradition. Self-location in Afro-Caribbean folk communities is related to a process of self-identification with aspects of the oral traditions such as the story-telling traditions, folk customs and language and these in turn inform the techniques of narration employed in *At The Bottom of the River* and *The Land Of Look Beyond*. Kincaid and Cliff create through narrative an alternative site for transmitting and
preserving Afro-Caribbean spiritual wisdom even as they affirm the mother’s oral wisdom.

In the crossing of generic and teleological boundaries and in the emphasis on participatory discourse, the writer needs to develop a critical voice. It is with the coming into critical voice that my discussion begins. Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff do so by creatively reclaiming what in the Caribbean vernacular is called “putting words in another’s mouth.” This idiomatic expression is usually framed in terms of a denial and a rejection of imposed explanations. Commonly it is expressed as “Don’t put words in my mouth” meaning “Do not explain my speech or attach your own meaning to it.” This notion of appropriable speech and the need for defensive safeguards informs the initial self-recovery process which Kincaid and Cliff each embark on. Equally important are the ways in which they each transform that concept so that it gains utility as a tactic of intervention.

Cliff and Kincaid, both descendants of Caliban, have fretted against words being put in their mouths, foreign words, indoctrinating words, indecipherable words, self-demeaning words, angry words, colonizing words, written words. They have worried over control and ownership of taught words, when as Marlene Nourbese Philip, another Caribbean woman in exile, laments in ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’ “English is / my father’s tongue. A father’s tongue is /a foreign language/ therefore English is / a foreign language/ not a mother tongue”(58). In the absence of a mother tongue, there were no words to express their creativity, for the words they had were catechized English words, borrowed words which devalued native ones,
which eschewed dialect as vulgar noise. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid registers her resentment in the following way:

But what I see is millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherlands, no fatherlands, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, . . . no tongue. For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? (31)

Similarly, in the preface to *The Land Of Look Behind*, Cliff confesses to being educated into an imprisoning, eloquent, linear prose where she could “speak fluently but not reveal,” where her wildness was tamed out of her so that she became civilized but never came to speech. Controlled, tongues held silent, rendered linguistically subservient, the muted subject now focuses on ways in which she can escape these restraints, and on the reacquisition of the mother tongue.

Earlier anxieties about words being put in their mouths give way to a validation of certain powerful, linguistic intrusions. In ‘Testimony stoops to Mother tongue’ Philip registers her anxiety about language in the following query: “In my mother mouth/shall I /use/the father’s tongue”(82)? Kincaid and Cliff seem to reverse this in their ideo-linguistic rewrite. In their own mouths, they who have used the father tongue, now choose to use the mother’s tongue. They each seize entitlement in a return to a maternal and oral tradition and in so doing allow for the willful insertion of their mothers’ tongues into their own mouths so that in agreement with Philip, each can:

```
Touch tongue to tongue       release
the strange sandwiched between
```
tongue and cheek and lip

III
the somewhere of another mother’s tongue
    tongues
    licks

into nothing
the prison of these walled tongues
- speaks. (79)

Slippery Tongues

The link between the insertion of tongues as a way of bringing one to voice and the story-telling process is not a new one. In *Conjuring*, Majorie Pryse describes the ways in which Hurston uses the “kissin’ friendship” between Janie and Pheoby, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as that which provides a receptive audience and rhetorical occasion for Janie’s narrating of her past. It is Pheoby’s unconditional, non-judgmental love which frees Janie’s tongue and initiates her into self-revelation.³

Similarly Pryse explores the relationship between Shug and Celie in the *Color Purple* where the literally “kissin’ relationship” between the two women acts as the liberatory free-tonguing. This gives Celie the authority to re-define herself in relation to what was formerly an abusive experience and to reclaim a selfhood which has as its core self-consciousness and connectedness to the innate spirituality of her world. Pryse’s linkage of this “kissin’ relationship” to a conjuring process which allows women to break free from silencing patriarchy and to release the ancient power of their tongues is of particular relevance here. Shug and Pheoby provide the tongue which brings Janie and Celie alive to a womanist understanding of self which, as Walker defines it in *In
Search Of our Mothers’ Gardens, allows one to be responsible, in charge, serious, appreciate and preferring women’s culture and “ultimately committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”(xi).

Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff create a similar “kissin’ relationship” with their mothers in order to come to voice. They connect the erotics of language in a primarily oral culture to a personal emancipatory poetics. Specifically, each writer seeks the inserted tongue as a way to bring the maternal past alive into the present. This choice allows each to speak in tongues which are inflected by and which echo the mothers’ own experiences, so that at the end of their autobiographies, we are left with the sense of the mother as proactive even as her voice remains mediated, accessible only in the daughter’s speech. The autobiography tells both the story of the mother and the daughter. When the mother’s tongue is allowed to reside in the daughter’s mouth, she too comes to voice. In the instance of Cliff what results is a mutual empowering. In Kincaid’s case however, the mother has always had a voice. Now this voice is re-configured and Kincaid moves closer to accepting the ambivalence embedded in the maternal voice.

Identity differences between mother and daughter become suddenly collapsible. In bringing the mother to speech each writer becomes more like her mother. Cliff confesses to being repeatedly mistaken for her mother while Kincaid in At The Bottom of the River describes her identity as one which separates only to merge with the mother’s:

I fit perfectly in the crook of my mother’s arm, on the curve of her back, in the hollow of her stomach. We eat from the same bowl, drink
from the same cup; when we sleep our heads rest on the same pillow. As we walk through the rooms, we merge and separate, merge and separate; soon we shall enter the final stage of our condition. (62)

Correspondingly, the maternal tongue which each writer inserts into her mouth, and the words which each allows to be placed in her mouth differ both in texture and in sound. However, what remains constant in both texts is the ways in which the ambiguity of the maternal voice is threaded as a recurring, unresolved anxiety in the autobiographies of Cliff and Kincaid. In the instance of Michelle Cliff, the mother is at once the site of submerged culture as she is the “phallic mother” who in her insistence that the daughter maintains patriarchal law and order teaches her to wield deception as a strategy for survival. The daughter is taught that she, much like a chameleon, must blend in, that she must be silent about her racial origin, that she must privilege her father’s white skin and its antecedent history over her mother’s brown one; that she becomes “a life lived within herself—a life cut off; that she hide from her real sources even as her real sources are hidden from her” (8).

Urged to forget her past, to render it an obsolete geography, Cliff instead mounts a reconnaissance of the child the mother once was, looking beyond the mother’s trained deception, going beyond the silence which currently exists between them and finding instead a common ground on which they can meet: “The island where we were born - we speak in the language spoken there” (36). As yet while they may not see eye to eye, there is an indelible similarity between mother and daughter: “And we bear a close resemblance except for eye color” (36).
Initially, the maternal tongue seems only to further silence Cliff, to wall her speech behind bourgeois hypocrisy and shallow social posturing, but the shared language of the Jamaican patois provides the as yet frail connection to community and specifically to the grandmother. The joint negotiation of orality comes in Cliff’s recall, with her unnamed mother, of the harmony of the grandmother’s rural, grounded space, of a connection with a community of village women, water-carrying women, laundry women, working women. The evocation of “women of our common ground” via a common spoken language allows mother and daughter to meet in memory and helps the daughter to conjure up of other sites of female communion:4

I imagine women dressing and undressing - together in their white eyelet cotton camisoles, helping each other undo the ribbons . . . lying side by side on large pillows, briefly released Perhaps touching; stroking the ribcage bruised by stays, applying a hanky dipped in bay rum to the temples of another. Perhaps kissing her forehead after the application is done, perhaps taking her hand. Head on another’s shoulders drifting . . . .I like to think of women making soft underclothes for their comfort -- as they comfort each other. (39)

This sensuous, romantic envisioning of female community is echoed in the practical womanist world of the grandmother. She too is surrounded by women, women working in the kitchen or the garden, women enlisting her support for children fathered by her husband, women praying in the parlor, all a help and comfort to each other.

The shifting landscapes within which the mother is located are complicated by class and color issues and her voice resonates differently depending on the acoustics of these various contexts. The sly tongue which instructs on the economic pragmatism of being able to pass for white in the United States, of the immigrant’s need for self
effacement on foreign soil, shifts and gains confidence as it recalls family history, long-time stories, and village gossip. In what seems to be a hypocritical bilingualism, the mother negotiates her disempowerment as a colored woman in racist America, and her place of pride as the daughter of a landed farmer in rural Jamaica. While Cliff herself has access to the privileges of both locations, her own life choices, both sexual and political, permit her to reject the philosophy undergirding her mother’s bilingualism.

Bypassing what seems to be a language of complicity and camouflage, Cliff chooses instead to celebrate traditional stories, proverbs and the accumulated wisdom of her grandmother’s rural community. This recuperation of the Afro-Jamaican folk ethos allows a once Eurocentric Cliff, trained in habits of colonial allegiance, to look more closely at what Sylvia Wynter, elsewhere called “the silenced ground”--the place where her mother’s native speech and experiences have been stifled.5 Cliff is therefore able to decode the system of meaning of another submerged yet resisting discourse, one which allies her mother and herself to a much beleaguered but still surviving folk culture, and facilitates a reacquisition of their shared history and their words.

In Cliff’s spiritual closeness to her mother comes the empowerment which Hurston cites as a kissin’ friendship. Cliff’s kissing relationship with her mother allows her to reclaim the positive nurturing images behind the mother’s patriarchal discourse, to become aware that her mother too is a victim of what Nourbese Philip has referred to as ‘socio-linguistic rape,’ where her forced obeisance to learned English forces her into submission to the phallic power of Eurocentric discourse. This new sympathy brings Cliff to a consciousness which engenders what Philip goes on to
describe in “The Absence of Writing” as “an alchemical process (alchemy from al-kimiyā, the art of the black and Egypt) a metamorphosis within the language from father tongue to mother tongue” (279). The presence of the father’s tongue—its influence, authority and biases—remains a corrupting reality but the alchemical shift in emphasis allows the father’s tongue to be overlaid by the mother’s and makes for Cliff’s articulation of personhood.

Where Cliff has difficulty with the absence of an identifiable or locatable maternal voice, Kincaid’s anxieties lie in the pervasive presence of her mother’s voice and its silencing authority. At the Bottom of the River focuses on the noisy insistence of the mother’s speech, its fidelity to cultural practices which reinforce patriarchy, and its ambivalent vernacular locations. The resultant thickness of the mother’s tongue shuts out the uninitiated reader/listener and it is in the creation of a “kissin’ relationship” between mother and daughter that a clearing space is provided for an unobstructed reception of her discourse.

Kincaid’s story “Girl,” the first in the collection At the Bottom of the River, tells of the mother who also seems to be a victim of corrupted speech. “Girl” evokes the talk of a mother throwing sharp words of counsel at her daughter:

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the colored clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don’t walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters, in very hot sweet oil; soak your little clothes right after you take them off; . . . on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are bent on becoming; don’t sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn’t speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give direction; don’t eat fruit on the street - flies will follow you. (3-4)
Situated in the mother’s speech are the rhythms of a domestic life which remain connected to folk ways of being and which simultaneously suggest a social world of duty and decorum to which the girl must ultimately submit. The mother’s relentless volley of instructions and admonitions leaves no space for the daughter’s responses or desire, for it assumes that the girl’s destiny, like hers, is to become part of the discourse of provisional domestic independence within patriarchal domination.

On the surface, the mother’s speech seems to be a non-productive monologue where feedback between sender and receiver is constantly frustrated by inadequately configured channels. The girl needs to grow into a fuller understanding of the mother’s speech for now she can access the words but not the message. The mother’s speech, in the interim seems impenetrable. The daughter receives it as interference and interprets it as tiresome noise to which there is no productive response. But the silence of the daughter speaks to a temporary voicelessness. The other stories in the collection detail the mother’s world and provide a clearer context for her speech. Faced with the mystery and magic of that world, the daughter/child’s mouth opens in wonder and appreciation. In the resultant insertion of the mother’s tongue, the distance between sender and receiver is shortened, thus lessening the chance of interference and distortion. In this newly created context for two way transmission, the important messages embedded in the mother’s tongue can now be recovered. The daughter’s new multilingualism allows her to read meaning in what were previously untranslatable words and the other stories in the collection plot the daughter’s proficiency in her meaning making enterprise.
The woman the mother admonishes the girl into becoming is as much the socially-constructed good woman who knows how to cook, clean and keep a man, as it is the successful rebel who can quietly and undetected, circumvent social mores, who can “spit up in the air when [she] feels like it” but who can “move quickly so that it doesn’t fall on [her]” (5). Ultimately the advice proffered is geared towards creating what the mother defines as a powerful woman--one who is in control of all spheres, the domestic one within which society has conscibed her, the sexual one where her power is felt but never analyzed and the social one within which she bounds herself. In contrast the slut the girl is admonished against becoming lacks control both over her funk and her material condition because as slut she is reduced to a woman outside of community, apart from systems of exchange, the kind of woman whose physical survival is imperiled, “the kind of woman whom the baker won’t let near the bread” (5).

Yet even while the mother advocates strength, she is training the child into habits of patriarchal compliance. She teaches the girl how to be a good daughter: “This is how to iron your father’s khaki shirt so that it does not have a crease. This is how you iron your father’s khaki pants so that they don’t have a crease” (4). She teaches her how to be a good wife: “This is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man and if this doesn’t work there are other ways” (5). Inserted in the text of the mother’s instructions are subtle lessons on how to empower one’s self within inevitable social strictures. Her instructions on marital control begins by giving the woman agency as prime actor and by casting the man as
reactive. The paradoxical alignment of patriarchal hegemony and female agency, where the woman is constructed as passive and submissive on one hand and controlling on the other, is at the heart of the mother’s discourse.

That same ambivalence inflects the maternal identity. The solidity of the mother’s presence, often configured as monstrous and threatening, is what the girl wants to both emulate and undermine. This paradoxical negotiation pervades Kincaid’s narrative enterprise and she has often admitted that her ambiguous relationship with her mother constitutes her inspirational springboard. In an interview with Kay Bonetti, Kincaid insists: “It was the thing I knew. Quite possibly if I had had another kind of life I would not have been moved to write. That was the immediate thing, the immediate oppression I knew. I wanted to free myself of that” (131-2). It is her mother for whom Kincaid writes, it is her mother’s voice which she attempts to capture in her prose and it is her mother from whom she needs to free herself. The short story, “My Mother,” captures the embedded contradictions in their relationship, in its vacillation between joy at belonging, and fear of separation, between desire for selfhood and the pain of remembered separation. The child’s love for her mother is constantly undermined by her desire to be freed of her “to grow my own bosoms, small mounds at first, leaving a soft place between them where if ever necessary I could rest my own head” (53).

For Kincaid, the metaphoric act of inserting her mother’s tongue into her own mouth functions both as a way of trammeling the power of the mother’s noise as it is a way of trying to understand it more fully. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde speaks
about the necessity of transforming silence into language and action, at the same time
warning that to do so, involves a process of self-revelation which is often fraught with
danger. Kincaid however makes self-revelation her agenda as she seeks self-definition
through entry into her mother’s language. From her mother, she learns how to knead
language into a shape that accommodates the folk world which her mother continues to
illuminate. From her mother she learns how to use poetry of the kitchen to give voice
to the most complex ideas. From her mother, she learns that language is the magic
which erases former silences and fills out old blanks with new ideas. Coming to
speech is coming to conjuring. However, both can be dangerous.

The powerful presence of obeah as a way of life is one such example of the
natural accessible magic which is part of the richness of the folk world that the
mother’s tongue allows Kincaid entry into. It is a mark of promise and of danger. The
constant presence of obeah as accessible folk magic is both a marker of promise and of
danger. For the unknowing, the uninitiated, and the fearful, obeah reduces the folk
world to an impenetrable blackness—a world where one is erased, annihilated, one’s
form made formless. The story “Blackness” captures the inconstancies of that world
and suggests a strategy for charting a geography of that seemingly immeasurable
world: surrender to its boundary-less silence. “Living in the silent voice, I am no
longer ‘I.’ Living in the silent voice, I am at last at peace. living in the silent voice, I
am at last erased”(52). But surrender to the boundaryless wonder is an option which
erases the agency that the mother in the story “Girl” was at pains to bestow on the
protagonist.

188
Learning how to make creative use of that power allows Kincaid to take her place alongside her mother and grandmother, women already armored by that magic. The story “Wingless” tells how to survive that world. Exploring the ways in which negotiation of that world depends on submitting to a larger maternal authority, it advocates an acceptance of paradox. “But how can my limbs that hate be the same limbs that love? How can the same limbs that make me blind make me see? I am defenseless and small” (22). In the safety of her mother’s presence, the protagonist can survive the co-existence of fearful and the mysterious. Now keeping a safe distance she can follow the woman she loves, can witness the encounter with the man who says forceful things to the woman, can watch the man blow himself up until he looks like a boil. The child is unafraid. She aligns herself to the woman who “instead of removing her cutlass from the folds of her big and beautiful skirt and cutting the man in two at the waist, . . . only smiled--a red, red smile [at the man] and like a fly he dropped dead” (25).

The daughters’ discovery of the facility of the mothers’ tongues allows them to go beyond the seemingly maternal alignment with the dominant hegemonic discourse to a realization that the oral traditions embedded in the tongue have a diversity which allows for the bringing together of both oral and written narratives, the stories of mothers and their daughters. This expansion of the creative terrain available to the writer makes for a partial reconfiguration of the term “oral tradition.” Emilio Jorge Rodriguez in “Oral Tradition and Recent Caribbean Poetry” provides an insightful
discussion on the Caribbean writer’s preoccupation with the dynamics of their culture and the linguistic and artistic possibilities it opens up. Rodrigez explains it thus:

The oral traditions of the Caribbean regions are thus not simply receptacles containing the material of culture in static, compilatory, preserved forms. They are, rather, streams meandering, or urging, across a landscape of history, merging with the diluting flow of other tributaries, and transforming into broader yet more discrete currents of cultural identity. Identity here is not a past to be invoked, nor an object to be contemplated in tranquillity, but a dynamic quest, as well as the sum of successive encounters and mixings across time. (1)

The following section anticipates the ways these encounter occur and the consequences of the writers’ involvement with the oral tradition.

**Negotiating Orality**

The mother’s tongue provide linguistic and artistic possibilities, but more particularly, it allows both Cliff and Kincaid to re-write their autobiographies in ways which confirm their connection to that oral community. It is useful to note however that not only does each writer engages in distinctive ways with this folk world but that their interaction is responsive to the dynamism of this community. In the Afterword of *Conjuring*, Spiller offers a useful theoretical position on the functions of tradition in the writing of black women:

“Tradition” as I would mean it, then, is an active verb, rather than a retired nominative, and we are now all its subjects and objects. Quite correctly, “tradition” under the head of a polyvalent grammar - the language of learning woven into the tongue of the mother - is the rare union of bliss towards which . . . experience has compelled us. (260)

*The Land Of Look Behind* makes creative use of these co-opted forms and moves freely between genres, weaving poetry and prose together in ways which imitate the
folk tradition of story-telling. Similarly, the negotiation of orality which Cliff and Kincaid undertake are complicated by the context of each writer’s positioning as subject and object of tradition.¹⁰

Michelle Cliff fuses the passive and active role implicit to this object/subject dichotomy. In The Land Of Look Behind, she explores the ways in which she has been unconsciously shaped by the oral traditions localized in her grandmother’s rural world, and relates its specific Afro-Caribbean rhythms to her own reclamatory activities. Village life, the mother lode of traditional culture which she was once educated into despising is now reclaimed as Cliff offers the following as an ‘opening’ statement:

To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands of us retracing the African part of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification. On a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the art form of these our ancestors and speaking in the patois forbidden us. It means realizing our knowledge will always be wanting. It means also, I think, mixing in the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language, and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose. (14)

Cliff’s validation of the necessary recuperation of that folk world is similar to that of another Jamaican writer, Olive Senior, and the world that Senior sees as her energizing springboard into creative voice is very much like the one outlined in Cliff’s autobiography. In a 1992 interview with Marlies Glaser, Senior explains the attempts in her writing to position herself relative to the oral and scribal traditions in the Caribbean and states her enterprise thus:
What I am trying to do in my work, is to fuse the oral and scribal traditions, because although I am obviously educated in a scribal tradition, I come out of an oral culture, in that I grew up in a small village in Jamaica. . . . We did not have access to media or entertainment so we had to entertain ourselves - story-telling for instance was very important. For every single night of our lives, we told stories, and orality pervaded the culture, because song is also important. . . . So I grew up appreciating speech as a very important medium of communication; and in my writing, what I am trying to do is write as if I am actually telling a story. (77).

For Cliff and Senior, trying to write as if telling a story allows for the successful bridging of the oral and the scribal and for the rendering of the self narrative as a folk performance.

But unlike Senior’s fiction, the story being told by Cliff is the “me” story, one that is mindful of the politics of Cliff’s mulatto location and her former infidelity to her African heritage. Significantly, in Cliff’s immersion into the folk world, facilitated largely by her maternal ancestors, negation is replaced by a celebration of the hybridity afforded by her racial and cultural legacies. The Land of Look Behind returns to Abeng, Cliff’s fictionalized autobiography written two years earlier and to Claiming an Identity They Taught me to Despise, a collection of poetry and prose written in 1980. The hybridity of a mixed racial ancestry and its attendant psychic anxieties is seasoned throughout these writing as a painful, discomforting constant which can only be adequately addressed through the healing power of words, words given to her by her mother’s community:

Such words conspire to make a past
Such words conjure a knowledge.
Such words make assimilation possible. They stay with you for years. They puzzle, but you sense a significance. I need
these words. (21)

Cliff’s project now becomes one of piecing together personal history—a story which is often repeated, sometimes inadequately articulated, often times lost in impotent anger at the circumstances which initially rendered her speechless.

As inaudible and once inarticulate griotte, Cliff’s new challenge is to tell compelling stories of herself, stories which by their very utterance confirm her connectedness to an Afro-Jamaican tradition. In “Of Mangoes and Maroons . . .”, Francoise Lionnet explores the anxieties which plague Cliff and links her angst to that of postcolonial writers who in the absence of recoverable history “have to invent mythologies of their own, stories and allegories of self’ and ‘other’ that can translate . . complex heritages and . . . make a difference in helping to transform the mentality of the oppressed as well as self-perception” (322). In her exploration of the complex cultural matrix which she is part of, Cliff speaks her story, adding it to a dynamic oral body and confirming herself as both an object and subject of that tradition.

However, the particular ways in which issues of gender identity, the politics of her homosexual location and her bi-racial heritage merge, become increasingly important in the engineering of Cliff’s subjectivity. The traces of fragmentation and hybridity which issue out of the multiplicity of her various locations and the reality of early exile to foreign lands affects Cliff’s relationship with a Jamaican oral tradition to which she wishes to claim a connection. While this is offered as part of an analysis of Abeng, what Lionnet has to say in “Of Mangos and Maroons” has applicability here:
For a writer to “wrestle with his shadow he must be certain of casting one”. Women of color have yet to define the shape of the shadow they are beginning to cast and autobiography is helping them in the task of achieving self-definition in a multi-cultural context. Their acts of self-portraiture increasingly bear testimony to the diversity and richness of the traditions that subextend their innovative narrative projects.

Given that theirs is a multiple-voiced subjectivity, then one is required to be attentive to the complex positions each engages in so as to explain the many categories within which they willfully locate themselves. So, while identity politics remains a central issue, one needs to be always cognizant of the multiplicity of that identity. (322)

Lionnet also argues that “the individual necessarily defines him or herself with regard to a community or an ethnic group and their autobiographical mythologies of empowerment are usually mediated by a determined effort to revise and re-write official recorded history” (321). But while Cliff is insistent on offering an alternative to the public version of her folk history, she is often mindful of the ways in which the folk history itself needs to be similarly adjusted to speak to the paradoxes and peculiarities of her multiply-located subjectivities.

In *The Land of Look Behind*, Michelle Cliff begins with the *I* as center and moves outward to make it relative and relational, but the self who is introduced is not only an elusive one but one which has been strategically split into safe fragments, “And yes this camouflage exists for its protection. I am not what I seem to be”(19).

Multiple identities, like costumes, can be deployed as the occasion warrants. Living on the margins of whiteness, she has learnt to virtue of psychic camouflage, that “Passing demands a desire to become invisible. A ghost-life. An ignorance of connections” (21). Cliff’s concerns are staged as a continuing suspicions of not belonging--of being an outsider. Ultimately, for Cliff, the Afro-Jamaican world is a safer space because its
hybrid nature makes it more tolerant of difference. It has come into being through
difference. It will survive because of these differences. Yet Cliff does not fetishize
these differences. Evoking the power of grafting a “bombay” onto a common mango,
the result of which is a triumphant resilience and another fruit, Cliff defines the Afro-
Jamaican society as part of a historical process. “We are not exotic—or aromatic—or
poignant. We are not aberrations. We are ordinary. All this has happened before”
(23).

The autobiographical act becomes a way of valorizing personal difference which
is in turn read as being intricately linked to communal ones. Cliff’s experiences, like
the activities of the folk community, have both been inauthenticated within the larger
narrative of Jamaican life: “It is like trying to remember a dream in which the images
slip and slide. The words connect and disconnect and you wake feeling senseless”
(23). Here personal history is not so much represented as it is re-presented in ways
which allow discourses of community that are mindful to contradictions, fragmentation
and impermanence.

Autobiography allows Cliff to re-write herself into a narrative of West Indian
history. Paradoxically, the act of self-inscription also changes the existing narratives.
Writing her personal history, Cliff reconstructs a narrative of possibilities in her
discovery of lost African fragments, in her unearthing of submerged myths, and her
self-liberation from former voicelessness. Part of this recovery is an insistent naming
of her landscape and the tongue she now has, chants out the magic of the natural world
which she is now appreciative of:
Things that live here: star apple, pineapple, custard apple, south sea apple; tamarind, ginep, avocado, guava, cashew, cane; yellow, white, St. Vincent yam; red, black, pepper ants; bats, scorpions, nightingales, spiders; cassava, sweetsop, soursop, cho-cho, okra, guango, mahoe, mahogany, ackee, plantain, Chinese banana; poly lizard, green lizard, croaking lizard, ground lizard. (24)

In her naming, Cliff marks the intermingling presence of Europe and Africa in the folkways which surround her. These same presences contour her self-naming.

Where in traditional Western autobiography, there is an insistence on personal genealogy, Cliff’s probe for ancestors is communal rather than personal, extending backwards into the moment of linguistic and ideological confrontation between what Stuart Hall reads as “Présenc Européenne” and “Présence Américaine” -- site of the loss and place of potential recovery of voice. Cliff’s lament goes thus:

We are a fragmented people. My experience as a writer coming from a culture of colonialism, a culture of black people riven from each other, my struggle to get wholeness from fragmentation while working within fragmentation, producing work which may find its strength in its depiction of fragmentation, through form as well as content, is similar to the experience of other writers whose origins are in countries defined by colonialism. (15 - 16)

Cliff, rejecting the learned Anglican stanzas which her terrified consciousness produced, seeks literary ancestry in a community of Caribbean writers who share her negotiation of identity as outsiders. What she creates in The Land of Look Behind, as Audre Lorde does in Zami: A New Spelling of my name, is a biomythography, as personal history, dream, myth and folklore are quilted over an uncovered past.

Her indebtedness to Lorde is foregrounded in her dedication of the work and Lorde’s influence as intellectual ancestor reveals itself not only in narrative correspondences, but in the ways Cliff’s passion for self-identification replicates
Lorde's own revelatory politics with regard to naming and defending her sexuality. Lorde in *Zami* makes reference to her Caribbean connections and the ways in which she can locate her sexuality in a womanist tradition marked by generations of Cariacou women and which is especially signaled through a subconsciously erotic relationship with the mother. While Cliff's remains less adamant than Lorde on the issue of her own homosexuality, she shares Lorde's passionate attachment to a Caribbean landscape. This connection to a nurturing female community is one which Cliff is eager to validate.

Jean Rhys is another writer with whom Cliff claims intellectual ancestry, for both are colonized children who bear the physical (in Cliff's case) and the psychic (in Rhys' instance) birthmarks of that encounter. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of the texts co-opted into Cliff's identity politics. She willfully interfaces the fate of Rhys' protagonist--an overdetermined, historically schizophrenic Antoinette/Bertha with her own condition of mulatto outsider.

To imagine I am the sister of Bertha Rochester. We are the remainders of slavery - residue:
White cockroaches
quadroons
octroons
mulattos
creoles
white niggers. (41)

Caught between the great house and the servants quarters, between white masters and black slaves, Cliff shares both Antoinette's alterity and the psycho-social chaos that it breeds. In returning to the narrative moment of Bertha's objectification as "dark bird
pinioned in a wooden chair” (46), and to her subsequent suicide when “her hair became wings with the interference of the wind and she smashed on those hard stones” (41), Michelle Cliff reclaims the possibility of flight as escape. Metaphorically freeing the pinioned wing, she re-writes her self-narrative as a story of possibilities and in so doing escapes (like Bertha escapes in death) the commodified destiny in store for her. “They name us, they buy us and sell us” (44).

Reacting to a historical definition of woman as having exchange value within a colonially inscribed cultural community, Cliff clears a discursive space which offers her, her literary counterpart Antoinette, and the many unnamed, un-mourned historical counterparts a fate other than that of a victim of the traffic in bodies. In the deliberate intertextuality of experiences of fragmentation, rootlessness, and dislocation, Cliff returns to the chaos of colonial history and subjects it to a creative re-ordering through a substitutive discourse which has as its authority what Lemuel Johnson has elsewhere called the “new world female presence.”11 Cliff’s weaving of her own experience of alienation into that of other fictional and historical communities is significant. It points to what Simon Gikandi identifies as a way of “decentering the Western narrative and colonial history from its dominant position in the Caribbean mind, but also a means of deconstructing or reconstituting modernist themes and categories first raised in the works of her precursors” (223). In The Land Of Look Behind, Cliff insists that her narrative goal is to overcome the absence, voicelessness and marginalization which mark Caribbean women such as Rhys, Bertha Rochester and of course herself. The path which Lorde clears in Zami widens in Cliff’s polemical enterprise, as her
autobiography replaces the grand narrative of European history with an oral tradition which has its own heroines, its own conditions of possibility.

Even while the authority of textual history is being interrogated, it is correspondingly being revised and amplified within an alternative folk archive. Cliff returns ideologically to the written narrative of her mother’s old school books to replace a genealogy of loss with one of uncovered presences. For Cliff, the gaps in her relationship with her homeland, like that in her relationship with her mother, are filled in out with words, with dreams and imaginings:

My mother is my grandmother’s daughter. My acquaintance with my mother in this house is from school books stored in boxes underneath. Worms have tunneled the pages. The covers are crossed with mold — making the books appear ancient. She has left me to find her here, under this house; I seek identity in a childish hand and obsolete geography. (29)

Cliff finds her mother through a paper trail which indicates a writing if not a speaking presence. Significantly, the worms which tunnel a deconstructive path through the European text books, represent the subterranean presence of lines of resistance even while paradoxically, they signal the death of an identity. Yet beneath the mold of rigid interpellation and fidelity to European scholarship, the childish hands points to subtextual markings, the undiscovered country of the mother’s past and in so doing, re-creates both the history of Cliff’s female ancestors and the once buried resistance history of Jamaica. The re-constructed bond with her mother and grandmother is codified as a response to the Jamaican landscape which is both compromised and promised, partially but not irredeemably stained by history. This is further reinforced
in the ways in which Cliff's past voicelessness and invisibility finds correspondence in
textual erasures in Jamaica's native history. Her recuperative process remains the same
in both instances. Cliff intends "to try and see when the background changed places
with the foreground. To try and locate the vanishing point: where the lines of
perspective converge and disappear--lines of color and class--lines of history and social
context" (62)

Cliff's relationship to her geographical space is an erotic one which echoes
Lorde's response to Cariacou. The land/scape in Cliff's narrative is painted in rich
sensuous hues and in an article entitled "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character",
Cliff goes on to explain, "I understand the landscape of islands as female. For me, the
land is redolent of my grandmother and my mother, it is a deeply personal
connection"(226). Repeatedly raped by waves of conquerors, the Jamaican landscape,
is nonetheless a land to which one looks back in reassurance, a land which is always
there to confirm a spirit of survival, a land which is emblematic of her mother's
personal history, a land which must now be read outside of contexts of loss and
lamentation. The feminization of the landscape allows for an interesting algebraization.
Cliff = mother = woman, woman = (Jamaica)n landscape, therefore Cliff =
(Jamaica)n landscape.

But in rewriting the history of Jamaica, Cliff is writing herself into a discourse
of nationhood which now cites history as self-dissolving and self-resolving. In her
revisitation of the nationalist paradigm which had constituted woman as a sign in the
imagining of both community and landscape, Cliff divests this association of woman to
landscape of the victim’s condition of conquest and domination it once had. In claiming an identity which is JAMAICA(N), she rescues Jamaica/woman from a former passivity and lack of agency by summoning buried narratives of female resiters and survivors. Offering her personal experience as a way of interpreting Caribbean identity and experience, Cliff presents a counter critique which dispenses of the old colonizer/colonized, victor/victim binaries. Her critique instead insists that such totalizing theories of oppression are inadequate to the conditions of possibilities emerging from this hybridized nation space.

The theoretical position which Cliff adopts is remarkably similar to the one articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in “Signs Taken for Wonders…” where he claims:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal… Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (173)

In The Land of Look Behind, the strategies for dismantling the symmetry of taught history lead to the formation of subversions. Not only does Cliff dislodge this master discourse but she moves on to transform it into a complex social order through the deployment of an alternative historiography which is rooted in oral history. Her disruption of institutional order, as represented by a linear, logical, self-negating concept of history is more than a carnivalesque gesture that is at once reabsorbed and re-contained within hegemonic structures. In her discovery of a Jamaican voice, Cliff
creates a feminized mythology—one which speaks to and celebrates female presence and participation. The phallocentrism of Western myths is displaced with new heroines of resistance such as Nanny of the Maroons. Related to this is Cliff’s own metaphoric representation of her female identity as associated with the landscape within which Nanny historically thrived—Cockpit Country, also known as ‘the land of look behind’. The geography of this space is one which, like Cliff’s own identity, is never fully accessible. Its many rock crevices hide pockets of resistance. It is refuge and garrisons for the maroons. It is a safe space and a site of empowerment for the many natives of Cliff’s person.

The Land Of Look Behind moves towards a validation of in-betweenness as a transformative metaphor of possibilities. In the shifting locations which her mulatto identity affords her, Cliff validates the condition of what Louis James has referred to as “the island in between,"—a place which is neither the margin nor center. She arrives at a defiant proclamation of a sovereignty which is constant and yet inconstant, derived and derivative, but which is ultimately useful in bringing dissenting sides into dialogue with each other. The final movement in the collection “I-Tie-All-My-People-Together" represents Cliff’s sense of her mulatto self as useful in bringing Africa into productive discourse with Europe. Evoking a Yoruba hymn to Oshun, she reveals how far she has gone in retracing her the African part of herself and the sense of belonging which she has gained from that journey:

Oshun makes of her people one
Mo so aiwon enia mi po

Healer destroyer of cruelty
mother  bringer of judgment
lover  excelling in tenderness
guardian  punishing foolishness

She lives at the bottom of the River
She greets the most important matter in water. (117)

Cliff in summoning this female deity symbolically affirms the power of other female
presences which have shaped her journey into speech. Her grandmother and her
mother, along with her literary othermothers, Jean Rhys and Audre Lorde, coalesce
into a maternal force which remind one of the powerful mother who populates
Kincaid’s writing.

However, Cliff’s re-visitiation of her past, domestic and socio-historical, creates
a rhetoric of selfhood which resonates differently from Kincaid’s for whom the act of
self-definition and identification begins with the dismantling of old narratives of power
both maternal, and colonial. The urge to testify, to confess, to reclaim a voice and an
identity is born out of Cliff’s condition as twice removed exile. She is an outsider both
in Kingston and New York. Her writing narrates a willingness to share the private and
the personal in a way which will make her representative of the alienated condition of
the overdetermined Caribbean womanhood. Jamaica Kincaid, on the other hand, is
insistent on establishing an identity which is distinctly individualistic. Where Cliff’s
focus is on locating self within community, Kincaid begins with the assurance of
community and is instead intent on establish a separate identity.

In her essay “Rootedness, the Ancestor as Foundation” Morrison argues that
the ancestor is always present in black literature: “And these ancestors are not just
parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationship to the characters are benevolent, instructive and protective, and they provide a certain type of wisdom” (343). *The Land of Look Behind* celebrates ancestors and acknowledge their contributions to the shaping of Cliff’s identity. Kincaid’s position differs slightly. Though she is appreciative of the contribution of the ancestors and for her connectedness to them, Kincaid’s self-articulations insist on her development of a voice and spirit which accedes to that wisdom even as it proclaims its independence. This is the tension which frames *At The Bottom Of The River*.

Where Cliff had envisaged an archeology of female power submerged, but retrievable at the bottom of the river, Jamaica Kincaid’s vision of what lies at the bottom of the river seems to be a narcissistic image of a self which is constantly threatened with dissolution by a community that assigns her an identity which is a reflection of her mother’s. Kincaid’s ambivalent response to the legacy of unity between herself and her mother, her joy in speaking with her mother’s voice and her ever present need to escape that voice, to create an identity which is distinct, loud, and separate, produces a multiplicity of images of selves. These selves, like fractured reflections in water can only be explicated through art, the form alternating between an oral and a written one.

Kincaid’s ongoing autobiographical project, like Cliff’s, is to create a discourse specific to those fractured and conflicting identities—rebel child and devoted daughter, to rescue the image of self, wavering at the bottom of the river. However, where Cliff was trying to write self into community, Kincaid moves in the opposite direction—her

204
project is to write herself as an individual distinct and apart from community. The act of writing becomes a way into self exploration and discovery, the arrival at a personal truth. She explains it thus: “I don’t know if this is the sense of ‘here I am, let me tell you about me,’ is universal to women, but it’s a very West Indian trait. Maybe because she’s confined to home and family that there’s a great love of self as an aesthetic thing among West Indian women” (145). This great love of self, assumes a primacy which makes Kincaid’s entry into the traditions of the Antiguan folk world, provisional and conditional. The act of narrating personal history constitutes a rearranging and artistic manipulation of the facts of the life lived so as to unearth the meaning which is core to it. The control suggested by this artistic manipulation establishes a power relationship between Kincaid and tradition which is significantly different from the one maintained by Cliff. Kincaid envisages a far more interactive role as subject rather than object of tradition.

The re-arrangement of the facts of her personal history, allows for an alternative rendering of experience--one which, like the transformative magic of obeah allows for truth to be identified as other than factual or locatable. Like the blackbird which is not really a blackbird, the beautiful woman who is really a jablesse, Kincaid’s autobiography as represented in At The Bottom Of the River gestures at a truth which is not absolute and which requires no authentication except that it lies chimerically embedded in her own experiences. Even while self remains the center of narrative interest, it is never a fixed identifiable one. Rather, it imitates the mother who in an unguarded moment, very much like the soucouyant, “can grow a new plated skin,
uncoil and remove her hair and talking her head into her large palms, flatten it so that her eyes . . . sat on the top of her head and spun like a revolving ball (55).

Kincaid’s playfulness with form imitates the slutishness which her mother had once warned against. Where previously the word “slut” described a moral or material condition, in this instance Kincaid’s reclamation of slutishness invests it with a freedom to transgress narratively, to disobey literary rules, and to destabilize generic boundaries. Indeed, for those intent on establishing individuality, the community may well be seen as suffocating, repressing the “funk” which must necessarily erupt so that Kincaid can come into her own literary personhood. Instead, access to the folk world inhabited by her mother allows for the creation of a fluid, incantatory prose, the rich melody of mother-tongued words, the inexplicable magic of maternal ways of coming to know and the transformative power to alter existing forms into new modes of self-representation. Slutishness becomes the familiar in Kincaid’s version of magic--her way of conjuring.

Apprenticed to her mother, having learned how to work her special kind of obeah, Kincaid sets about transforming the terms of her location in her mother’s oral world. She is as much the initiate as she is a challenger. She is both a child and a woman. She loves her mother, yet she is constantly seeking to destroy her. She glories in her mother’s presence, yet yearns to escape into exile. The story “My Mother” explores these dichotomies. The child imagines herself growing into her mother, yet never achieving the power, “I had grown big but my mother was bigger” (56). “My mother has grown to an enormous height. I have grown to an
enormous height also, but my mother’s height is three times mine” (58). Some scenes presented here will resurface Annie John if only to confirm the indomitable presence of the mother and the continuing, seemingly futile struggle to escape that hegemony. The farewell scene in Annie John is in At the Bottom of the River, written as a paean of reconciliation where the mother /daughter relationship, temporarily suspended in departure is resurrected in a new place.

Furthermore, even while the choice of the mother’s tongue has initiated an understanding of its ambivalence, there is no wholesale acceptance of and surrender to its power. Instead the folk community becomes a place framed in departure, conditional returns, and yearning to be there and to be elsewhere. Intent on establishing a positionality which is attentive to her myriad subject positions, Kincaid demonstrates an instinctive fear of fixed structures, be they conformity to the canon which her colonial education forced upon her into, or the oral world of her mother. More particularly, the mother’s sphere of influence, easily transformable and lacking fixity is, always rendered in terms of power and powerlessness with Kincaid finding herself usually aligned with the powerless, but seeking to become part of the powerful.

Kincaid’s lyrical weaving of poetry and prose, dream and reality, the domestic and the cosmic, mark the birth of a literary consciousness intent on exploring the memories of a prelapsarian mother/child idyll which is the site of both empowerment and disempowerment. The exploration of the residue at the bottom of the river of her consciousness is the necessary beginning in which Kincaid must situate her own gendered and cultural identity, ones tested against the looming shadow of a maternal
presence. This process is continuous, every conclusion unraveling into doubt and new
tactics of intervention. In her title story of the collection, “At the Bottom of the
River,” these contradictions contouring the maternal tongue move towards yet another
resolution.

Kincaid sets up a contrasting frame of a lonely man, a man who cannot conceive
of the harmony of a woman and child at play, who has not seen birds in flight, has not
heard the sound of the wind in the trees; a man who has held himself aloof from life’s
turbulent vitality and is now deaf to the singing sounds of the sea. He faces a silent
world, a world where the mother’s tongue has been allowed no intrusion. The near-
existential nothingness of his self-inflicted cultural dislocation engenders a Naipaulian
futility, a world not of opposites but of absences. “‘Sing again. Sing now,’ he says in
his heart...But again and again he feels the futility of all. For stretching out before
him is a silence so dreadful, a vastness, its length and breadth immeasurable. Nothing”
(68).

The next movement introduces the girl who knows and understands her place in
the world, who has come to accept death as part of the circle of life. She recognizes
that death brings a partial silence but that in the natural inconstancies of her world,
love and adoration create a harmony which is continuous, “an extraordinary chain: a
hymn sung in rounds” (74). It is that assurance which renders her world paradisial.
Content in that understanding and knowledge of love, she is able to assume the
carapace of invincibility which the earlier stories had gestures towards, becoming as
solidly impregnable as the earlier constructed images of the mother. The creative
potential of that maternal legacy allows for the confident litany of being and of naming:
“I was not made up of flesh and blood and muscles and bones and tissue and cells and
vital organs, but was made up of my will, and over my will I had complete dominion”
(79).

While separation is inevitable to the event of growing up, Kincaid, at the end of
the collection, presents it as neither the lonely man’s self-alienation nor the confident
child’s self-placement. The one room house made of rough boards, with its A-shaped
red galvanized roof celebrates an Antiguan world, yet the four windows facing all sides
remind of an openness to nature, literally and metaphorically gesturing to the wide-lens
perspective which Kincaid has arrived at. And the conjured image of a native world is
made to harmonize with aspects of the learnt story book European culture—legacies of
her father tongue: “There were flowers: yellow and blue irises, red poppies, daffodils,
marigolds. They grew as if wild, intertwined . . .”(76). The much maligned daffodils
in Lucy here partially constitute the fixity which she sees at the bottom of the river. In
the intertextuality of the two experiences, one lived, the other read, one Antiguan, the
other European, is the suggestion of a split consciousness arriving at partial synthesis:
“And so it was with everything that lay so still at the bottom of the river. It all lay
there not like a picture but like a true thing and a different kind of true thing, one that I
had never noticed before”(76).

Finally, Kincaid seems to resolve her struggle to claim a voice which while it
carries echoes of her mother’s is not her mother’s voice. The self which emerges at
the bottom of the river is one which, though clad in the familiar images of maternal
connectedness, wears a newness born out of difference as conflicting identities are replaced with multiple ones, each fragile, as yet un-named and unreadable:

I had no name for the thing I had become, so new was it to me, except I did not exist in pain or pleasure, east or west or north or south, or up or down, or past or present or future, or real or not real. I stood as if I were a prism, many-sided or transparent, refracting or reflecting light as it reached me, light that never could be destroyed. (80)

Interestingly, the language used to describe the process of self revelation, carries obvious traces of two linguistic traditions. It reminds of the fluidity of form which is so much a part of the mothertongue even as it suggests the father tongue which has interpellated her. Her prose makes fluent and deliberate use of the poetic language of Milton’s lost paradise, and her evocation of the sublime as an expressive context for the self she is about to become, is generous and unapologetic.14 Yet the intervention of the mother tongue remains apparent. She returns to the same prosaic structure which dominated “Girl”, to what Diane Simmons elsewhere described as an incantatory list. Only here, the voice and the power implicit to the one who names shifts from mother to daughter. What remains common to both is the ritualistic naming of domestic certainties and the assurance found in this act of naming, for the comfort of those solid presences brace against the nothingness which the lonely man at the beginning of “At The Bottom of the River” experiences. That she chooses to envisage herself in a house, the domestic structure which the law of the father has confined women such as her mother to is suggestive of the level of identification operating between mother and daughter.
Where "Girl" had pointed to the mother’s choices of strategies useful to the negotiation of an adult and threatening world, "At The Bottom of The River" melds the earlier images so that they reappear as non-threatening, marked by unquestionable truth and beauty. However, underwriting this euphoric construction of a paradisial world are the cautionary postscripts which while they accede to the constructedness of these concepts, are careful to show how useful these are in giving the girl/artist a temporary frame within which to fix the world and with which to fix herself in that world. Indeed, Kincaid’s construction deliberately leaves the lonely man, (whose condition is never relieved by community), suspended in the narrative as the embodiment of the potential threat to this paradise. Once again there is the reiteration that accommodation is always provisional. The reader is left uncertain as to whether this frequent reiteration constitutes a lamentation or a reminder of the possibilities implicit to this fluidity.

Where The Land of Look Behind concludes with unity engendered by community, At the Bottom of the River affirms a unity of being which is grounded in individuality. But the journey to either stage begins and continues with the assistance of the mothertongue. The last section of this chapter explores the consequences of the activities which each writer, possessed by and possessing that tongue, now undertakes.

**Tactics of Intervention and Survival**

The foregrounding of the I as subject, rather than the communal we can only occur after the daughters have negotiated their way around the continued presence of
the maternal tongue. The speech it has provoked in these two writers is one which is respectful to filiation, shared community and appreciative audience. The story of the self which each offers as part of the repertoire of that world confirms their connections. Yet these stories also subvert these traditions in distinctive ways.

In the Caribbean, the storytelling traditions survive in a variety of forms: folk tales, proverbs, patterns of performance, rhetoric and calypso. These oral traditions inform the structure of *At the Bottom of the River* and *The Land Of Look Behind*. Like the calypso, a form which Gordon Rohlehr in “Articulating A Caribbean Aesthetic” describes as: “a flexible medium capable of accommodating narrative, social and political protest . . . and a celebration of an entire and virtually unexplored body of oral literature” (4), the stories which Kincaid and Cliff offer begin with a play on the infinite shades of possible meanings. Making use of a variety of tones and voices, they each create improvisations which assert and define identities, identities which even as they are being established are simultaneously being revised.

Further the oral traditions which each writer puts to creative use serve as both a source of nourishment and as a challenge when the private act of autobiography become a public act of story telling- another folktale. Establishing woman as the primary repository of folk wisdom, the stories in *At the Bottom of the River* and *The Land Of Look Behind*, disrupt the recognizable anti-feminist character of Caribbean folk forms by inserting new, unexpected textualities. Images of survival and endurance now form part of what Ropo Sekoni labels the “under text” in oral literature.
to which both Cliff and Kincaid now have access. These are constantly brought into
creative tension with other recurrent issues in their writings.

Mother daughter relationships are problematized. The identification of the good
woman as woman-identified is supported in a variety of ways and the possibility of
self-recovery within womanist communities inform the substitutive folk tales which
Kincaid and Cliff offer. Like folk tales, these issues are repeated, never-ending
narratives which continue to echo in a variety of places, with no discernible beginning,
middle, and end, throughout their later works. The autobiographies offered by the two
writers never arrive at a conceptual resting place, but instead pause at sites rich in
interventions and transgressions. Identity remains very much a process and the selves
being made within these folk homes are only aspects of a multiply-constructed persona.

Thus empowered, the oral tradition once presented as a unified definitive text
which ascribed women particular roles is disrupted and transformed through the
invention of these two writers. Autobiography becomes their contribution to the rich
lore they discover in the oral tradition and Kincaid and Cliff use its treasures to
unapologetically re-fashion themselves, and in turn, respectful to their liberal
borrowing bequeath a tale about the self to the collection of never-ending stories. And
in the tradition of the never-ending story, their narratives turn back repeatedly on
themselves, reappearing in partial, revised forms, in each instance marking the passage
to self explication as a labyrinthine process. Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to
Despise reappears in The Land Of Look Behind, resurfaces in Abeng, and is repeated
in No Telephone to Heaven. All of Cliff’s Jamaica novels come together in a

213
seemingly never-ending story about identity formation and like Kincaid’s serial autobiography speaks to a fractal and fractious identity which cannot be confined to one specific geography and which in its constant reiterations generate a visionary charge which sustains the writer.

Kincaid’s story “What have you been doing lately” is a dramatic example of this regenerative narrative process. There, Kincaid suggests that there is no single definitive text. Instead the text is born through a verbalizing occasion, coming into being through the act of saying, and coming undone through silence. The protagonist’s decision to go back to the place where she is lying on her bed means that the text does not become extinct so much as it gestates anew as the constraining linearity of narration is once again disrupted. Yet while the narrative repeats itself, it does so with subtle differences. In the echo of a never-ending story, similar to children’s word games, the circularity of the tale is displaced in each transformative version, as passivity is replaced by activity. Indeed the narrator takes possession of the tale in a way which foreshadows Kincaid’s later commandeering of her mother’s text, her stories, her voice.

Interestingly, the tactics of intervention once deployed differ from the strategy of survival now assumed. Permanence seems to reside in the act of writing her world, the mention of a table, a pen and a lamp to write by evoking a new room of one’s own where the artist will reside, writing her way out of the provisional nature of that paradise. And the mother’s voice once again echoes an assertion that paradise is always yet never lost. It is in this conundrum that the images at the bottom of the river
reside, for images written in water by definition lack fixity and permanence even while they have a particular truth and a definite beauty:

... how bound up I know I am, to all that is human endeavor, to all that is past and to all that shall be. To all that shall be lost and leave no trace. I claim these things - mine - and now feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling up my mouth. (82)

What Kincaid arrives at here is similar to the position identified by Inderpal Grewal in “Autobiographical subjects, Diasporic locations...” where she insists that “there can be syncretic, ‘immigrant,’ cross-cultural and plural subjectivities, which enable a politics through positions that are conditions, intransigent, in process and contradictory” (234). At the Bottom of the River initiates such a process. The narrative perspective has shifted, the discursive strategy less vested in the mythic and the surrealistic, but the fragments remain the same. Reassembled, they reveal her desire to name herself as part of a community which begins with mother and child, whose echoes resonate with cultural continuity, but which also demand her distance.

At the same time, Kincaid as well as Cliff are conscious that the specific terrain on which they stand constitutes part of a black feminist tradition, one which because of the diasporic experience triangulates from Africa through to the Americas and the Caribbean. While Cliff takes a more activist stance with regard to this connection, Kincaid chooses to view the silencing of black women within the generalist frames of temporary alignments of power. Responding to a still entrenched tradition which had excluded the voices of black women, both Cliff and Kincaid become contributors to an expanding discourse on black feminism: one which acknowledges the particular
influence of race and gender without being locked into isolationist, essentializing categories. In so doing these writers fulfill Marjorie Pryse's suggestion in *Conjuring*:

By their combined recognition and mutual naming, based on magic, oral inheritance and the need to struggle against oppression, black women writers enlarge our conventional assumptions about the nature and function of literary tradition. Focusing on connections rather than separations, transforming silence into speech and giving back power to the culturally disenfranchised, black women writers affirm the wholeness and endurance of a vision that, once articulated, can be shared - though its heritage, roots, survival and intimate possession belong to black women alone. (5)

The role of postcolonial autobiography in this project is also re-situated. the autobiographical nature of Cliff and Kincaid's writings. The focus is now broader than a stable, nationally identified subject, expanding to a collective rather than an individual witnessing. Both autobiographies read as repositories of oral histories, interpretations of the experiences of other members of the oral community and accounts of the now-speaking subject. Self is defined, in relation to other traditions, through other primarily written traditions and ultimately as part of both an oral and a literate tradition. Exploration of an oral past leads to a celebration of all its elements, and a validation of its role in the formation of what Fanon calls a "people's true nature."

The reality of the colonial education which each writer has undergone cannot be dismissed nor the utility of the oral tradition essentialized. The traces of both tradition remained unerasable and intertextuality becomes a constant characteristic of their discourse.

However, becoming double-voiced in their experience of the mother's oral world, Kincaid and Cliff can now talk back fearlessly to both the mothers' oral text and
the white literary text which they have gained educated access to. Mindful of what Fanon described as “a whole body of efforts made by a people in a sphere of thought, to describe, justify and praise the actions through which a people has created itself and keeps its existence” (188), Kincaid and Cliff use the act of self-narrative to bring both the individual and the community into narrative existence through the co-optation of the speakerly text. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines the speakerly text as one which has as part of its narrative strategies the literary representation of the speaking voice. Going on to relate the contribution of Zora Neale Hurston to that trope, Gates further clarifies: “The speakerly text privileges the representation of the speaking black voice, of what the Russian Formalist called *Skaz* and which Hurston and Reid have defined as ‘an oral book. A talking book’”(112). Both Caribbean writers in giving primacy to the mother tongue create their own editions of the talking book, and the speaking black voice which assumes the podium carries the remarkable volume of shared communal experiences, and the untrammeled power of their newly minted words makes it impossible for their fiery speech to be ignored. Location within the oral community, however negotiable, provides a supportive audience which not only encourages the noises of their critical voices but which, by its very presence transforms the individual literary voice into a black public voice and moves the resulting discourse from monologue to polyvocality.

No longer having to mind their words, both Cliff and Kincaid gain the freedom to “wash their tongues,” a Caribbean vernacular expression meaning taking onto oneself, the liberty to say whatever one feels, on a variety of once sacrosanct subjects.
Correspondingly, this power for Cliff functions as an act of re-membering allows her
to name herself as part of a once discarded Afro-Caribbean filiation.

. . . [That] part of my purpose as a writer of Afro-Caribbean (Indian, African, and White) experience and heritage and Western experience and education (indoctrination) has been to reject speechlessness by inventing my own peculiar speech, one that attempts to draw together everything I am and have been, both Caliban and Ariel and a liberated and synthesized version of each. (Cudjoe, 264)

Having talked her way back into an Afro-Jamaican community which had once made
her an outsider, Cliff’s newly found comfort in that supportive space makes her less
willing than Kincaid to critique it. She reserves the washing of her tongue for a
blistering attack on the hypocritical Anglo-Jamaican society, its blind adherence to
colonial habits and its intolerance of difference. The homophobia typical to both
communities and the fact that neither world affords her a space to articulate her
sexuality remains unaddressed.

On the other hand, Kincaid allows her tongue no such strictures. Having
struggled to create a voice which is not her mother’s, having to cope with the recurring
power of that maternal voice, Kincaid’s actions find correspondence in what Michael
Awkward identifies in Negotiating Difference as useful manipulation of border
crossings. Awkward argues that “location within a geography of difference contributes
to its inhabitants not essential being and insight but strategies of racial/gendered, class
and sexual performance that can be accepted or rejected, in part or in full” (6). At The
Bottom of the River constantly interrogates the cultural wisdom which the community
as represented by the maternal voice imparts. Moreover it does so even while it
retrieves and reclaims the Afro-Caribbean cultural experience: its songs and music, its stories and language, and all the practices which make up the daily life of people like her mother.

These are the very practices which Kincaid willfully exiles herself from and which, given the pervasive intrusion of her mother’s tongue, she can never escape. Caught between affirmation and critique, between the mother’s traditional mythology and the desire to formulate her own myths—myths suitable to a description of her process of self-actualization, Kincaid’s version of the speakerly text creates a system of interpretation which expresses her critical dissent. Her talking book speaks to what Rachel DuPlessis in *Writing Towards the Ending* explains as “putting things at their most extreme [so as] to stand at the impact point of a strong system of representation and to rehearse ones colonization or ‘iconization’ through the materials one’s culture considers powerful and primary” (106). This deliberate confrontation—this talking back to dominating forces brings the oral and the literal into literal and ideological juxtaposition

In *Noises in the Blood*, Cooper offers the following position on the relationship between these two forms of representation:

The history of ideas in the ‘anglophile’ Caribbean has conventionally been defined as a one way flow of knowledge from the centered mother country to the peripheral colonies. Though the patriarch has long given her illegitimate children flag-independence, the superstition that upper case Culture is intrinsically foreign does persist. Conversely the womanist project . . . is to reproduce a body of subversive knowledge that originates in centers of consciousness of the historically dehumanized people of the Caribbean. (174)
Part of this revisionary project requires for Cooper a remapping of the boundaries of margin and center. Oral literature has long been dismissed as the vulgar noises, the rude vernacular speech of common people, and pushed to the margins of literary considerations only because its persistence does not allow it to be ignored, or altogether dismissed. Ideologically relegated to a binary which cites Africa as the origin of the vulgar and Europe the producer of its antithesis—the refined, the written text—oral literatures have not been actively considered as part of Afro-Caribbean letters. Both Cliff and Kincaid in their own theoretical endeavors, bring these hitherto disruptive, interfering and vagrant texts into conversation with the great tradition of English literature, even while their foregrounding of these speakerly texts, help to silence the great tradition and push it to the margin.

Their activities find echo in the polemical positions of other Caribbean writers. One such example is Edouard Glissant's address and resolution of these anxieties in Caribbean Discourse where he insists “we should not forget that we can assist in the complex union of writing and orality; by so doing, we contribute to the self-expression of a new kind of human being, free of dogmatisms, of textualities and in search of a new audience for the voice” (200). For Cliff and Kincaid, the search for a new audience for the voice requires a return to beginnings to what Edward Said in Beginnings: Intention and Methods, refers to as “making or producing difference by combining the already familiar with fertile novelty.” In so doing, each writer re-theorizes marginality and power in her inversion of hierarchies, the restoration of the
oral text and the definition of self as fully participating subject in the Caribbean story
of self-actualization.

Having moved through critical dissident speech to self-reflexive dialogue, Cliff
and Kincaid turn to another revisionist enterprise: the reclamation of female
historiography. This activity is a natural corollary to their earlier tongue washing as
each turns to Caribbean history and offer a rewrite which turns the official version
upside down. Houston A. Baker Jr. in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*
offers a definition of the womanist project which aptly describes the theoretical
negotiations which each of these two writers embark on in the following chapter:

The task seems to [be] one of negotiating the unseen and
presuppositional domains of current popular white theorizing in as much
the same way that Walker . . . negotiated the heroics and analytics of
their respective eras—pen in hand, listening to African sounds of
precursors and mastering (both intellectually and rhetorically) the
discursive forces and stories that suppressed an African body. (143)

Folk tales replace fairy tales, mother tongue covers and suppresses father tongue as
identities are claimed and reclaimed. Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff, having now
freed their words from servile colonial ownership, let them loose so that, echoing a line
out of Hurston’s *They Eyes were watching God* they become: “Words walking without
masters, walking altogether like harmony in a song”(8). These words will enter
various discourse communities, will bear witness, will criticize. And the range of their
activities will transforming the popular West Indian folk accusation “Your tongue too
long” into an advantage.
Notes

1 In this chapter, I am evoking the slipperiness of that story-telling tongue, so as to suggest the ways in which woman talk resists erasure and silencing even as it resists confinement and explication. I want the phrase to resonate with the Caribbean definition of slippery tongues as duplicitous tongues so as to explore the ways in which representation of woman talk is always partial. I am aware that other literary critics have explored the issue of how multiple locations and shifting contexts affect the discourse. See for example Mae Gwendolyn Henderson’s “Speaking in tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition” in Changing Our Own Words, Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989. 16-37. In this essay, Henderson argues for a critical position which is attentive to a dialogic subjectivity, one which affords “a dialogue with aspects of ‘otherness’ within the self”(18), thus enabling black women to speak from a variety of positions and to a variety of discourses- hegemonic and non-hegemonic.

2 I use the phrase “ancient properties” as Morrison uses it to describe Jadine in Tar Baby. Marie Therese judges Jadine’s immersion in Eurocentric values as a sign that she has forgotten her afro-centric roots—“her ancient properties.”

3 This trope has much currency in lesbian criticism. I am using it evoking the sense of lesbian in a way which is similar to Barbara Smith’s use it in her much discussed critique of Toni Morrison’s Sula, to mean woman-identified. This broad definition allows me to avoid a potential reductive reading: one which focuses on the sexual rather than the erotic. In a later chapter, I will revisit the “erotic” and argue for a use of it which distances me from the traditional Anglo-feminist way of viewing the experience of black women.

4 In “Of Mangoes and Maroons” Francoise Lionnet argues that Cliff creates an alternative access to the “web of multi-cultural influences that her mother could not and would not pass on to her” and that it is through the conjuring up of a fictive past for herself and for her mother that Cliff comes into dialogue with her past. I am claiming instead that the mother’s voicelessness in The Land Of Look Behind, is a temporary condition from which the daughter rescues her by placing her mother’s seemingly passive tongue into her own mouth and that further Lionnet’s argument is grounded in the erroneous conflating of the unnamed mother in The land... with Kitty in Abeng .

This relates to the folk saying which describes people with lisps as having thick tongues, this means that their speech is never clearly received.

It is no means incidental that many critical responses to Jamaica Kincaid’s work frequently identifies the mother as cruel -- reading her counsel to her daughter as “malevolent,” “manipulative” and “attacking.” See Diane Simmons Jamaica Kincaid and Helen Pyne Anthony “Adolescent Rebellion and Gender Relation”. Both these critics argue that the mother is unable to bring the adolescent child into a sense of her female personhood.

I read the word “slut” here to mean a dirty, slovenly woman rather than a dissolute immoral one as Diane Simmons does in Jamaica Kincaid pg. 75-6. Simmons sees the mother’s admonitions as repressing the child’s burgeoning sexuality. Yet all three references to the girl becoming a slut are related to her physical appearance - how the world perceives her in her dress and her mien. Further the mother’s advice on how to get a man, how to keep him and knowing when to let him go speaks to her recognition of the inevitability of the girl’s sexual nature and the measures (as natural as knowing which fish to throw back and which to keep) necessary to that development.

I am playing with the term which Marshall uses to describe her artistic development in her article “Poets in the Kitchen”.

This notion of a conditional presence in that world is very much in the spirit of fairy tales where words and actions give access. See Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves as a popular instance of a tale where the word allows access and where one is denied entry without this word code. A useful Afro-Caribbean version is the folk tale Anancy and the Magic Pot, where a word command conjures up a bountiful feast.


This argument revises hooks’ thesis in her essay “Choosing the Margin as a space of Radical Openness” where she too confronts silences and language as a place of struggle by making the margin “a site of resistance - a location of radical openness and possibility” (153).

A jablesse is the French patois word for devil woman (called diablesse in Standard French). The jablesse is usually constructed as an extremely beautiful woman whose cloven foot betrays her demonic origin. She is usually found at crossroads, her favorite site, from which she lures susceptible males. She is said to be afraid of salt, smoke and crucifixes and in the presence of these, transforms herself into a wild animal.

Chapter 4

W/righting History

Every sidung smaddy got dem tan-up day dah come.
Jamaican Proverb

It has often been claimed, and as often hotly contested, that Caribbean history exists only within the monologue of Western history. There is too, a perception that it is history which shapes identity, and as stated elsewhere in this study, much of male-authored West Indian literature has been concerned with writing alternative narratives to the existing Europeanized version of their history. John Hearne in his Introduction to Carifesta Forum captured this anxiety with history in his pithy assessment: “History is an angel with whom all we Caribbean Jacobs have to wrestle sooner or later if we hope for a blessing”(vii). The battle with history has raged across a variety of wordscapes as Caribbean writers have sought to represent the history of the region in terms of the fragmentation, diversity and unpredictability integral to the colonial experience.

Accordingly, the tendency has been to shift inquiry from the accounts of the plantation and the activities of the Great House and to focus instead on the plot. Once history comprised public narratives of planter activities, the production of sugar cane,
the buying of slaves and other commercial enterprises as revealed in manifests, bills, reports, newspapers. Now, historiography focuses the activities of the slaves, their methods of resistance, their ways of surviving the middle passage experience as revealed in their cultural activities, their work songs, and the oral traditions they had passed on. This account was hard to piece together. Historiography is accordingly often elusive, beyond the fixity of facts and definitions, difficult to inscribe within manageable categories, and because of its oral character, harder to access through the normal retrieval system favored by European scholarship. Moreover, because historiography was faithful to an oral form, an exploration of the history of that voice and the translation of its secret language became important.

But these articulations offered formulations of West Indian identity which while representational were not attentive to the differences gender would introduce into such theorizing. West Indian women writers, when they entered the discussion in the eighties, in reacting to what had been essentially male narratives, were writing an account of history which because it had as its center women’s ways of knowing and of coming to know, was sensitive to the relativism implicit to any interpretation of events. In so doing, they remodulated the relationship between history and identity by making the former subordinate to the later. Specifically, a woman version of colonial experience resulted in a different narrative of West Indian history—one which was shaped by a more intimate and complex account of the fragmentation, diversity and unpredictability which Columbus’ incursion into the New World had occasioned. The
overlooked subject had stood up and her new visibility had transformed her margin into the center.

Significantly, West Indian women writers were offering testimonies of personal experience as crucial to the formulation of a viable account of history. While they were interesting in re-couping the historiography of the region, they were not however concerned with replacing old versions, but with offering narratives which would transform the “public” text into a multi-voiced discourse which reflected the point of view of the previously silenced female witness. Where West Indian male writers had been portraying history from the point of view of Caliban, that is, they had focused on Prospero’s treatment of Caliban and the various strategies that Caliban had devised to resist this domination, their female counterparts were presenting a version of events based on the points of view of Sycorax—once imprisoned in a tree, silent witness to the engagement between her son and her imprisoner.

In “Silencing Sycorax” Abena Busia establishes the importance of recovering that silenced perspective. She reads Sycorax’s absence as a major actor to be a deliberate disempowerment generated by the perspective that sexuality and access to language confer a certain power. Busia goes on to argue that in the disappearance of the woman’s voice from the text of history, there is a correlated loss of “a whole range of traditions and . . . reformulations, of women’s existence as socio-political actors with viable organizations and institutions with which to act as capable political actors”(99). In clearing a discursive space within which to re-contextualize history, West Indian women writers were curing Sycorax of what Busia describes as a
“symbolic laryngectomy” and the women characters who populate their writings are noisy and rambunctious. Further, even while the noises of these new actors may not always be read as useful, they were nonetheless disruptive and demanded an audience.

But the recovery process needed to be more than a coming to noise. While it was necessary to explore the circumstances which had silenced Sycorax, it was also important to analyze the consequences of such a silencing on Sycorax’s perception of self as subject. Indeed, the account which Sycorax would give would depend largely on how she had interpreted her imprisonment. Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are two West Indian writers who in responding to the move to recover Sycorax’s alienated perspective, used the occasion to speak particularly to the impact of location on the discourse. Specifically, Cliff and Kincaid, while accepting Sycorax as witness, recognized that her immobility in a tree, while it did not foreclose on her ability to witness, did not afford her the multiplicity of perception which a mobile witness would possess. So, in keeping with the heterogeneity of they own experiences and their simultaneous occupation of various locations, each writer further transforms Sycorax from newly speaking subject to a traveling one.

Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff in A Small Place and Free Enterprise, negotiate their particular engagement with history. Their anxieties about self-definition necessitate a broadening in focus to encompass the particularities of the construction of self as subject in a landscape which was attentive to differences: national, sexual, racial and artistic. Even while theorizing postcolonial history is the immediate project, neither writer makes a pretense of monolithism, each remains conscious that her critical
voice speaks only partially to the experience of other women in as much as other postcolonial theoretical constructions had only partially accommodated her reality. The account being given is as much a personal one as it is an example of the heterogeneity implicit to the postcolonial woman.

While Kincaid and Cliff are both West Indian women who have chosen to live and write in the United States, each bring to her conversation on history different experiences of colonialism, and the discursive context which each fashions is attentive to those personal experiences. Cliff speaks as a bi-racial Jamaican who once taught to despise her African heritage has now re-claimed this identity. Kincaid speaks from the distance of a self-imposed exile, her voice still nuanced by the language of her mother. The relationship of each writer to her personal history is reflected in the ways she responds to social and political difference. In Black Women, Writing and Identity, Carole Boyce Davies explains this perspective as a “critical relationality” with competing discourses:

Critical relationality means negotiating, articulating and interrogating simultaneously a variety of resistant discourses relationally and depending on context historical and political circumstances. It is not opportunistic in the sense of conveniently articulated but progressively multiply articulated in the face of a variety of dominant discourses. (47)

Both Cliff and Kincaid establish themselves as agents with power over discourse. Though the descendant of slave owners, Cliff interrogates this legacy and separates herself from the activities of the great house. Instead, she chooses to privilege her connection with the resistance efforts which had undermined that power. Similarly,
Kincaid, speaking as the descendant of slaves focuses on the activities of the West Indian peasant and chooses not to frame those experience in terms of powerlessness, but rather on the constitution of that group as resistant subjects.

Both writers use the trope of traveling as an enabling metaphor for their exposition on Caribbean/woman history. The traveling metaphor reverberates in a preponderance of ships in each of their narratives: slave ships and cruise ships; doom-laden ships in the instance of European seafarers; sleek escaping canoes which promised freedom to New World migrants. Cleopatra-like barges carrying the mythic Annie down the river transformed into the canoe which the re-named Regina dreams of rowing across the Atlantic in search of home/land or coalesces into Turner’s painting of the dreaded Zong. Thus ships and travel breach the linearity of time and space, bringing past and future, New World and Old World, conqueror and conquered into unions which are effortless, sensible and natural. Further each writer undertakes a journey back through history and forward in history in order to discover a racial, gendered, and resisting presence.

Kincaid explores the consequence of travel to the region and its shaping of the experiences of Caribbean people. Her version localizes the events which had brought official West Indian history into being, thereby reducing the weighty encounter of history as disseminated by Eurocentric texts, or as lamented in West Indian literature, to an encounter between the powerful and the powerless. The victory is rendered relational, for the winner, in this case Europe, may not always occupy the victorious stage. *A Small Place*, in offering an alter/native perspective disrupts this triumphant
discourse by naming this victory in pyrrhic terms. There, Kincaid argues that the popular version of West Indian history comes about because of a tourist encounter, and that this text, like any other travel brochure, is an elaborate, and largely theatrical enterprise where the winner—the powerful—names the occasion. In transposing Columbus’s story into a context which is sensitive to cultural relativism, Kincaid allows for the enunciation of other positions and possibilities which now subvert the authenticity of the “original” tale.

Cliff as traveler through history is similarly preoccupied although she assumes a different pose as migrating witness. She journeys through written accounts and through different theoretical communities so as to present a context of resistance to various experiences of oppression and exploitation. The ease with which she travels through time and texts, her emphasis on giving women an active voice in the grand events which now constitute the official version of history affirm her agency and her power to affect the discourse of history.

Both writers become what Paul Shard in “The Art of Memory and The Liberation of History: Wilson Harris’ Witnessing of Time” defines as witness in its many playful linguistic articulations:

We can play on the notion of witness: firstly there is the writer as witnessing observer of historical events. Secondly the writer as witness for some court of historical review; thirdly, witnessing may be taken in the religious sense of giving testimony of grace and vision. At the root level there is also the old English wit- “to know”— which for the oral “counter-histories” of the enslaved and colonized also means to remember. (94-5)
However, Kincaid and Cliff each blur the definitional boundaries set up in Shard’s categorization by their own contrary manipulations of the condition of witness. In *A Small Place* and *Free Enterprise*, these writers function as both historical and legal witnesses in their testimonies to the crimes of history. Yet the epistemological stance assumed by each is narratively qualified as a vision/version which is itself partial and which is at once visionary and revisionary. This flexibility allows for the freedom of movement which comes through the occupation of the margins and for travel between contradictions and intersections as each makes cross-cultural, cross-racial, cross-gendered, or intertextual journeys. Each writer offers what Gloria Anzaldúa’s in *Borderlands, la Frontera: The New Mestiza*, observes as:

> . . .[A]nother narration of history, another resistance. One that asserts a difference yet cannot be absorbed into the pleasures of the global marketing culture. One that locates its different voice, yet will still not take a stand on the unmoving ground of a defensive fundamentalism. One that speaks its location as more than local, yet makes no claim to universality for its viewpoint of language. One that knows the border and crosses the line.(9)

**A History of Travel**

*A Small Place* begins with the exploration of the ways in which tourism in a twentieth-century context repeats earlier colonial encounters between people of different geographies, histories and cultures. Specifically, Kincaid presents tourism in the Caribbean as allowing for a re-colonization in as much the same way as historically it provided the occasion for Columbus’ imperialist project and the colonization of the ‘New World.’ Columbus had embarked on a tour of India, misread his maps and
found himself on the other side of the world. He had judged the native “Indians” he found inhabiting there, as souvenirs to be taken back to Spain, in chains. Having made what he considered a successful tour, Columbus had published his discovery and made a space for other European tourists. Now, the plundering galleons of the likes of Nelson, Rodney, Drake and Hawkins now give way to multinationally owned cruise ships such as The QE 2, the Cunard Countess and the Pacific Princess. In both instances, the encounter between tourist and native is rehearsed as a drama of conquest, coercion and appropriation. Where imperial adventurism had claimed the accessible plenitude of newly discovered lands as the possession of ‘Queen and Country,’ now capitalist expansionism responds to the packageable charm of the Caribbean as emblematic of a commodified paradise. The native now becomes part of the sun, sea and sand package marketed by the Tourist Board and his private life is repeatedly transformed into a public site wherein the tourist/visitor can stage his desire.

Jameson’s reading in Signatures of the Visible of the visual as essentially pornographic has particular applicability here. For Jameson, the act of viewing becomes an aggressive one which lays the viewed wide open to the objectifying gaze of the viewer. The viewed is re-presented as and reduced to an image of the viewer’s desire. Cast in the form of a silent object, the native exists as a site of difference where the tourist’s subjectivity is theorized within the context of lack. He, the tourist, is everything which the native is not—monied, and mobile—and cannot be. In A Small Place, Kincaid establishes a framework similar to Jameson’s pornographic paradigm where the tourist is cast as viewer/ writer, and the native as landscape/ scenery wherein
desire is narrated. Reduced to the imagistic re-presentation of the white man’s privilege, the native is in danger of being dismissed as the speechless, gaze-less subaltern. In her use of visual observation as a frame for her exposé on postcolonial Antigua, Kincaid is careful to show that observation is not confined to the tourist. The essay explores the radicalizing moment when the native responds to this constant re-enactment of her domination by taking possession of the script and inflecting it with an ideology of resistance.

Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, points to the transformational power of contact zones: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4). *A Small Place* focuses on Pratt’s “contact zone” and deconstructs “asymmetrical power dynamics” by signaling the ways in which, in the intersecting trajectories, the life of the visitor and that of the native, once culturally separate, begin to inflect and affect the habits of the other. Kincaid transforms the notion of travel as broadening to one of tourism as potentially deadening. She connects the dangers bred by travel to the ways in which travel functions as a reading whose textual construction is shaped by the ideology and politics of the reader’s location. Specifically, the meeting of tourist and native puts both at risk. The tourist is in danger of being read/misread in as much the same way as he reads/misreads the native. And the tourist is in double jeopardy for he is read by Kincaid, the exiled Antiguan and by the native Antiguans whose lives he tours.
While critical efforts to render the subaltern powerful, have sought to locate her voice, Kincaid gives her agency through the gaze. Extending the tourist metaphor, the association of travel with cameras, camcorders and other pictorial representation to the discourse of tourism in *A Small Place*, Kincaid shows the ways in which the native resists by appropriating the power implicit to the act of observation. In *Black Looks*, hooks historicizes the concept of the oppositional gaze as power, relating the ways in which the politics of slavery required that blacks be punished for looking the master in the eye. Connecting this to Foucault’s thesis on relations of power and the reproduction of domination, hooks reads the oppositional gaze as one which takes power unto itself. She goes on to argue that “in resistance struggles, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating ‘awareness’ politicizes ‘looking’ relations--one knows to look a certain way in order to resist”(116). In the theoretical space which *A Small Place* occupies, resistance similar to that defined by hooks’ oppositional gaze is the response to the belittling gaze of the tourist.

Operating within a related Foucauldian construct, Kincaid’s panoptic eye in *A Small Place* extends its critical gaze to contain the roving eye of the occidental tourist. Another level of surveillance is added, a commanding view which scans and judges both the tourist and the native. In a manner similar to nineteenth-century travel narratives, the inquisitive eye can survey the entire operation of tourism at a glance, yet remains free to focus on the minutest details. While the overarching interpretation of the tourist scene reflects the circumspective force of Kincaid’s gaze, the power of her gaze has to be itself contextualized in the location of her observation post.

235
Ultimately, the primary act of observation resides in Kincaid, the exiled writer who is at once insider and outsider, once native and now visitor to Antigua. However, the consequence of her inquisitive eye, that is, the potential reproduction rather than transformation of the power systems at play in the tourist/native encounter needs to be foregrounded in so far as the perspective of Jamaica Kincaid, the multiply located witness, may be unconsciously repeating the biases of the powerful in her rendering of events.

Here, Kincaid’s experience of migration to the United States creates in her a double vision which facilities what Carole Boyce Davies in Black Women, Writing and Identity refers to as “a praxis where the theoretical position and the criticism interacts with the lived experience”(55). Kincaid, writing for The New Yorker, establishes her intended reader as a potential tourist who imagines Antigua to be a tropical paradise. In presenting Antigua as commodified, degraded and threatening, not only is she justifying her exile from this ‘Eden’, but she is also warning against a touristic enterprise which may put her reader, the ‘wanna-be-tourist’ at risk. To become other than an armchair tourist--one who stays at home and learns about the world through the safety of books and essays like A Small Place--is to risk becoming morally reprehensible as did the earlier historical tourists. It is then Kincaid alone who is allowed to tour. She will like the latter-day Columbus, publish her findings. But from the privileged position of the original native, she will produce a more judicious report on a small place.
This rhetorical assumption of power is manifested in Kincaid's visual manipulations. Throughout the essay, Kincaid precedes each section with a nineteenth-century plate depicting slave life in the Antilles. Functioning as ironic subtexts, these etchings, like twentieth century postcards equivalents, deliberately market a pastoral, contented native, never locating the drudgery and toil which is central to this life of slavery. Europeans are not depicted in the picture and no reminders are offered of the colonial enterprise simultaneously taking place. These images, produced by and for Europeans, reproduce England/Europe's concept of itself as different from and superior to the rest of the 'uncivilized' world. Similarly, nineteenth-century travel narratives configured imperial frontiers in ways which erased European presence from the landscape being toured. Mary Louise Pratt suggests in another essay entitled "Scratches on the Face of the Country: or, What Mr. Barrow saw in the Land of the Bushmen" that:

An important consequence of the European's self-effacement in this literature is that it [was] possible to narrate the journey and 'to other' the Other while maintaining silence about the actual specific contacts going on between the European traveler and the indigenous peoples they encountered (146).

Estheticized landscapes such as these confirm the imperial project to be a civilizing and aesthetic mission; what Pratt refers to as a "benign and beautifying intervention" (Imperial Eyes, 205). Kincaid's twentieth century narrative offers these historical plates as a deconstructive gesture. The plates had not revealed the rebellious underbelly of native resistance--the unwritten history of these oppositional subjects. Kincaid's narrative will.
Similarly, Kincaid is aware of the ways in which the twentieth century tourist brochure also reduces the native to part of a danger-free, interactive landscape. In this instance, the imperialist rhetoric depends on the assiduous shifting of the frames of representation, and the deployment of photographic assurances of the European’s safe interaction with the landscape as a way of marketing the place toured. Word painting helps to create the aesthetic landscape. The earlier trope of Monarch-of-all-I-survey resurfaces in the promise of azure skies, crystal clear water, freedom from cares, and anticipation of one’s every need. This narrative of promise is sustained as the tourist brochure negotiates a comfort zone which lies between primitivism and twentieth century conveniences, between the assurances of Euro-American influences and the counter-assertion of an unspoiled, untouched paradise. Now the treasure troves which one is invited to explore refer to ‘virgin rain forests, rich flora and fauna, golden sandy beaches and duty free shops.’ The island itself acquires a similar luster. For example, Lusita Lopez Torregrosa in an article entitled “Resort Nation” in Conde Nast’s Traveler describes Antigua thus:

But Antigua--an elegant name, a languid name, an-TEE-ga--seemed at first a stranger to me, a resort nation, a postcard...roadside communities of tiny houses, some painted in postcard colors--turquoise, magenta, pink -- . . . (154)

A Small Place presents an alternative discourse to both tendentious postcard/cover stories in the disclosure of the imperialism which underwrites both ventures. Kincaid begins the essay observing the tourist, usually a white American, surveying his holiday landscape: “If you go to Antigua as a tourist this is what you will
see”(3). Dressed in his multi-cultural leisure suit, the tourist surveys this habitat, as he transforms adversity into a novelty and de-personalizes poverty into exotic backdrop. Bad roads become a vicarious thrill, the aridity of the land. “Everything’s an interesting shade of brown,” converts into the absence of rain to spoil a vacation in the sun.

That people are required to survive under conditions which in another context would readily be seen as inhumane is not an idea which comes readily to the vacationing mind. Instead the Caribbean is metonymically reduced to sunny beaches where one can escape the drudgery of “Home”. The consideration that it is home to another group of people is further obscured by travel brochures which insist that the cultural life on the island exists merely for the visitor’s entertainment. Native life is reduced to people posing in guileless wonder in front the camera’s inquisitive eye, cooking exciting meals to titillate the visitors’ palates, speaking in quaint accents, creating worthless trinkets as holiday mementos.

The intentions of those who tour the Caribbean, who read it as a edenic escape from the monotony of their own existence is repeatedly called into focus. The tourist judges himself to be superior, for he has agency derived from cultural and financial capital--this allows him mobility and access to the other/land. However, Kincaid is quick to undercut this complacency by highlighting the ways in which the tourist’s own agency, facilitated by his economic means, does in no way privy him to a meaningful or an accurate reading of the lives of those he tours:

An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist. An ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and
there to gaze at this and taste that, and it would never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just passed cannot stand you, behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness, (you do not look the way they look); the physical sight of you does not please them; you have bad manners . . . (17)

Even while the tourist attempts to penetrate that privileged space occupied by the native as accessible to the gaze his money has bought, the private life of the native promised as part of public pleasure, is never laid bare to his desiring gaze.

The notion of the powerful tourist is further undermined in Kincaid’s analysis by the fragility of its construction:

   For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. (18)

The authority which resides in the one who tours is constantly inverted. If superiority comes through the establishment of identity through difference, then when the tourist and the native becomes potentially exchangeable, the authority which resides in the one who tours is de-legitimized. His account of the experience is similarly devalued. In contrast, Kincaid, at once the one who tours and the native secures for herself the authority of a credible commentary.

Her staging of herself as a reliable witness depends on how comprehensive an account she can provide and accordingly, Kincaid’s travel narrative is rich in detail. In the second part of *A Small Place*, surveillance shifts from the tourist on a ten-day junket to the ex-patriate--the tourist who remains in the Caribbean, and to the

240
consequences of his imperial habits. David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* explores the connection between the direct domination of colonialism and the more elusive, yet more powerful force of cultural hegemony and the ways each partakes of a colonizing authority. He argues that:

> For [both] . . . it becomes a question of establishing authority through the demarcation of identity and difference. Members of the colonizing class will insist on their radical difference from the colonized as a way of legitimizing their own position in the colonial society. But at the same time they will insist paradoxically on the colonial people’s essential identity with them—both as preparation for the domestication of the colonized and as a moral and philosophical precondition for the civilizing mission. (7)

Typically what is being judged as worthy in the native is attributed to his contact with and identification with the colonizer who is, in this instance, the expatriate tourist, while any “unsavory” character traits in the native, are seen as examples of difference. Kincaid however presents a flipside to this discourse of difference. The encounter between a racial and culturally foreign minority and a materially weaker, indigenous majority initiates a threat to the civilized values of the native Antiguan. Now it is the native, endangered by the tourist, who is a casualty to imperial surrender. The exclusionary practices which the expatriate tourist indulges in are read as “unchristian. . . small-minded. . . like animals, a bit below human standards as we understood those standards to be. We felt superior to all these people.” (29) The British to whom Kincaid refers seem less English than the natives. Now, in an ironic inversion,
Kincaid renders ridiculous the long established notion of what constitutes ‘Britishness’ by showing the actions of the expatriates to be rude and uncivilized.

_A Small Place _also responds to the rhetorical strategies of debasement commonly found in earlier travel writing. Much of nineteenth-century travel literature had cautioned that in the outpost of the empire one risked losing control of the value system which had made Europe superior. In her essay, Kincaid evokes the fear of going native, of Conrad’s tourist, Kurtz, coming face to face with ‘the Horror, the horror’ of life in the tropics only to locate it within a catalogue of the atrocities committed by the visitor who overstays the tour. The visitors---starting with Columbus, the lost, ill-mannered tourist and continuing with the latter day Syrians--are the ones guilty of contamination. The tourist’s ongoing anxiety over borders and barriers, the fear of encroaching savagery to threaten his civilized boundaries, results in places like the Mill Reef Club declaring itself completely private and therefore safe. Yet on the outside, in public, Mill Reef Club is narrated as a contaminant. The native who is invited to Mill Reef Club is now the endangered one. There, he is initiated and learns new habits of corruption, “how to imprison and murder each other, how to govern badly, . . how to take the wealth of [a] country and place it in Swiss bank accounts” (34). It is those apt pupils whom Kincaid later blames for the continuing colonial culture, one which is as rapacious, exploitative and pervasive as that which it replaced after Independence.

_A Small Place _deliberately reconfigures and re-conceptualizes varied forms of interaction between colonizer and colonized into discourses of collusion. Kincaid
argues that imperialism has survived the formal ending of colonial rule and is repeated
in patterns of interaction not only as tourism but also in the administrative structures
which the colonial powers helped to create: “That bureaucracy is one of your
inventions, that Gross National Product is one of your inventions, and all the laws that
your know mysteriously favor you (36). The native is now implicated in the
imperialist project and is responsible for maintaining colonial hegemonies. But Kincaid
does not consider herself ally to this complicitous native. Instead as the self-appointed
witness/ recorder of events she is free to make strategic alliances and disassociations.

Having reversed roles and shown how it feels to be gazed upon, Kincaid’s essay
moves beyond the demonization of the tourist to problematize her own subject position.
Nancy Armstrong in “The Occidental Alice,” an essay on yet another tourist, warns
against “the new wave of culture criticism which still assures that [one] must either be
a subject who partakes in the power of gazing or else be an object who is by
implication the object of the pornographic gaze”(5). A Small Place attempts to
negotiate a space for the writer, who like the tourist is actively involved in
surveillance, and who participates in narratives of power even while identifying with
the objects of the gaze. How therefore can Kincaid be a native and a tourist in the
same instance? How can she speak with power and identify with a group categorized
as powerless without having her speech interpreted as contaminated by the privileges of
her various locations? These anxieties are manifested in her earlier dismay that the
library is allowed to fall into disrepair. On one hand, she is conscious of the ways in
which the library with its deference to an English canon functions as an interpellative
tool. Yet implicit in her reaction is the suggestion of anancyism and its subversive power. A well-stocked colonial library equips the postcolonial subject with tools to dismantle the master’s house, and provides her with a language with which to speak of the crimes of colonialism.

The myopia which she attributes to a small place, the single-mindedness with which every event is narcissistically rendered into a domestic one, the assumption that the small place is the heart of the world—is the world—is as much a condemnation of political irresponsibility, as it is a strategy of intervention with which the native of a small place transforms himself from object to subject:

In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over and then absorbed into the everyday so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small place’s tongues. For the people in a small place, every event is a domestic event; the people in a small place cannot see themselves in a larger picture, they cannot see that they might be part of a chain of something, anything. (52)

Kincaid remains ambivalent about this tactic of resistance. She is similarly condemning of the point of view which holds Emancipation to be a recent phenomenon, and does not anticipate that Emancipation may be regarded by the masses as a contemporary occurrence primarily because this interpretation would suggest that the historical atrocities of slavery continue to proliferate in a postcolonial Antigua. Further, Kincaid’s indictment of the energies spent on ‘the trivial’ and the dismissal of the important can be read within the context of her own exile and the recognition that analytical lens through which she now views the native of a small place may have been
calibrated with “first World” biases and new assumptions of superiority as she enjoys the privileges of her location as the ‘darling’ of *The New Yorker*. She seems to judge the matter-of-fact acceptance of corruption to be a sign of political naïveté:

> I cannot tell whether I was brought up by, and so come from, children, eternal innocents, or artists who have not yet found eminence in a world too stupid to understand, or lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum, or an exquisite combination of all three. (57)

But what is also operating here is the rhetorical disclaimer. In claiming to be part of the group of naïfs, Kincaid assumes an innocence which is at odds with the perspicacity of her commentary. Now Kincaid, the artist, the lunatic and the child all manage to resist interpretation, each creating a referential frame which allows them to witness the degradation yet remain apart, to be unimplicated in the surrounding chaos:

> And it is in that strange voice, then -- the voice that suggests innocence, art, lunacy-- that they say these things, pausing to take breath before this monument to rottenness, that monument to rottenness, as if they were tour guides; as if, having observed the event of tourism, they have absorbed it so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction. (68 - 69)

Where the child and the lunatic surrender agency, and accountability, Kincaid as the artist and overarching commentator is more than a dutiful tour guide. She is instead the producer of tours in her invitation to the reader to witness the native’s degradation. But the native can not be so easily dismissed for in parading in the semi-detached status of tour guide, the native manages to deflect attention from her essential self, offering up for view a public facade so that, to cite Chow in *Writing Diaspora*: “Where the colonizer undresses her, the native’s nakedness stares back at him both as the defiled image of his creation and the indifferent gaze that says, “‘There was nothing-- no
secret—to be unveiled underneath my clothes. That secret is your phantasm’ ” (52).

Tourism then becomes as much a way of seeing one’s world and making sense of one’s life as it is about making sense of another’s world. The native withholds this information from the tourist. It is Kincaid who, manipulating her ambivalent position as native and tourist, reveals this oppositional consciousness. It is she who is interested in demonstrating her power over events and narration. The native remains strategically silent.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in The Post-Colonial Reader, compare Kincaid’s narrative voice in A Small Place to that of Kipling’s half-devil half-child:

In the second person address which she employs, she also draws attention to the ways in which the texts of the imperium and the derogatory representations they promulgate were constituted as authoritative through the convenient assumption that they offer a transparent ‘window’ on an objective reality; that relations between producers and consumers, or writers and readers did not really exist and did not foster and reflect unequal colonialist power relations. By addressing the English (and by extension the contemporary western tourist) directly in this way, Kincaid draws attention not only to the textual power of representation but to the ideologies and technologies through which these were and are disseminated and rendered normative. (86)

The ways in which ‘the ideologies and technologies” have influenced Kincaid must not however be dismissed. As an Antiguan in exile, the uncertainty of the precise location of her voice may well be born of the shifting and contradictory locations she chooses to occupy.

Resistance to interpretation takes many other forms. It may appear in trade unions lobbying for social amelioration or in revolutionary figures like Maurice
Bishop. It can also take the form of escaping the representational frames which label the native as duped or defiled, for as Chow continues, “our fascination with the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures is therefore a desire to hold on to an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own “fake” experience. It is a desire for being “non-duped”, which is a not too innocent desire to seize control” (53). Finally, resistance surfaces in Kincaid’s theoretical project where she deliberately leaves herself veiled from the reader’s interpretation.

*A Small Place* ends with the juxtaposition of two visions of Antigua: That of the tourist who reads the land as unreal and the other of the reality of Antigua. The first vision imagines Antigua as a stage set, very much like that of Rochester’s reading of the Caribbean in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The unreal shades of blue, the ultra softness of the clouds, the thickness of the night all serve to reinforce it as unreal. For in denying the place reality, the tourist allows it only peripheral status. To remove it from its tourist brochure frame, to focus on its poverty, its material condition are considerations antithetical to the carefree spirit of Caribbean vacation. Differences between home and holiday site need to be constantly foregrounded so that the tourist defers the self-reflective moment which would allow critique of his subject position as an ugly intruder. The small place is seen as absent of history, a place where “there are no historical big moments, No industrial revolutions, no revolution of any kind, no Age of Anything, no world wars, no decades of turbulence balanced by decades of calm” (79), just blank blueness like an impenetrable sky.
Against this vision is set a corrective one as Kincaid interrupts the complacency of the tourist. She begins with the deconstruction of Euro-American history, one which has divorced moral goodness from material wealth, one which is guilty of reading the West Indian as part of a homogeneous group. *A Small Place* presents many natives of the Antiguan person; some corrupt and complicit; others resigned and some, like her mother ready to bring down the political house of cards if sufficiently provoked. Further, where the assumption had been that the civilized colonizer must act civilly, that commercial enterprise readily converts into moral resurgence, Kincaid re-reads the colonizing mission as one which breeds pathology—an European disease which infects the native. Appropriating the authority which the colonizer had seen as his province, Kincaid creates a counter-discourse which is larger than an inversion of the differences set up by the colonial text. Indeed what is suggested in the final pages of her essay is the sense that the history of human nature allows for a polemic other than postcolonial lamentation. History is after all a narrative which can be written from a variety of perspectives, and by a variety of players. Each remains a version.

Responding to Foucault’s claim that “Discourse transmits and produces power, that it reinforces but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (101), Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, asks, “Do the possibilities for written description and representation of other cultures extend beyond the theoretical space occupied by the Western discourse of power” (188)? *A Small Place* seems to respond by creating a space beyond binaries, a new space with no rules, no apparent privileges. Kincaid engages in a critique which is self-reflective even

248
while she constantly signals her own interest. The many parentheses in the essay speak to her lack of disinterest, the power integral to her own technique of surveillance. Her position of exile from a small place allows her a double vision which accommodates both the tourist and the native within the same referential lens—both are just human beings:

Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master’s yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings. (81)

No longer standing merely in ideological opposition, having deconstructed the colonial discourse on travel to a small place, her critical intervention opens new possibilities, new narratives of interaction and for what Suleri in The Rhetoric of English India describes as a “productive disordering of binary dichotomies” (112). For with the exchangeability of ‘native’ and ‘tourist;’ with the erasure of difference between ‘civilian’ and ‘barbarian;’ with each coming into being through the gaze of the other; there is a reduction of ‘master’ and ‘slave’ to the common denominator of ‘human being’. Finally Kincaid seems to be in agreement with Suleri’s theoretical position that “diverse ironies are too compelling to be explained away by the simply pieties that the idiom of alterity frequently cloaks” (112).

Travel to any place becomes an occasion for cultural hybridity. With shared access to the power and agency implicit to the gaze, dichotomies can be undermined, boundaries re-negotiated, imagined communities re-aligned and power rendered provisional—almost. Kincaid, the writer still wields power. Her narration of history,
to again cite Suleri “occurs to confirm the precariousness of power” (113), but for however long she may wield power, Kincaid is aware that it is inevitable for the powerful to take advantage of the powerless. She admits as much in her interview with Moira Ferguson:

It is very human to think what you see, if you see it, it is yours in some way. It has to be admitted that what they did is within the human frame. Hardly anyone has ever not done what they did. Seen the advantage and said, “You know, there are some helpless people over there and I can take advantage of but I am just not going to.” No one has ever done it. (Ferguson, 180)

**Traveling through History.**

*A Small Place* offers a stirring critique of enlightened Euro-American rationalism through the juxtaposition of a value system which encouraged barbarous exploitation of the supposedly primitive, cultureless African tradition. This is repeated in *Free Enterprise*. Only here Cliff uses a less obviously polemical form, choosing instead an intense manipulation of the novel asa talking book. *Free Enterprise* creates productive disturbances within hegemonic structures, and allows for different testimonies to be voiced. In ‘realizing’ accounts of the past which are marginal to available versions of history, Cliff creates new systems of meaning, excavating and freeing old stories --woman versions-- from phallocentric accounts.⁶

In *Free Enterprise*, Cliff approaches the notion of black women history from a perspective which, like Kincaid’s, is faithful to the recording of resistance movements. Her primary focus is on Mary Ellen Pleasant an African American entrepreneur who is committed to the free enterprise of black freedom and who uses her capital to fund that
freedom. Mary Ellen Pleasant, like Mary Shadd Carey, is a historical figure whose contribution to American history is like that of many black women in the New World silenced in the masculinist annals of history. In an interview with Merle Schwartz, Cliff explains her interest in Mary Ellen Pleasant as a project to offer another version of history, for “the official version is a cheat,” and the victories of women are never included. If indeed it is winners who name the age, then Cliff’s project is to recuperate a feminist historiography which while it may never be fully accepted as the official version, at least manages to destabilize dominant narratives.

_Free Enterprise_in a manner reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s _Beloved_, inserts the silenced memory of the unspeakable and sometimes unbearable story which constitutes African American history, into the public imagination.\(^7\) Cliff in the aforementioned interview, Cliff admits to the connectedness of her work to Morrison’s engagement with “the subject of history in its deepest sense.” Morrison, in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” advises that:

> Winging one’s way through the vise and expulsion of history becomes possible in creative encounters with that history. Nothing, in those encounters, is safe, or should be. Safety is the focus of power as well as the protection from it, as the uses to which masks and myths are out in Afro-American culture remind us. (395)

Cliff also free falls through history in her chronicle of the life of a black resister.

Weaving the mythical, the magical, and the submerged, she reshapes the nature of truth in ways which links her to the current theoretical activities of diasporic women. Cliff begins with an interrogation of the dominant discourse which constitutes learnt history:

> The official version has been printed bound and gagged, resides in schools, libraries, the majority unconscious. Serves the common good.
Does not cause trouble. Walks across tapestries, the television screen. Does not give aid and comfort the enemy. Is the stuff of convocations, colloquia; is substantiated—like the host—in dissertations. (16)

Mary Ellen’s story told to the fictive Annie Christmas through a series of letters provide both a written and oral record of history, each form a reinforcing of the other so as to guarantee that in the absence of written records so often privileged as official history, another version—the ‘talking book’—is available: “Books are fragile things. . .what they contain can easily be lost. We must become talking books; talk it on, like the African, children. Talk it on.” (211).

Fox-Genovese’s study of strategies of resistance employed by slave women in the United States, offers an interesting entry into an analysis of the ways in which resistance is theorized in Free Enterprise. Fox-Genovese details the ways in which the dominant ideology of nineteenth-century patriarchal America sought to confine women to households and to limit their skill training to activities which would keep them within domestic confines. While males slaves were allowed to learn a trade and by extension had an opportunity to sell their labor outside the plantation, female slaves were afforded no such income-earning possibilities nor did they have similar access to travel:

The gender relations and norms of white society made it unlikely that female slaves would be trained for most of the specialized crafts or hired out for jobs that would provide them with an excuse for mobility. Female slaves were unlikely to become carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, or coopers or to acquire skills in comparable specialized crafts that would lead them to be hired around. . . Even those female slaves who receive specialized training, as cooks or seamstresses for example, would be expected to remain not merely within the plantation households but largely within houses. Since female slaves like white women were
not expected to be abroad unaccompanied, they enjoyed far fewer opportunities for successful flight unless they dressed as men. (155)

Within these historical confines, Cliff offers a narrative which details the ways in which women like Mary Ellen Pleasant circumvented these limitations. Mary Ellen Pleasant travels across the country in jockey’s silk, wields her mother’s hand-wrought revolver with great dexterity, and passes for an itinerant blacksmith. While the protagonist is a free women, she is sufficiently restrained by social mores which require that she limit her enterprise to domestic activities. Doubly bound by gender and racial constraints she nonetheless succeeds in the covert manipulation of these expectations. In public view, she conforms:

She began her empire building by embodying Mammydom, as much as she grated against the word, the notion, taking care of the guests in her hotels, washing their linen in her laundries, satisfying them in her restaurants.
To further quell any unease that she was stepping across, over and through, Mary Ellen Pleasant dressed as a dignified, unobtrusive housekeeper, no handkerchief head, but a black alpaca dress, white apron, lace cap. (105)

While she plays the convivial mammy, committed to instances of service and servitude, Mary Ellen Pleasant in private also engages in male-defined enterprise in her activities as “a successful hotel keeper in San Francisco,” “entrepreneur and woman of property,” “investor in the opening of the West.” Her mobility and self reliance are at odds with the then current ideals of true womanhood and the socialization into male dependency. While the source of her income comes from her late husband and her dead father, Mary Pleasant’s prudent financial wizardry ensures the growth of this
income and its deployment in funding revolts such as John Brown’s in 1859. The later absence of a husband allows Mary Ellen an escape from gender determinations and a freedom from her biology. Whereas much of African American history details resistance primarily in contexts of motherhood and reproduction, Cliff lodges Mary Ellen Pleasant within the alternative, subversive and still under-documented historical tradition of ex-slave women like Harriet Tubman and portrays her as an efficient conductor who uses her hotels as safe houses in the underground railroad.

Cliff’s rewriting of a feminist history is contextualized in her conversation with other theorizings of black feminisms. In her insertion of Mary Ellen Pleasant into the tapestry of nineteenth-century history, she is careful to embroider her involvement in the ‘upliftment of the race’ alongside the activities of a community of women, such as Frances Harper and Mary Shadd Carey, women whose activism took different shapes but who shared the same devotion to the freedom of Black Americans. In so doing Cliff steers the reader away from the danger of reading Mary Ellen Pleasant as an anomaly. Further the debate between Annie Christmas and Frances Harper on the role of ‘untalented nine tenths’ in the movement highlights the differing roles which black women may occupy in the liberation movement and warns against the easy temptation of universalizing the contribution of nineteenth-century activists.

Positionality remains key, and in this respect, Cliff seems in agreement with the mission statement which Adrienne Rich offers in Blood, Bread and Poetry:

Feminist history charges us as women, to know the past in order to consider what we want to conserve and what we want not to repeat or continue. To see patterns, corrections, which the false assimilation of liberal humanism obscures. To draw strength: Memory is nutriment,
and seeds stored for centuries can still germinate. As differentiated from women’s history, feminist history does not perpetuate the mainstream by simply making the mainstream appear more inclusive. It is not simply contributory; it demands that we turn questions upside down, that we ask women’s questions where they have not been asked before. Feminist history is not history about women only. It looks afresh at what men have done and how they have behaved not only towards women but towards each other and the natural world. (146)

While *Free Enterprise* provides a historical record of the public actions of men, it inserts in the margin of those records the domestic/private activities of women. John Brown’s Revolt is footnoted with Mary Ellen’s monetary and political involvement; John Wilkes Booth’s escape is postscripted with Scheherezade’s holding his waiting horse and Augustus Saint Gaudins’ civil war memorial is supported by the photographic efforts of Clover Hooper Adams. These marginal events constitute the focus of the novel and ultimately what is presented is a version of history which displaces the center with accounts of the activity on the margin.

Echoing Rich’s insistence that feminist history must move beyond the mere inversion of differences, Cliff uses *Free Enterprise* to discuss relationships between women in ways which are attentive to the controversy evoked in Barbara Smith’s ground breaking essay, “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism” where Smith theorizes the relationship between Nel and Sula in Toni Morrison’s *Sula* as woman identified and therefore lesbian. Cliff’s own entry into that conversation, while it is respectful of Smith’s woman-identified perception, reconfigures the lesbian connections. Accepting Smith’s manifesto that “A Black Feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucial
interlocking factors in the work of black women writers is an absolute necessity (412), Cliff’s own engagement with a woman-identified paradigm, seeks to explore the ways in which the term “lesbian” is nuanced by the particularities of its racial and social context, thereby releasing it from the sexual moorings which had hitherto confined it. She does so by contrasting two female friendships in Free Enterprise: that between Mary Ellen Pleasant and Annie Christmas, and the other between Alice Hooper and her cousin Marian Clover Hooper Adams. Each relationship offers sustenance, although in the case of the latter white partnership, Alice and Clover are sufficiently restricted by their particular social locations that they submit to a conditioning which requires a heterosexual union rather than a singular commitment to each other.

Adrienne Rich in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence” argues that heterosexuality is not a preference at all, but is instead a way of life which is “imposed, managed, organized, propagated and maintained by force . . . and false consciousness” (648). Cliff’s segue on Alice’s capitulation to the safety of essentialist sexuality begins from a similar position and is extended to show the ways in which education imprisons rather than liberates Alice. “Reading releases her imagination” (83) and the offspring of that mind is a potentially lesbian Alice. The rabbit hole into which this reading Alice falls transforms into red-lined passages which fork into “insane asylums for white women” or to an isolated “country house on a hill, where she plays chess with an old queen or reads sapphic fragments from a book where the artist had portrayed the lesbian poet in empire style, curls plied high breast trapped by Napoleonic restraint”(84). Alice in her fear of a woman-centered existence is a
still-born lesbian. In Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers . . . Lilian Faderman’s
description of race and class based nineteenth-century female friendships as spiritually
uplifting, passionate and useful in unlocking creativity has only partial utility here.
Passionate though their relationship is, Alice and Clover seem to decide that to commit
more fully to it, to immerse themselves in an experience which is often coyly coded as
“becoming real,” would mean transmuting the emerging passions into the much
malignated and forbidden sexual arena.

Female desire remains shackled to sexuality. The nurturing love which Alice
and Clover share is never allowed to develop into an erotic bond, and I use erotic here
in the sense which Audre Lorde employs it in Sister Outsider to mean: “. . . [The]
assertion of the life force of women, of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge
and the use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing,
our loving, our work, our lives” (55). Inspite of the closeness which exists between
the two women, each seems to lack the creative sustenance which engagement with the
erotic engenders. Clover’s suicide at the end of the novel and Alice’s lonely looking-
glass peregrinations in her attic-like room mark the absence of fulfillment and the
psychic distance in their friendship. Clover’ admits to Alice: “I have an overwhelming
desire to do the forbidden thing, to meet myself. I must not” (171). Her ambiguous
location on a bed in a darkly shaded room prompts one to inquire as to whether the self
she wishes to engage with is a sexual one, or to link the frustration of that discovery
with the pathological categorization of female desire. Insanity and suicide become a
necessary condition to Clover’s narrow self-classification.
Clover feels fragmented, unable to define herself as female, as three dimensional and as real. She believes she can achieve wholeness in the actualization of Alice’s dream to go West, but is stymied in social paralysis. “I have a need to move and cannot. I am land locked” (167). Maternity can not offer the necessary palliative. The freedom to pursue a career of one’s choice, unrestricted by the limitations of gender, can be achieved as in the case of Mary Walker the union surgeon who “passed for a man during the war and who after the war waged a long campaign in Washington to allow women to wear trousers. Abandonment of the conventions dictating womanhood and striking out for a genderless existence are staged as possibilities. Yet there is a price to be paid for falling outside the dictates of true womanhood. Indeed, Alice’s fascination with Dr. Walker is muted by the equation of assertiveness and freedom with masculinity. To be female is to be contained within the domestic sphere and while Alice is attracted to Dr. Walker’s chameleon gender identity, she is sufficiently socialized into necessary heterosexuality to link such behavior with deviance or pathology.

In her theorizing of sexuality, Cliff contextualizes the energies devoted to defining what constitutes male and female behavior, and male and female work, and explores the ways in which race and class locations necessarily alter these perceptions. In the instance of Mary Ellen Pleasant and Annie Christmas, their devotion to a political cause does not allow them the luxury of debating what constitutes woman work. Often seen clad in men’s attire [what Mary Ellen refers to as guise de guere], they need not worry about appearing strange or unfeminine, for already their race has
moved them outside the conventions of true womanhood. Cliff here seems to be in dialogue with Hazel Carby’s own reconstruction of black womanhood in the nineteenth century where Carby insists that:

Black Women . . . had to define a discourse of womanhood which would not only redress their exclusion from the ideology of true womanhood but as a consequence of their exclusion would also rescue their bodies from an association with illicit sexuality. (32)

The muted lesbian desire which filters through the letters of Alice to Clover is transmuted to lesbian love in the sense which Audre Lorde used it in Zami; A New Spelling Of My Name, that is the relationship between powerful and woman-oriented women. Cliff reconfigures female friendships in ways which reflect the particulars of race and culture, an issue which remains un-theorized in Faderman’s analysis of female friendships. The gendering of gallantry which the white women engage in is markedly absent from Mary Ellen’s friendship with Annie Christmas. Mary Ellen’s admission to Annie that: “You are to me like an old lover” does not depend on the modifier “don’t be shocked. I mean you know me very well and can read between the lines” (137). Their zami relationship allows for a rich friendship to exist between the two women, one in which Mary Ellen nurtures Annie and makes her witness to her life-story.

The political activism which both groups of women share allows for a comparison between Alice and Mary Ellen. But in the activities of the former, Cliff presents Alice as never moving beyond a passive aversion to the social ills being perpetrated against people of color. Alice’s request that Mary Ellen explain Turner’s
painting speaks to her recognition of the pernicious wrongs of slavery even while this awareness does not preclude Alice from the complicitousness of that enterprise.

Though she is not responsible for the direct purchase of the painting, Alice chooses to have it hung in her house. Her attitude to capital amassed no doubt through slavery is markedly different from Mary Ellen’s. Alice sees capital as something to divorce self from the responsibility of and accountability for. She enjoys the privileges it provides even as she disclaims:

The responsibility of capital weighs on me. Too many New England fortunes-- as you need not be reminded--rest on the enterprise of slavery in one way or another. I have tried as much as possible to separate myself from any profit which by any filament however slender have been linked to the trade. (77)

She is however, cognizant of the underlying hypocrisy of her claim, tacitly admitting that her race and class bonds her to the enterprise of capitalism and slavery and the impossibility of ever relinquishing invisible privilege.

Mary Ellen’s inquiry “Can you accept, nay believe in the deepest part of yourself the full humanity of Africa”(79)? is generated by her perception that Alice can never have an answer to that question. Cliff uses this occasion to problematize white female involvement in anti-slavery cause. Alice, in looking at the picture of slaves being thrown overboard, has the luxury of generalized concern about the ways in which slavery has damaged the white race as well as the African. She is safe in her echoing of the popular anti-slavery argument that the moral character of the white American was being undermined by their involvement in such a pernicious unchristian enterprise. Thus protected, her social concern allows Alice to backdrop the immediacy of
drowning slaves, sacrificed to capitalist pragmatism and Turner’s artistic
sensationalism. In her imaginative traveling she is not responsible for the scene toured,
much like Kincaid’s twentieth-century tourist.

The aesthetic distance which Alice creates as she views the painting is similar to
that maintained by Ruskin in his description of the painting of Turner’s sea as the
noblest ever painting. With unintentional irony Ruskin evokes the apocalyptic to
describe the terrible beauty of that sublime seascape:

Purple and blue, the lurid shadow of the hollow breakers are cast upon
the mist on the right, which gather cold and low, advancing like the
shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of
the sea, its thin masks written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded in
condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and
mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast along the desolate
heave of the sepulchral waves incarnadines the multitudinous sea. (571-2)

Alice too conjures up the apocalypotic in her association of the “white flash of the
typhoon at the center of the work, surely comparable in foreboding and whiteness to
Melville’s white whale or Coleridge’s albatross . . .” (78).

In the instance of Mary Ellen’s perusal of the painting, her political
commitment affords her no such luxury. Turner’s work resurrects the memory of the
sea as ambivalent historical highway and graveyard, space of loss and place of
dislocation. Unlike Alice or Ruskin, there is no operating aesthetic sensibility to
divorce beauty from moral accountability. The historical slaveship, The Zong and its
discarded cargo of drowning slaves represents the middle passage experience of loss
and void which her father in his hopeful H.M.S. Daedalus attempts to retextualize by
his smuggling of slaves to the freedom of Cuttyhank Island, Martha’s Vineyard:

“While you can focus on the background of Turner’s painting, I cannot tear my eyes from the foreground. It is who we are” (80). Mary Ellen, like Cliff, is concerned with historiography, the minutiae which is so often overlooked in the written records and which are nonetheless crucial to any accounting of events. The details of individual destruction so conveniently left out of Turner’s painting constitutes the body of history for the offspring of these lost slaves. This is what needs foregrounding.

Alice’s self-reflexivity affords Cliff a way out of the demonization of the white woman and proves the short-sightedness of the claim made by Frederick Aldama and Cybele Knowles in their review of Free Enterprise that “Cliff’s white characters . . . are treated to an unmixed, sneering condescension that leaves them flat and uninteresting as cardboard cutouts” (163). Rather, Cliff shows Alice to be a product of a certain configuration of experiences. As a single, white female of independent means, Alice, reminiscent of a later day Virginia Woolf, cannot help who she is. Her subjectivity continues to be determined by her social reality. Like Turner’s drowning brown limbs, her socialization surfaces as a counterpoint to her wished-for liberalism:

   Suddenly. Out of nowhere, everywhere, pushing aside the arms and legs and ghosts of an ocean floor, the shades of the dining table, Mrs. Pleasant’s abrupt, unpleasant departure, “Mammy” careened in her brain, in a contre coup. Alone, she reddened, burning. She tried to quell the word. “Mammy!” screamed once more. Then, having bested her, it was gone. (83)

Alice’s unbidden association of Mary Ellen with “mammy” has interesting reverberations.10 Her earlier pleas for Mary Ellen to explain the painting, to be the
educating authority, sets up a scenario of nurturing and mentoring, the mock maternal one which like the mammy relationships in slavery forced black women to parent without authority. Cliff uses this scene as a way into critiquing feminist historiography which claimed a sisterhood between black and white women. Ultimately the specter of mammydom surfaces to remind of the race-defined boundaries separating Mary Ellen from Alice and Clover and the historical circumstances which limit political alliance between white women and women of color. Alice’s awareness of the void is nonetheless staged as a sign of progress.

In theorizing political activism, Cliff foregrounds female mobility and agency and the ways in which race and gender intersect with class in order to act as containment fields. Clover and Alice, chaperoned by Patrick, are inhibited in their range of free travel and are reduced to voyeurism. They live vicariously through other women who have mobility, and who in traveling have witnessed history. Like Scheherezade in the alley, who is accidentally complicitous in the assassination of President Lincoln, to be itinerant is to participate in history. Yet this is not without its dangers, because to be itinerant is also to be homeless and potentially a casualty of history. Scheherezade’s bi-racial origins transforms her into the exotic mulatto even while her accounts of her personal history point to the tragic dispossess which comes when the appeal of her exoticism wanes and she quickly loses her place in the library. Scheherezade is demoted to Sally the scullery maid whose white ancestry cannot save her from the pit of slavery. Further, while Alice and Clover romanticize the freedom which Scheherezade embodies, their yearning never moves them beyond
spectatorship, the touring of other people lives. In a manner similar to the tourist in Kincaid’s *A Small Place*, Alice imagines the West as the embodiment of her fantasies of freedom and dreams of:

. . . female couples, the most daring of pairs, dashing in their wide brimmed hats, friends or cousins traveling with the wagon trains. Women homesteading in the middle of nowhere, say a plain in Nebraska, no beginning and no end in sight, building from the ground up. Planting a cornfield. Raising a milk cow. Gathering eggs and slaughtering hogs. Shooting the eyes out of a rattle snake. (97)

The romanticism implicit to this vision is mocked in Cliff’s portrayal of the nervousness which Clover and Alice feel as they watch Scheherezade prepare her dinner “a mixture that smelled strongly of game something wild” (86), fearing that she would invite them to partake in her meal, they with their picnic basket prepared by a chef and served by a factotum. Again, like the tourist in *A Small Place*, Clover and Alice, the intruders, are as much at risk as they have put Scheherezade’s life at risk. As they tour Scheherezade’s life, casting her in the role of *objet de l’histoire*, Alice and Clover never realize how limited access they are permitted to that life for they have chosen instead to remain dreadfully attached to earl gray tea, Turner paintings and a room of one’s own where they can substitute fantasy for living . . . for being real. Clover and Alice can not perform outside of their interpellation. It is their commitment to their social class, to the cultural creation of what constitutes white womanhood which makes them immobile.

In contrast, it is Annie’s social class which prompts her to flight, to escape a life of privilege in the Caribbean for activism on the American mainland. Her escape
westward is the materialization of Alice’s still-born wish to strike out West for independence. Born “Regina with a long ‘I,’” and renamed Annie Christmas after a legendary African American Cleopatraesque character, Annie becomes involved in the freedom movement in the United States because her social position in the Caribbean has stymied her from taking action there. Annie makes a race choice similar to that made by Iola Leroy, Harper’s light-skinned Christian octoroon and Cliff dramatizes the issue of racial alignment in Annie’s act of physically blackens her skin so as to remove herself from privilege. Cliff’s own fairness, her ability to pass for white, narrated as a constant anxiety in Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise, is gently threaded within Free Enterprise as autobiography enriches the already densely intertextual narrative.

In her depiction of Regina/Annie Christmas as one of les gens inconnus, Cliff is creating yet another resistance trope. Jonkonnu, a Caribbean art form which bears recognizable traces of both Africa and Europe, is linked to the dubiousness of Annie’s racial origin and her mother’s guerrilla manipulations of her gens inconnus status. Cliff creates an imaginative bridge to link the masquerade which the jonkonnu dancer employs, to the layered masking which both Regina and her mother resort to. Les gens inconnus, literally translated to mean unknown people, represents the socio-racial status of Annie, used here in the sense of unknown people whose racial composition never betray the full story of their African past. Able to pass for white, their shifting identifications make les gens inconnus both complicitous and subversive, mistress and
slave, depending on the particular tide of fortune, or, as dramatized in Annie's case, on individual agency.

Cliff's casts Annie in the mold of the tragic mulatto who populated much of nineteenth-century African American literature. In becoming an agent of her own future, Annie is the antithesis of these tragic heroines. She is no passive victim to historical circumstances, nor is she unaware of her mixed racial ancestry, the African presence. Her *gens inconnus* roots keep interrupting the public staging of her witness: "African seeping into the parlance of the better class: le gens inconnus trying to trick it into Jonkonnu" (8). These are the forces which shape the rebellion in Annie, and which move her to escape into foreign resistance. Cliff renders the phrase *les gens inconnus* explicative of the willful masking which Annie is later to assume as part of her resistance activities in the United States. Where in the Caribbean, her masking had required the privileging of her white ancestry, in the United States, blackener carefully applied to her light skin create an alternative mask out of which her other ancestors speak. She now "passes" for the black woman she really is.

Cheryl Ryman in "Jonkonnu: A Neo-African form," explains that "mask and masquerade are often linked to secret societies and to the embodiment of the ancestors and deities as a means of socialization and social control" (13). Ryman connects the masquerade tradition with resistance efforts in the New World:

> It was out of this milieu that Africans affirmed their strength and ability to survive. Some of them took to the hills and pursued a course of relentless aggression, while others remained on the plantation to protest largely through mask and symbol. (19)
In deploying Jonkonnu as an enabling trope, Cliff complicates Ryman’s analysis and invests in Jonkonnu the duality of resistance through active aggression and the covert guerrilla activity of mask and symbol. Regina is a soldier to one movement her mother recruit to another. In passing for white, Regina’s mother exposes the constuctedness of race and in so doing undermines racial, and by implication, social categories. The history which she fashions for herself is one which “branched into swashbucklers, riders on the Spanish Main, swordsmen, petty nobility, an aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington . . . a female pirate who begged off execution due to motherhood . . .” (20). While “the guineaman, the driver, the cane cutter, the furious maroon” (20), are excluded from the public version of her family history, Regina’s unnamed mother (literally le gens inconnu) is quietly devoted to her African past. The snuffbox wrapped in Kente cloth which she bequeaths her daughter reveals an awareness Europe’s conquistadorial role in her past and her subversive gesture to redress the wound of the past, warning Regina to remember her origins and her people:

That she’d not forgotten. One of her favorite tales dangling from her mother’s family tree. Thinking of it now, she realized again that there had been a spark amidst the befuddlement, in the crazy quilt of a mother she’d had. (23)

Uncomfortable with the complicity which contours her mother’s ways of empowering her dubious racial heritage by keeping her African roots hidden, her decision to take advantage of the social class to which her carefully cultivated skin color privileged her, Annie reads whiteness as a dead, oppressive center. Fleeing from her mother’s public erasure of her African roots, from deliberately lavish balls which proclaim their racial
status (13), from “too many nights on the slave-pieced coverlet, with the promise of many more” (11), Annie wages war on another terrain, fighting what she calls “someone else’s fight” rather than “on [her] island, burning the great houses to the ground, under [her] mother’s nose, [her] father’s hegemony” (199). In both instances the durability of the African experience is suggested in the ways in which that African past permeates the white spaces which each woman creates to protect her multiple locations:

And her hair snaked with the least encouragement. . . . When her hair snaked, her mother said it was going back to Africa. “Look like you going home, pickney,” she said. And the swashbucklers and petty nobility fell away. Then: “Tell no one I said that, ma fille,” speaking out of her gens inconnu mouth. If you don’t know the river, its environs, the snake bird could fool you. (23)

Annie’s choice to “retire” to the banks of the Mississippi surrounded by bottle bearing trees is not incidental nor is it what Fredrick Adama and Cybele Knowles dismiss as the actions of “reclusive, introspective, and divided woman dealing in the echoes of the past on the stories of the Mississippi behind a grove of trees”(163). Cliff strategically locates her protagonist within the literal and metaphorical interstices of freedom and of slavery so as to evoke the labyrinthine and often contradictory connections which constitute New World history. The Mississippi river, while it can be a means of traveling to freedom is also a conduit used by the Klux Klux Klan men “shrouded all in white, spotless sheets ironed as only a wife can iron”(30). Geographically, the Mississippi helps to connect the Caribbean, South America, and The United States and
affords Cliff the opportunity to stylistically render the Mississippi into part of what

Benítez-Rojo describes as a metarchipelago where:

The maritime flows . . . extends from the mouth of the Amazon to the Mississippi delta that the north coast of South and Central America, the old Arawak-Carib bridge and part of the United States . . . (24)

Benítez-Rojo goes on to link this maritime flow to “the migratory flow of the Antilleans in search of the center of their Caribbeaness” (25). It is this connection which Cliff exploits. Annie’s migration stems from the realization that “she was not strong enough to resist on home ground; it overwhelmed her” (70). To relocate is not to abandon the struggle merely to shift its locale. Annie’s resistance takes the form of covert participation in Mary Ellen’s free enterprise. Later when the venture fails because John Brown had seized the wrong day, Annie becomes the collector of stories, functioning as the audience for the yet unwritten and just now spoken discourse of the dominated. Cliff presents this new activity as one which is as necessary and as subversive as Annie’s early military participation.

The many bottles with their babel scents are the material culture which tell their own stories of her history:


Annie’s home appears ghostly, very much like places frequented by old spooks and witches. As collector and keeper of the memories of others she becomes part of the spirit of the dead, a medium who connects past to the present. Her project like Cliff, is
to recover lost historical moments. The metal strong box with which Annie is
preoccupied contains pieces of forgotten history which can only be reassembled
through the act of memory and imagination. While Annie’s contribution to the struggle
lacks the force of Mary Ellen Pleasant’s, it is no less valid in spite of the self-
deprecating account of her witnessing:

I had come to this country and this cause seeking my own redemption
which was a selfish motive. Of course I believed in destroying the
Institution but I put myself first.
Mary Ellen... was a liberator by marriage and by inheritance. I on the
other hand, walked by myself, out of the place where I was raised, and
across a foreign landscape where, in my mother’s words, I should not
business.... (198).

Both *A Small Place* and *Free Enterprise* ignore the admonition that one “should
not business.” In these works, colonial history is transformed into a specious fiction
which had long ago become real because it had repeatedly been molded into a credible
narrative. Deliberately, Kincaid and Cliff do not repeat these popular narratives
because to do so is to reinforce its power. Instead they offer their versions, transposed
over the other version, much in the style of “talk over” which as O’Callaghan
describes in *Woman Version* has the power to transform through “recontextualization
[so as] to create a unique literary entity” (11). Conscious of the power of narrative to
consolidate stereotypes, they each mark off their accounts of history as an
individualistic activity which is always already subjective. Neither writer offers her
version within the parameters of historical accuracy as defined by European habits of
scholarship. To do so would be to participate in the validation of Europe’s own
ontological strategies, the basis of which depended on Columbus’ account of a
successful tour of a New World. Indeed it had been Columbus’s victorious discovery
which had proved Europe’s power, the activity of one man proving the greatness of
nations. Contrastingly, Cliff and Kincaid are not out to prove the greatness of the West
Indian in their alternative accounts. Their enterprise is personal. Having assumed the
right to speak, Kincaid and Cliff choose to do so in various contexts. History functions
for both as an old text which is looked upon with new eyes, eyes which are able to
discern history’s context and its subtext, eyes which are sensitive to its epistemological
biases, eyes which confirm the Ibo proverb in Arrow of God that: “The world is like a
mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.”
1Here I use ‘native’ to mean ‘Antiguan’ --and the Antiguan in this instance can be either Jamaica Kincaid, the self-determined exile or the population of Antigua. Although throughout A Small Place, Kincaid maintains a neutrality of voice, where the ‘you’ to whom she refers is the tourist and the ‘them’ the Antiguans, the observer/participant observer distinction is erased by her establishing ancestry with the islanders and by her inclusion of self as victim of a colonizing process.

2Here I am referring to postcolonial discourse and the ways in which Spivak’s essay, “Can The Subaltern Speak” has generated a stream of articulations on the necessary negotiations which the postcolonial subject, Spivak included, must undergo to arrive at empowerment.

3Selwyn Cudjoe in an earlier interview indicates that Kincaid was reading Resistance and The Caribbean Novel at the time when she was writing A Small Place. By her own admissions her political consciousness has deepened. In a later interview she insists: “The development of my political consciousness and my ability to express it is really what you see. . .And by the time I wrote A Small Place, something had really matured. It gets more and more so. . .I really understood a lot more than I did” (Ferguson, 1994).

4 An example of this can be found in Lady Nugent’s Journal (18). The ways in which Lady Nugent narrates her travels through the Jamaican countryside is linked not so much to the desire to learn about new places but as part of an undertaking which has at its core, territorial surveillance and administrative control. However, Lady Nugent is very much the accidental tourist who travels because she is required to do so as governor General’s wife. Her preference for the safety of her domestic space is an interesting counterpoint to the freedom of movement which Mary Ellen Pleasant, a nineteenth century black woman, creates for herself in Free Enterprise.

5 Recently, to maintain the illusion that one is the first to set foot in the undiscovered country’, tourist brochures seduce with the promise of secluded resorts where one is far from the madding tourist crowds. Books like Undiscovered Islands in the Caribbean (Third Ed.) promise a Caribbean vacation which offers “an escape to seemingly bygone eras” where the beaches are breathtaking and frequently empty, the natives friendly and the accommodation well priced. See Also Frommers Comprehensive Guide: Caribbean’95, where Antigua is described thus “From a poverty-stricken sugar island, Antigua has risen to become a twentieth century vacation haven. American millionaires seeking British serenity under a tropical sun turned Antigua into a citadel of elegance” (260).

6Core to these works are anxieties about representation, what Paul Gilroy in The Black Atlantic refers to as, “a common degree of discomfort with the novel and a shared
anxiety about its utility as a resource in the social processes that govern the re-making and conservation of historical memory. (218-9). Sherley Ann Williams in *Dessa Rose* focuses on the problematics integral to competing narratives of historical re-membering. Adam Nehemiah’s busy transcription of Dessa’s story, his eagerness to reduce her life to rational notes on white paper—material for his book, *The Roots of Rebellion in the Slave Population and the Means of Eradicating Them*, is juxtaposed against the contradictory narrative inscribe on Dessa body, “sealed in the scars between her legs” (59-60). At the end of the novel it is Dessa’s version of History which prevails, and Nehemiah’s is reduced to an illegible, dislocated and ultimately dismissable attempt at recording.

Similarly in *Beloved*, Morrison problematizes the relationship between the rational enlightened thought which defined early American society and the atrocities perpetrated in the name of that modernity. Schoolteacher’s ruthless cataloguing of Sethe’s body parts relates intimately to her later act of abomination—her sacrifice of Beloved. Sethe chooses to take her daughter’s life rather than relinquish her to Schoolteacher because she too is working within the established logic that one have ownership of the lives of other human beings. The relationship between these two acts is underscored in Morrison’s postmodern rendering of Sethe/Margaret Garner’s act. The historical and the historiographic are placed alongside each other, each version a partial, ambiguous one. The reading generated in both the fictional and historical account is a conditional one which emerges out of the pieced together mosaic of facts, suppositions and speculation.

7 Cliff in an interview with Merle Schwartz admits to the connectedness of her work to Morrison’s engagement with “the subject of history in its deepest sense”. Indeed there are many similarities between the two novels. Both create narratives from the lives of real historical characters. Cliff and Morrison faithfull to Frederic Jameson’s dictum “always historicise” takes this one step further to “pass on the story”. Stylistically each writer in the fictional rendering of her story uses fragments, other voices which speak to and comment on each other. However, while in *Beloved* the voices chorally evoke a communal rendering of the event in *Free Enterprise* there is instead a sense of a gendered debate.

8 I use “zami” here in the Caribbean sense of *Les amis*, meaning the deep, supportive friendships which women share. Often times these women would be described their friends as *macomere*, a kwéyol [fr. patois] word which literally translates as “my co-mother” and suggests comradeship and other mothering. This afro-centric concept of female friendship is evoked by Audre Lorde in *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, to describe her coming to female lesbian self-hood. Alice Walker’s definition of “*Womanist*” in *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens* also echoes this notion of zami: “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually” (xi). Walker has however, taken umbrage with the word “lesbian” and its Greek etymology, arguing that not only do the activities of black women loving each other predate “Sappho’s residency
on the isle of Lesbos” but that it is a move towards wholeness which has an implicit political character.

In choosing to evoke this sense of zami to describe the friendship between Mary Ellen Pleasant and Annie Christmas, I am problematizing the ways definitions are colored by their cultural contexts and Cliff’s own interrogation of definitional absoluteness and pigeon-holing. Free Enterprise is as much about transgressing those sexual boundaries as it is about re-reading racial and material boundaries.

9 Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying. Typhon Coming On (The Slave Ship). Painting done by J.M.W. Turner, exhibited in 1840 in the Royal Academy. Oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm. While Alice cites Turner as an abolitionist, he never identified himself as such and his painting has been viewed as merely responsive to current event rather than as a condemnation of practice of slavery. Incidentally slavery was abolished in the British West Indies three years after Turner’s painting was displayed.

10 I am reminded here of Dessa Rose. In the meeting of Rufel and Dessa, Sherley Anne Williams presents the problematic implications of such a perspective. Williams presents Rufel’s relationship with her mammy and shows how inspite of her deep love for her mammy, Rufel never perceives that she has a name and a life outside of the plantation. When Dessa speaks of her Mammy meaning her mother, Rufel assumes that they are referring to the same person.
CONCLUSION

Infinite Chronicles of The Word and The World

"Jack mandora me no choose none."

"Jack mandora me no choose none" is part of the story-telling process in Jamaica. Loosely translated the phrase means "I have not chosen the shape this story has assumed nor am I responsible for its educational and entertainment value." Similar to the final "Kwik! Kwik! as explained in the Introduction, "Jack mandora me no choose none" functions as a deferment of authorship for the tale told. The storyteller’s rhetorical intention is to cast self as merely the channel through which the word passes. The audience, in an act of empowerment, brings the storyteller to voice, and is ultimately responsible for the story. Without an audience, the story is lost in silence. Given my assessment of the ways in which Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid are making themselves at home in the West Indies in particular and the Western world in general, my choice of this form of closure as a part of the conclusion is strategic. Not only is it part of the oral structure which I earlier established as a framing device which both Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid use, it also problematizes the relationship between speaker/writer and the community of listeners/readers.

Indeed, while Cliff and Kincaid have both told stories of themselves, their postures as storytellers allow for the audience’s varied interpretations of their rhetorical
performances. The degree of comfort which they have achieved in their narrations of the self, the ways in which each woman writer has made herself at home in the role of raconteur, shapes the listener’s response. But Cliff and Kincaid are also the subjects of these stories and accordingly participate in the wiliness of folk heroes such as Ti Jean and Brer Anancy. In the simultaneous occupation of the space of character and narrator, the artfulness of the raconteur merges with the cunning of the folk protagonist and the resultant impenetrability accordingly provokes new questions. Specifically, have Cliff and Kincaid found homes for their identities? Where are these homes and what shapes do they assume? While these writers have made themselves at home in the West Indies, how final is that self and is it the same self which is constructed in the West? Finally are they at home in those homes? This volley of questions is very much in the spirit of West Indian folk tales where at the end of the story, the listener remains curious as to the eventual fate of the protagonist. In Kwik! Kwak! contexts, the reiteration of the tale on another occasion serves to answer some of these questions. So too must readers, having been sensitized to the process of a never-ending story, await Cliff’s and Kincaid’s future narratives of unraveling and reconstructed identities and the reconstitution of places called home.

The self which each writer has fashioned ultimately resists full interpretation. While Cliff and Kincaid are deliberately establishing themselves as possessing authority and have shown in their writings the various ways in which that authority is authenticated, they are yet to reveal the purposes to which this agency is enacted. This
“undoing” of agency returns the reader to the inscrutability of the traditional raconteur. Further, while narrations of the self seem to be generated by an intention to find homeplaces wherein these identities can be performed, the shape these homes assume and the locations in which they are sited remain framed in ambivalence. There is one certainty. If indeed Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff have made themselves at home, they have done so in distinctly separate locations and in radically different ways.

Ostensibly, Kincaid is at home in Vermont. In “Homemaking” she describes the enterprise of buying the house of her dreams, thereby establishing a restful location to which she has finally come. Yet “Homemaking” reveals the intimate lives of the house’s past inhabitants. We learn more about the past owners, The Woodwards, than we do about the present owners. With deliberate artfulness, Kincaid bars the reader from entering this house she has made for herself. She offers an architectural sketch as appeasement. The reader is given a quick tour of house. We know the layout, the number of rooms and the available space. But the house’s “fearful symmetry” remains suppressed beneath the recreation of the house’s past life. The deferral is deliberate. Kincaid is as yet unwilling to disclose her discovery of home or the specificity of its location. The masking and slipperiness typical of the consummate story-teller comes as no surprise.

Kincaid’s relationship with community is also uncertain for while her writings confirm that she shares community with her mother/land, this community is enacted largely through memory. What remains conspicuously absent is the dynamism which
confronts one in community, that is the ways in which the performance of relationships usually brings one to self-reflectivity. The size of Kincaid’s declared West Indian community, usually established in her writings as a domestic one, is as intimate as the largely solitary act of gardening with which she is now occupied. And this community has been reconstructed through selective memory. It never confronts Kincaid in the sense that the community of listeners typically confronts the teller of the tale. She never seems to defer to it.

Kincaid’s relationship with a wider, more public community is also problematic. Having made herself as a writer who is unaligned with any theoretical community, having insisted that the West Indies has no literary tradition within which she can locate herself, having established that she is always repeating the story of her life as told to her by her mother, Kincaid goes on to complicate and in some ways undo these assertions with a searing commentary on Western feminism, an admission that she is currently participating as reader and writer in a West Indian literary aesthetic and a celebration of the ways in which her mother had brought her into individuality.

In “The World and The Word,” Dash describes the poetics of Caribbean writing as one which:

takes account of literary forms but provides an insight into the relationship between the individual artist and the collective imagination. The result will be an anthropology of the Caribbean imagination since literature is conceived as a symbolic order through which community attempts to grapple with and resolve the painful dilemma of a lived reality. (114-5)
The community-based "imagination" to which Dash refers does indeed dominate Kincaid's writing. It reveals itself in the wealth of oral rhythms and devices which texture her prose, and in the success with which she achieves what Ramchand describes as "literary orality." In the ongoing, although unacknowledged relationship between Kincaid and the collective West Indian imagination, she is allied to a tradition of writing implemented by literary practitioners such as Louise Bennett and Samuel Selvon in much the same way as she is allied to the tradition of storytelling implemented by her mother. The unmistakable West Indian character of her work suggests that she needs no labels to reveal her origin. The fact that all her writings, including her current articles on gardening or her latest book, *Autobiography of My Mother*, return to West Indian life is not accidental, for it confirms the interactive nature of her engagement even while writings insists that the individual imagination must not be confined to singular locations.

Michelle Cliff's writings, on the other hand, offer more explicit testimonies to community. Cliff has made herself at home with various audiences, some West Indian, others North America, all diasporic. Her later works narrates the discovery of a home which is part of yet larger than the West Indian landscape and culture she had once yearned to belong to. Whereas Kincaid has defined home as a private and domestic space, Cliff is at home, but does not have a home in a public space—one which is similar to the gathering place described by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*:

Gathering at the frontiers, gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres, gathering in the half-life, half light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval
and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the minorities of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal status, immigration status . . (139)

Centering herself within these gatherings, Cliff offers a complex re-definition of home. Hers is a home grounded in ideology. Her idea of home supports hooks’ declaration in “Choosing the Margin . . . ” of home as a space which “can be interrupted, approximated and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (153). Cliff’s approximations and transformations also partakes of Dash’s Caribbean poetics and personalizes it as the anthropology of an imagination which constantly returns to the reality of hyphenation. Through discourse Cliff moves to an acceptance of the safe provisionally of communities based on shared liminality. Now the personal identity which Cliff had once been so passionate to forge is deferred to a relational identity with a transnational community. No longer is she just a West Indian writer. Instead she is a feminist writer even as Free Enterprise confirms her awareness of the limitations of mainstream feminism in dealing with race issues. She identifies her experiences of loss and silencing as similar to that of African American, Native American, and Latina women while simultaneously acknowledging that these groups may, in resorting to a necessary essentialism, deny her a right to participate in their struggles, not only because it is not her fight but because the particularities of her West Indianness cannot easily be mapped into these already complex discursive operations.
Accepting her liminality to be an inescapable condition and the comfort of intersecting communities to be always compromised by the precarious negotiation of in-betweeness, Cliff deliberately substantiates this political identification with an artistic one. Her fiction is increasingly characterized by a dense allusive relationship with texts judged to be similarly subversive in the articulation of a rebellious decolonized sensibility. The theorizing of Césaire, Douglas, Du Bois, Garvey, Harper, Head, Hurston, C. L. R. James, Rhys, Rich, Toomer, Walcott and Whitman allow her to participate in a broad-based critical dialogue even as her interaction with community may remain confined to the aesthetics of the texts and textual communities. This relationship suggests that Cliff's artistic voice needs the sustenance of a dialoguing community. She has made herself at home in the word and has used this as a base upon which to establish a relationship with the world. In “Language and Power” Maryse Condé, speaking for the Caribbean artist establishes that “we write to build ourselves word by word, to form our unique identity with the help of our imagination and our mastery of the word, we replace the world we have with a utopia” (19). The utopia of secured origins which Cliff constructs in Claiming an Identity they Taught me to Despise now subsides into an acceptance of the sufficiency of discourse communities. Common to both sites is the opportunity to participate in liberatory articulations.

Indeed, West Indian cultural life in Cliff's writing is interpreted as a constant flow which unifies, sustains, and creates. Yet, while she has drawn support from a
West Indian and has acknowledged her debt in an unceasing validation of the oral life of that community, Cliff offers no definite statement on her role as West Indian nation builder. Rather she defers to a transnationalism which allows for emphasis to remain on the individual, and concedes that these diasporic communities and nations are the sum of gatherings of margin-inhabiters. Neither does Kincaid identify herself as a nation builder. Her political position as revealed in *A Small Place* seems to be one of non-involvement, her critique of the West Indies is that of an observer rather than the testimony of a participant. But the West Indian community is useful to Kincaid and in returning faithfully to this site, she reanimates through constant testimony the power of the word to capture the world. We are indeed persuaded by the power of the narrative “I”/ eye to recast the world. Yet there is an ever-present danger that Kincaid’s prolonged fascination with the “I”/ eye will create solipsistic, self-indulgent narratives devoid of an interactive engagement with community. *Autobiography of My Mother* is an example of the consequences of a non-symbiotic relationship with community, and this work has a heaviness, a profound sense an ennui, and a staleness of representation occasioned by Kincaid relentless return to her mother’s words and world. The consequence of this kind of self-preoccupied narrative activity may well be that soon there will be no “Kwak” responses to Kincaid’s and Cliff’s “Kwik” narratives.

But this is a distant danger. While the exilic voice is susceptible to a constructed nostalgia which ignores the complexities of the place, Cliff and Kincaid have to date been consistent in their portrayal of the West Indies as resisting full
interpretation. The Antigua of Kincaid's writings and the Jamaica which Cliff explores are never presented as absolute portraits, but are instead representations which are constantly modified and clarified in the writing process. The West Indian space in which each writer makes herself, is one constructed through language. The slipperiness of the oral traditions which have brought these women to voice affects the shape and definition of that space and their never-ending stories of self seem to be generated by a need to explain their relationship with a place which is at once destructive and creative. Similarly nation-building can potentially occur in these self-explanatory narratives as Cliff and Kincaid continue to theorize the relationship between the individual and community.

Ultimately Cliff and Kincaid have enriched the conversation on what constitutes West Indian woman. Having made generous use of indigenous and learnt literary traditions, they have produced narratives which are vibrant, delirious and playful. This aesthetic vigor returns the writers to ideological communities which value this interplay, to a West Indian poetics which has at its core the transgression of conventional forms, one which has insisted on a prevalent native consciousness or the need for a nation language with which to describe the world. And the radicalization of genre remains intimately connected to folk forms of story telling. The digression into anecdotes, the moralizing, the hectoring, the singing, the mourning, the verbal dexterity, the loquaciousness, the impudence and the irreverence typical to this form surfaces and resurfaces in the writings of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid,
confirming that they have found a home in West Indian poetics, and in a community of readers who remain fascinated by their infinite chronicles of the word and the world.

*Misi I di Kwik! Kwak!*
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


---. "Homemaking." New Yorker, 16 October 1995, 54-65

285
Related Primary Works


Mordecai, Pamela and Betty Wilson, eds. **Her True-True Name.** London: Heinemann, 1989.


---. **The Middle Passage.** London: Andre Deutsch, 1962.

Naylor, Gloria. **Mama Day.** New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983


Patterson, Orlando. **Children of Sisyphus.** London: Hutchinson, 1984.

Philip, Marlene Nourbese. **She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks.** Charottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada: Ragweed Press, 1989.


Rhys, Jean. **Voyage in the Dark.** New York: Norton, 1982


**Secondary Works.**


Frieden, Sandra. “Shadowing / Surfacing / Shedding : Contemporary Female Writers in Search of a Female Bildungsroman.” The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development. 304-316.


Rowe, Karen E. “Fairy-born and Human-bred: Jane Eyre’s Education in Romance.” The Voyage In. Fictions of Female Development. 69-89.


