



Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Centro de Educação e Humanidades
Instituto de Letras

Natália Affonso de Oliveira Assumpção

**The darkest hour is before the dawn:
(de)colonial(ity) aesthetics in *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) and *No Telephone
to Heaven* (1987)**

Rio de Janeiro

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^a. Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris

Rio de Janeiro

2018

CATALOGAÇÃO NA FONTE
UERJ/REDE SIRIUS/BIBLIOTECA CEH/B

A851 Assumpção, Natália Affonso de Oliveira.
The darkest hour is before the dawn: (de)colonial(ity) aesthetics in Here comes the sun (2016) and No telephone to heaven (1987) / Natália Affonso de Oliveira Assumpção. - 2018.
121 f. : il.

Orientadora: Leila Assumpção Harris.
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Letras.

1. Cliff, Michelle – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 2. Dennis-Benn, Nicole – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 3. Cliff, Michelle. No telephone to heaven – Teses. 4. Dennis-Benn, Nicole. Here comes the sun – Teses. 5. Literatura caribenha (Inglês) – História e crítica – Teses. 6. Colônias na literatura – Teses. 7. Teoria queer – Teses. 8. Jamaica – História – Teses. I. Harris, Leila Assumpção. II. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Instituto de Letras. III. Título.

CDU 820(729)-95

Bibliotecária: Eliane de Almeida Prata. CRB7 4578/94

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Assinatura

Data

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Aprovada em 17 de julho de 2018.

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Rio de Janeiro

2018

DEDICATÓRIA

Dedico esta dissertação à Marielle Franco. Hoje faz 100 dias que você foi executada. Sua morte não foi uma derrota. Sua potência corre nas veias daqueles que compartilham das suas lutas. Nós somos porque você é. Resistimos juntos. Seguiremos juntos.

AGRADECIMENTOS

Agradeço primeiramente a minha orientadora Leila Assumpção Harris, a quem tenho como inspiração desde a graduação. Obrigada pelo apoio incansável, pelo rigor nas correções, pela orientação inestimável. Obrigada por sempre me incentivar a ir além, principalmente nos momentos nos quais duvidei de mim. Você foi essencial na minha formação como pesquisadora e professora.

À professora Peonia Guedes pela avaliação cuidadosa na qualificação e por aceitar fazer parte da banca. Seu curso sobre pós-modernismo na graduação foi determinante para o início da minha jornada no mestrado.

À Natalia Borges Polesso por aceitar fazer parte da banca de mestrado. Agradeço as trocas generosas desde o momento que nos conhecemos no Seminário Mulher e Literatura. A potência do seu trabalho emociona.

Aos professores da pós-graduação, Victor Hugo Adler Pereira e Julio França pelo apoio desde a época da graduação e por me encorajarem a sair da zona de conforto ao escrever artigos para suas respectivas matérias no mestrado.

Aos parceiros da Comissão Organizadora do Seminário dos Alunos de Pós-graduação em Letras da UERJ 2017: Fernanda Vieira, Gabriel Fernandes de Miranda, Priscilla da Silva Figueiredo, Daniel Augusto P. Silva, Thomas Häckel, Annelise Estrella Galeazzi, Ariane de Andrade da Silva, Maria Hermínia Cordeiro Vieira e Ana Luíza Poyaes pelo evento fantástico que construímos coletivamente em meio ao sucateamento UERJ. Tenho orgulho dessa equipe, espero que ainda tenhamos oportunidade de fazer muitos eventos juntos.

Aos colegas pós-graduandos com quem compartilhei teorias, angústias e risadas nesses últimos anos, principalmente Renata Gomes, Iasmin Luz, Patricia Bellas Raiz, Barbara Lima Madsen, Valeria Oliveira, Priscila Catalão, Walter Cruz, Cassio Maia, Victor Santiago, José Victor Neto e Carolina Lopes.

À Fell Vieira pelo acolhimento irrestrito e incondicional e pelas revisões e traduções em momentos de tensão. Aprendi em dois anos com você o que não aprenderia em três vidas.

À Nathalia Duarte pela revisão cuidadosa dessa dissertação, incluindo os comentários ocasionais vibrando com a evolução do trabalho que tanto me deram força e segurança. Obrigada por toda a bruxaria do bem, pelo seu amor à natureza que me inspira, pelo seu carinho com o Catgar e a Mia.

À Ariane de Andrade pelas conversas filosóficas sobre o mundo, sobre nós, sobre literatura. Obrigada por me ensinar a ser menos complacente com quem não nos quer bem.

Às pessoas cujas apresentações de trabalho presenciei e aos amigos que fiz na conferência da Caribbean Studies Association (CSA): Education, Culture and Emancipatory thought in the Caribbean. Em particular, professora Juanita Diaz-Cotto, foi uma honra estar na mesma mesa que você; e Kedon Willis e Camila Belliard Quiroga, é maravilhoso sentir que não estou sozinha em meu fazer acadêmico ao conhecer pessoas de lugares completamente diferentes da minha realidade. Há algo muito potente que nos une.

À Raylane Braz pelas conversas prolíficas que nunca acabam. Obrigada por compartilhar tão generosamente seu conhecimento. Obrigada por, mesmo em meio ao caos, ousar imaginar mundos alternativos a esse que temos.

À Carolina Victorino por tantos ensinamentos e escuta mesmo quando não nos conhecíamos pessoalmente, pela fala e pesquisas potentes, por ter dividido a mesa sobre gênero na Estácio comigo e com a Renata. Que continuemos nossas caminhadas juntas.

Ao Slam das Minas, Isoporzinho das Sapatão, à Marcha das Mulheres, aos comícios e posteriormente, homenagens à Marielle Franco e todos os outros movimentos que buscam ocupar a cidade do Rio de Janeiro com nossas vozes e corpos dissidentes.

A todas as *queer* e às sapatão que, com sua arte, seu afeto e sua luta tornam essa cidade um lugar menos hostil. Obrigada Érica Sarmet, Tata Barreto, Renata Ferrer, Carol Maia entre tantas outras que tive o prazer de conhecer nesses últimos anos.

A todos envolvidos no projeto da Biblioteca Comunitária Carolina Maria de Jesus, em especial Victor Fernandes, Ana Beatriz Coelho, Lili Rose e Nara Miranda pela alegria que é presenciar o poder transformador da literatura e do trabalho em comunidade.

Aos meus amigos de fora do mundo acadêmico que compreenderam minhas ausências e que me deram colo e estímulo quando precisei, Anna Gibara, Regi Barros, Danielle Dardeau, Charles Fouquet, Jessica Burmeister, Guilherme Chagas, Luciana Milton, Rogério dos Anjos e, principalmente, Gabriella Silva, obrigada por todo (afro)afeto nessa reta final.

À Ciça Souza, minha analista, pela escuta e aconselhamento que me ajudaram a respirar nos momentos mais difíceis desse processo.

À família da Renata que sempre me acolheu. Anamary e Tião, obrigada pelo apoio incondicional. Matheus, obrigada pelas conversas filosóficas. Dona Diva, obrigada por me adotar como neta. Tia Cine, obrigada por abrir sua casa para nós, sem restrições, nesse momento tão conturbado da inevitável obra.

À Lene Souza por ter cuidado sempre de mim e por ter me ensinado, entre tantas coisas, a ser uma pessoa mais ponderada.

À minha mãe, Vera Affonso, pelo apoio irrestrito, principalmente durante a jornada acadêmica que escolhi. Sem você não teria sido possível. Obrigada pelas malas cheias de livros e do que mais eu precisasse. Nem sempre foi fácil, mas a distância nos aproximou. E ah, muito obrigada por ter insistido que eu fizesse curso de inglês desde pequena.

Ao meu padrasto, Leandro Areal, o “Chico”, por não medir esforços para nos ver felizes.

Ao meu pai, Eduardo Assumpção, pelo estímulo a leitura e pelas conversas sobre literatura.

À minha madrastra, Carla Araripe, pelas leituras na hora de dormir que contribuíram para meu amor à literatura.

Ao meu avô Pedro (*in memoriam*) por nos ensinar a amar os livros, por nos lembrar todos os dias do poder transformador da educação e por transmitir o valor de que todos os seres humanos têm direito a viver dignamente.

A minha avó Isis (*in memoriam*) por ter me ensinado a importância de compartilhar o que temos e que somos uma família de mulheres fortes e não há mal nenhum nisso.

Aos meus filhotes felinos, Catgar Allan Poe e Miaïs Nin Rey, por me fazerem parar, respirar e rir todos os dias. Por vocês aprendi a encarar a vida de outra maneira e a ser grata por todos os dias.

À Renata de Souza Spolidoro. Passei quase 22 anos à deriva até que você me deu a mão e juntas mergulhamos na infinidade do mundo que existe para além da vida na superfície. Obrigada por ser minha parceira acadêmica, artística, militante, empreendedora, viajante. Seu amor é afeto transformador que faz eu me apaixonar pela vida todos os dias.

I want to unroll Anzaldúa's
"excuse me" tongue
away from tiptoes and eggshells.
I want to rip it from my body
to release all you see
and what's not seen
allowing my pen to outline
the best of me
and bleed litanies for what
I wish not to be.

I deliver truth.
Bringer of good news
I speak in tongues
pregonera of change
for things to come
example of a new generation
that will not be undone.

I know you feel the change
the pressure of your melting pot
boiling over in our fury
spilling our identities over the edges
melting these borders you
keep trying to construct
as fast as you build them,
as fast as the speed of brown voices
carried in the wind
screaming all we are beyond
that box you've confined us in.

Welcome to the multi, culti, transnational mess!
home to people of colors
breaking through the rigid lines
of conformity
bending genders
meshing languages
embracing fluidity by accepting
all of their identities
home to people like me.
[...]

Yarimee Gutiérrez

RESUMO

ASSUMPCÃO, Natália Affonso de Oliveira. *The darkest hour is before the dawn: (de)colonial(ity) aesthetics in Here Comes the Sun (2016) and No Telephone to Heaven (1987)*. 2018. 121 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018.

A proposta desta dissertação é investigar como dois romances de autoras migrantes nascidas na Jamaica *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) de Michelle Cliff e *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) de Nicole Dennis-Benn fazem transparecer os efeitos latentes da colonialidade, apesar do período colonial na Jamaica ter se encerrado oficialmente em 1962. Além de mapear as marcas da colonialidade nos personagens e universos ficcionais, o objetivo da análise desenvolvida é entender como se dá a construção das personagens *queer* em ambos os livros e como as relações destas se desdobram com seus corpos, com os membros de suas comunidades e perante o sistema heteronormativo. O conceito de colonialidade utilizado como cerne teórico deste trabalho parte das proposições de Aníbal Quijano (2000) que trabalha com as noções de colonialidade do ser, do saber e do conhecimento. O autor salienta que a categoria raça, fictícia e heterogênea, como já apontava Hall (1997), foi a base fundamental para a disseminação e imposição da colonialidade, garantindo e auxiliando na configuração, também, das classes sociais como observadas hoje em dia. Posteriormente, o conceito de colonialidade é expandido por María Lugones (2007, 2010) para compreender a noção de gênero e da heterossexualidade compulsória como imposições construídas, também partes constituintes desse sistema. Outra autora que compõe esse diálogo é Grada Kilomba (2015) que propõe estratégias de decolonização do conhecimento. Faz-se necessário lançar mão do conceito de *queer* em Paul Preciado (2011) e as implicações da utilização dessa ferramenta epistêmica em se tratando de sujeitos de territórios que sofrem com os efeitos da colonialidade. Para uma análise mais focada nas especificidades da questão de personagens não-heterossexuais e não-cisgêneras da literatura caribenha, usarei preceitos de Dionne Brand (1994), Jenny Sharpe e Samantha Pinto (2006), Kemala Kempadoo (2009), Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2010) entre outros. Com o auxílio da teoria do fracasso *queer* de Jack Halberstam (2011) investigaremos também nos dois romances possíveis efeitos estéticos dentro da construção literária da rejeição das noções de fracasso e sucesso concebidas dentro do sistema da colonialidade.

Palavras-chave: Literatura caribenha. Colonialidade/Decolonial. Queer. Jamaica.

ABSTRACT

ASSUMPCÃO, Natália Affonso de Oliveira. *The darkest hour is before the dawn: (de)colonial(ity) aesthetics in Here Comes the Sun (2016) and No Telephone to Heaven (1987)*. 2018. 121 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018.

The aim of this dissertation is investigating how two novels from migrant authors born in Jamaica, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) and Nicole Dennis-Benn's *Here Comes the Sun* (2016), portray the latent effects of coloniality, even though Jamaica's colonial period officially ended in 1962. Besides mapping the marks of coloniality in the characters and fictional universes, the purpose of this analysis is to understand how queer characters are constructed in both novels and how these characters' relations with their bodies, community members and heteronormative system unfold. The concept of coloniality, the theoretical basis of this work, comes from Anibal Quijano's propositions (2000), which elaborate on the notions of coloniality of power and knowledge. The author points out that the category race, fictional and heterogeneous, as Hall (1997) has stressed in the past, was one of the foundational axes of modernity. This category was key in the spreading and imposition of coloniality, assuring and cooperating with the settings of the social classes observed nowadays. The concept of coloniality is then expanded by Maria Lugones (2007, 2010) in order to comprise the ideas of gender and compulsory heterosexuality as manufactured impositions, and as core elements of this system. Another author who adds to the discussion is Grada Kilomba (2015), who proposes strategies of the decolonisation of knowledge. It is important to keep in mind Paul Preciado's concept of queer (2011) and the implications of the use of this epistemic tool when dealing with subjects from places that undergo the effects of coloniality. With the purpose of having an analysis focused on the specificities of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender characters in Caribbean literature, I will use notions posited by Dionne Brand (1994), Jenny Sharpe e Samantha Pinto (2006), Kemala Kempadoo (2009), Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2010), amongst others. With the help of Jack Halberstam's queer failure theory (2011), this analysis wishes to highlight possible aesthetic effects generated by literary constructions which reject the notions of failure and success construed inside the coloniality system.

Keywords: Caribbean literature. Decolonial/Coloniality. Queer. Jamaica.

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INTRODUCTION

Quando eu morder
 a palavra,
 por favor,
 não me apressem,
 quero mascar,
 rasgar entre os dentes,
 a pele, os ossos, o tutano
 do verbo,
 para assim versejar
 o âmago das coisas.
Conceição Evaristo

I had already decided to work with *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) by Jamaican writer Nicole Dennis-Benn when, early in 2017, I read *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) for a Graduate seminar. The novel, written by another Jamaican author, Michelle Cliff, came as the piece that was missing in my research. I had chosen Dennis-Benn's novel for many reasons, including the literary descriptions of the relationships – sexual or otherwise – of the women characters and of how their lives were affected by the operating forces of coloniality. The aesthetic effects produced by destabilizing common tropes of Caribbean literature, and by playing with notions of failure and success, to my mind, make the novel a valuable example of decolonial praxis. Similarly, Cliff's novel, released almost thirty years before, is also a literary work which seeks to question, resist and subvert the regimens of the normal.

During a class discussion of *No Telephone to Heaven*, a colleague blurted out that Clare's death made no sense, since she had lived in England and had learnt the ideals of the Enlightenment. According to this colleague, a character with such knowledge would never have joined the guerrillas in their raid of the movie set, closing his argument by saying that her death had been, and I quote, "pointless". Immediately, another colleague argued that the Enlightenment ideals had not been a product of European's sole thinking. She reminded us that over two hundred years of colonisation and invasion had elapsed by the time Enlightenment ideals were recorded into the "official" hegemonic History. Hence, the origins

of many of the ideals preconised by the movement had had the influence of many different places and peoples from all around the globe. Indeed, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare does study European thought; however, she realises that there is a lot more to what she has been taught. From that moment on, she makes it her mission to excavate into memory and to go back to her (grand)motherland to recuperate and fight for parts of herself, for instance, her ancestry, which had been denied to her.

The debate between those two colleagues was a turning point in my research. At that moment I realised my main goal would be to investigate if and how the fictional worlds and the representation of characters such as Margot and Verdene in *Here Comes Sun*, and Clare and Harry/Harriet in *No Telephone to Heaven*, escaped traditional post-colonial nation-building projects and hegemonic literary tradition from the United States and Europe. Moreover, my focus is also to investigate how these novels go beyond the binaries and do not stand simply as opposition to the modern/colonial system, but rather as the result of decolonial imagination and creativity. I chose to investigate what the implications of Clare and Harry/Harriet's deaths were in parallel with Margot's achievements, including the purchase of the house she had dreamt of for so long were.

In order to do so, I knew that a linear understanding of History and human experience would not suffice. Consequently, the epistemological standpoint that we live in a "post" era (postcolonial, postmodern, poststructuralism, etc.) would not be enough, and, in fact, would potentially hinder an analysis that endeavors to dislocate notions of gender, identity and race, but without forgetting the materiality of the local experiences and without reinforcing notions of positivism and progress. Frequently, when women are represented in fiction as non-heterosexual, a myriad of stereotypes surface and usually the only storyline they are involved in are the ones surrounding their sexuality, as if it were an isolated factor of their lives. The same happens with racialized characters whose stories only deal with whiteness and racism. There is no individuality and subjectivity for those characters who are labelled as representatives of whole groups. It is as if they were homogeneous and defined only by what makes them different from the norms of the heteropatriarchal colonial/modern cis-tem. Therefore, in the first chapter, which aims to outline the theoretical foundation of the analysis of this dissertation, I explored the notion of coloniality.

In the first part, entitled "Coloniality of Power", Anibal Quijano's work is central to the understanding of the colonial/modern system, how it operates and how it can be challenged. Additionally, Walter Mignolo's proposal of other ways of thinking and producing knowledge complements Quijano's proposition. In that section, I draw from Jamaican history

in order to locate important aspects of the novels. The selection of a symbol, the Jamaican coat of arms, was made in order to illustrate objectively how coloniality lasts, even though it may change its configuration, but not without maintaining the power structures.

The following section, “Coloniality of Gender”, further elaborates on gender and how it has been constructed together with the modern/colonial identities. Drawing also from Black Feminist thought, intersectional approaches and studies far from epistemological hegemony, Maria Lugones’ theorisation questions even biological determination. Briefly, I problematize but do not go in deep on how discourses at first sight considered progressive, such as the “LGBTI+” movement, can be seen as prolonged forms of colonisation and erasure. My option was to focus on the term Queer. Even though it emerged as a term from the Global North, it has been appropriated by theoreticians of the South and, in some parts, it has gained new spelling, “cuir”, “kuir”, “cuier”, as a sign of distancing from the postulates of canonical theory such as Judith Butler’s.

As Toni Morrison remarks in *Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination* (1993), representing oneself, a people or a place using a language that has developed within a system of oppression of those is a constant struggle. At this point, to me, queer seems to be the most adequate (albeit wanting) signifier to refer to the sexual dissident characters in the novels being analysed in this dissertation. Similarly, the term “lesbian”, or rather, the “lesbian continuum” is an epistemological tool that does not simply mean sexual intercourse between people with vaginas socialised as women. As said before, the demands of identity claims within the LGBTI+ categories can prove to be extremely problematic for subjects who had not been included in the modern/colonial project of humanity. In other words, using well-circumscribed categories to locate subjects who have had their (hi)stories fragmented and who live in-between is not the most appropriate strategy in the arts if one wishes to promote decolonization of thought.

The last part of the first chapter, “Decolonizing Knowledge”, gathers a number of decolonial practices that have been used by a variety of theoreticians, writers, artists and activists. It is important to highlight, though, that the decolonization of knowledge does not happen only in works of art or scholarship. In fact, a great deal of decolonial knowledge comes from knowledge(s) and praxes which had been undervalued, discredited and left out of “formal education” by the colonial/modern system of hierarchising thought and attempting to obliterate ideas which may put the hegemonic order in jeopardy. Additionally, there is also a discussion around different moments within black politics of representation and the politics of representation of black/racialized subjects and peoples.

The analysis of *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) by Nicole Dennis-Benn is the focus of the second chapter, which is also divided in three parts. The first one, “‘Membah dis, nobody love a black girl’”, takes the title after a quote from the novel. This section expands the discussion around the myth of racial biological determination. It paints a picture of how racial configurations have been established in Jamaica, and comments on common tropes of racialized bodies in Caribbean literature and how they play out in the novel. After that, in “(Ac)cursed affections”, the discussion around representation in Caribbean literature continues. Furthermore, an exploratory assessment of the images of lesbian affections within the novel aims at outlining some aspects of the queer decolonial aesthetics discussed in the first chapter. The mix between internal and external interactions and manifestations of these affections and the consequences of these encounters in the unraveling of the plot also aid in the understanding of the many possibilities within creation unengaged with mainstream nation-building projects and the limits of the hegemonic definitions of success and failure. The last part of chapter two, “All that glitters is not gold or dawg a sweat an long hair hide it” complicates the notion of lesbian affection. It also considers the varied layers of interaction between characters. The choice to have the title in Standard English and Jamaican was meant to bring about the effect of the nuances of local particularities. Those two seemingly similar expressions are referred to as synonymous in some places, and in other references have slightly different meanings. The chapter ends with an analysis of what achieving success meant for the protagonist.

The third chapter looks at *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) by Michelle Cliff. The introduction of the chapter brings an overview of Cliff’s early life and literary journey. The Jamaican writer, who was one of the big names amongst lesbians of color in the United States since the late 1970s, went through a process of self-discovery and decolonization, which resonated in her literary work. The epigraph to the chapter, one of her poems, already anticipates the complexity of in-betweenness. Cliff, who was light-skinned, gave this attribute to the protagonist of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare Savage. Throughout, the novel is an experiment with borderlands of self, identity, memory, location and tradition. In the first section, “You’re hardly the sort they were ranting on about”, the focal point is the issue of how race and racial configurations in Jamaica, England and the United States influenced Clare Savage’s journeys. Under this heading, I also analyse the significance of the name and location of some of the main characters in the novel. Additionally, coupling my literary critique with interviews given by Cliff, I point to some of the strategies she used to decolonize knowledge and to create characters who are not constrained to hegemonic binaries.

However, it is in the next section, “What history do you bring to your students?”, that practical examples of how Cliff promotes the decolonization of thought are discussed. From the appropriation of hegemonic literary forms, to the inclusion of other traditions, to the recuperation of memory, the writer composed a love letter to Jamaica and its often forgotten or neglected people and nature, in the form of a novel. In this section, the politics of black representation is also discussed. In “Cyaan live split, not in this world”, the last section of this chapter, the focus is on how lesbian affections work within the novel and how the colonial/modern gender system influenced the lives of the characters, Clare and Harry/Harriet. Drawing a parallel between Queerness and resistance was also a goal in this part. In the conclusion of the chapter, one of the central themes of this dissertation —success and failure— comes back and the death of the guerrillas is put into “an other” perspective, as proposed by Mignolo (2000).

In the final considerations, I draw parallels between the novels in the hopes of outlining similarities between the production of decolonial thought and aesthetic. I also compare themes which appear in both novels and which have been analysed in the body of the dissertation. Having said that, there are points of congruence that were not addressed, such as the connection between Christopher, the gardener in *No Telephone to Heaven* and Charles, the gardener in *Here Comes the Sun*.

During a long period of my research, I questioned what my role was as a Brazilian researcher of Jamaican queer literature. When talking about the topic of my dissertation, I have had people in Brazil asking me if people spoke English in Jamaica — and not in a linguistically interesting Standard English vs Jamaican way—, or if Jamaica was in Africa. Often, my interlocutors would refer to “the amazing resorts” or Bob Marley, and would lack further knowledge of the country. More than once, I have heard “Jamaica? How exotic!”. All these interactions have shown me how relevant my research is. The power of coloniality still operates full force on our lives in the Americas. It is striking to me how many Brazilians often fail to notice how we are also “exotic” in the eyes of the cultures we so often wish to mimic (from the United States, European). It is mind-boggling to me how we continue to reproduce a logic and structures which oppress us. It is high time we build bridges and connections with other cultures who have been through similar processes of nation and identity formation instead of making them the “other” we also are.

The monolithic pattern of a single story of Jamaica, which reinforces some of the stereotypes abovementioned, does not apply to the colonisation process that took place there. As Catherine Hall posits in *Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment* (1996), the

particularities of each territory must be taken into consideration. Hall turns her attention to Jamaica, pointing out that Spanish colonisers, the first ones to invade the island, killed almost all its native population; therefore, the majority of the Jamaican people is comprised of people who were not there originally. Hall highlights that the current population is made up of - descendants of many peoples, including enslaved Africans, Asians tied to indentured labour, Spanish, British, Dutch and French colonisers, amongst others.

Furthermore, Catherine Hall explains that in 1962, when Jamaica turned into a nation state independent from England, there was a huge movement towards decolonization, which resulted in the birth of new Jamaican identities. She also explains that part of this process was highly influenced by the intensification of the syncretized Christianity. Jamaicans who felt a connection to Africa through diaspora sought to reinvent the African roots they had lost and introduce African culture into the religious discourse of the missionaries, in order to appropriate the coloniser's tools in the building of their new identities.

From 1972 to 1980, with Michael Manly from the People's National Party as Prime Minister, Jamaica experienced a period of a socialist-oriented government. In his first term, the Prime Minister invested heavily in public welfare. One of Manly's goals was to seize or nationalize Jamaica's largest businesses. The government ended up taking control of large segments of the economy towards the end of the mandate. Although Manly had to face an economic crisis during his first mandate, resulting from the global oil crisis in 1973, he managed to stay in power for two terms in a row.

However, in 1980, Edward Seaga, was elected from the Jamaican Labour Party, a conservative party with strong ties with the Jamaican workers' movement. Seaga's government reduced the investments in health, education and housing dramatically and saw an increase in violence and drug-related crimes. Seaga was in office until 1989 and opened up the Jamaican market to foreign capital, seeking out private investors, following economic liberal practices. These policies increased Jamaica's debt crises, which was critical by the 1990s. He remained in office until 1989, when Michael Manly was elected again. Yet once back in office, Manly did not run the country as he previously had. Maintaining some of Seaga's economic practices, Manly did give social programs a boost; however, the advancement of neoliberalism still impacted Jamaica and its people heavily. When Michael Manly stepped down 1992, P. J. Patterson, a member of his party, took over, making many promises but failing to rescue the country from the deteriorating economic scenarios. With legislations and policies in place which favoured foreign investors and the rapid building of luxury resorts without rigid inspections of the environmental impact generated, Jamaican

people along with the country itself went through a lot of hardship during the 1990s. The two novels featured in this dissertation are set primarily in these turbulent decades.

Hence, digging deep into Jamaican (official) history and into the literary universes created by Dennis-Benn and Cliff allowed me to gain a better understanding of how these processes unraveled and where the different narratives and discourses meet and diverge. Additionally, this research has given me a better overview of how scholarship, (hi)story, art and praxis can work together towards a decolonial project.

I was fortunate to recently attend the 43rd Annual Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA). This year's topic was Education, Culture and Emancipatory thought in the Caribbean. It took place in Havana, Cuba, from 4th to 8th of June, 2018. The opening conference was delivered by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, one of the biggest names from the decolonial turn. Maldonado-Torres delivered a historical panorama of the development of decolonial studies and emphasized the need to take into account the movements not only within scholarship and art, but also in local practices.

I also presented a part of this dissertation and was able to dialogue with scholars from different parts of the world. This exchange has been invaluable as it showed me my work is aligned with much of the emancipatory work which other "Third World" scholars have been carrying out. The issue of epistemological tools fit to deal with the particularities of the Caribbean was often brought forth, for instance, the debate between LGBTI+ vs Queer vs Other concepts was ever present.

Furthermore, during many sessions of the conference, I would think to myself "you could cross the name of your country and write 'Brazil' instead, what you are saying hits close to home". Throughout the conference, a very common thread was the politics of resistance against the advance of neoliberal and neoimperialistic practices. Often, solidarity amongst the nations which are oppressed by those practices was offered as one possible solution.

The role of solidarity as a tool against oppression was emphasized in a speech delivered by Angela Davis last year, on the 25th of July, the Afro-Latin American and Caribbean Women's Day. Davis underscored the need to strengthen and build transnational ties between peoples who do not conform to the colonial/modern Capitalist system. She remarked that

[w]hen we resist, dominant institutions and specially the State want to contain our resistance. They want to transform our struggles into nation building strategies. [...] And so we say that when we stand up against racism we are not asking to be included in a racist society. If we say no heteropatriarchy then we do not wish to be assimilated into a society that remains deeply misogynist and deeply

heteropatriarchal. If we say no to poverty we do not wish to be contained by a Capitalist structure that values profits more than human beings. [...] This is why we call for solidarity across national borders and we recognize that radical decolonial black feminism recognizes our deep connectedness even in the midst of acknowledging contradiction. (DAVIS, 2017).

Therefore, it is fundamental to put the decolonial project into practise within the institutions, e.g. the University, too. We must produce and circulate knowledge that seeks to question, resist and escape oppression in those places that have helped perpetuate colonial structures for hundreds of years. To say that carrying out this dissertation project amidst the defunding of UERJ – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro – when, for months, none of the workers were getting paid, while politicians kept receiving their salaries regularly, was a huge challenge, would be an understatement. For over a year, students did not have access to the library, to computers, to other resources. At times, there were simply no conditions to have classes. However, as Gloria Anzaldua wrote in “Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers”, we cannot wait until we have a room of our own. We have to keep on writing, working and researching wherever, whenever and however we can. In *Theory as a Liberatory Practice*, bell hooks talks about theory as means of understanding and healing. hooks also sees theory as a social practice and rejects the distinction often made between theory vs practice. Furthermore, I come from the country which has the highest LGBTQ murder rate in the world and I research the literature of a country which is also notorious as one the most dangerous places for queer folk. That being said, I refuse to let these statistics and this ‘fame’ be the single story of fear and violence that represents queer reality in Brazil and Jamaica. These have all been ideas that have guided me throughout the making of this dissertation.

1 LET US MAKE THIS QUEER: ON COLONIALITY

One cannot leave behind what is ALL around;
 nor one can accept that what is all around
 will be here forever
*Jota Mombaça*¹

The notion of time instilled in the peoples who were colonised or emerged from the process of colonisation in the Americas has a linearity to it, which quite often leads us to cognitive and perceptive traps. For instance, the notion that once an event — such as war or a form of ruling — that has apparently ended becomes the past, something that has been overcome and that no longer exists. This perspective prevents us from truly perceiving that names and laws change, but a great deal of what was supposed to have been eliminated remains the same. Likewise, the notion of progress we replicate assumes that ways of living, societal organizations, philosophies and cosmologies different from the hegemonic colonial notions of existence are outdated, useless, untrue and unsophisticated. The two novels under discussion in this dissertation are set in Jamaica. Chronologically speaking, the first one, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) by Michelle Cliff, starts in the 1960s, although most of the action in Jamaican soil happens in the 1980s. The second one, *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) by Nicole Dennis-Benn, begins in 1994. Together, both of them cover roughly thirty years of Jamaican history after the country's official independence from England in 1962. In the novels, neo-imperialism is what, in the macro sense, perpetuates colonial structures. Additionally, the main characters have to face what it means to be a colonised subject and they have to navigate between adhering to the hegemonic order to recover fragments of the past which were lost and creating other spaces and ways of living, beyond the coloniser's parameters. The pervasiveness of these power dynamics is what Aníbal Quijano (2000) calls coloniality.

¹ Written on one of the seven bloody white flags from the series “NÃO VÃO” (2017).

1.1 Coloniality of Power

Peruvian Sociologist Aníbal Quijano is known for having coined the concept of coloniality of power. In his article *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America* (2000), he explains how the historical period known as Modernity came to be. Analysing the colonial process in America², Quijano argues that the modern configuration of power was based on two fundamental axes: the creation of ‘race’ as a category that hierarchically organizes differences between human beings and the reorganisation of the control of labour, resources and products. The concept of coloniality is later expanded in 2007 and 2010 by Argentinian theoretician María Lugones, who elaborates coloniality of gender.

The historical panorama proposed by Quijano shows that racial classification was created in the process of colonisation of the Americas. The colonisers used this social construct as a means to impose dominance and to organise the colonial establishment hierarchically, in a different way from the Feudal structures in Europe. According to Quijano,

[t]he idea of race, in its modern meaning, does not have a known history before the colonization of America. [...] [It] was constructed to refer to the supposed differential biological structures between those groups. Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities in America—Indians, blacks, and mestizos— and redefined others. Terms such as Spanish and Portuguese, and much later European, which until then indicated only geographic origin or country of origin, acquired from then on a racial connotation in reference to the new identities. Insofar as the social relations that were being configured were relations of domination, such identities were considered constitutive of the hierarchies, places, and corresponding social roles, and consequently of the model of colonial domination that was being imposed. In other words, race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 534).

Quijano explains that in colonial times, the “so-called blacks were not only the most important exploited group, since the principal part of the economy rested on their labor; they were, above all, the most important colonized race, since Indians were not part of that colonial society” (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 534). The territory known as Jamaica nowadays was under Spanish colonial control until 1670, when it was ceded to the British Empire through the Treaty of Madrid. Bearing in mind that the territory was under Spanish control for a hundred

² Aníbal Quijano, as he explains in *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin American*, uses the term ‘America’ not to refer to the United States, but rather to the area which was under the colonial ruling of the Iberian territories between 1492 and 1610, roughly the area known nowadays as Latin America. According to the author, the lexical choice is directly connected to the pattern of world power being discussed in the article (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 574).

and seventy-six years is essential to understand its process of colonization. In Jamaica, as IndexMundi, a data portal that displays statistics by country, shows, ethnic configuration in 2012 was divided as follows: 92.1% black, 6.1% mixed, 0.8% East Indian, 0.4% other, and 0.7% unspecified³. It is evident that native peoples, such as the Taínos, have been almost completely obliterated due to the process of colonisation.

However, during the 18th century, mestizos — mixed-raced individuals, the children of black or indigenous people with white folk — started working in waged positions. In Hispanic America, a greater number of mestizos with indigenous and white ancestry found jobs, more easily than the offspring of black and white people. From the beginning of the development of the Eurocentric and colonised mindset, paid labour has been a white privilege. Unsurprisingly, to this day, white and non-racialized people still earn higher salaries. The space of whiteness has been associated with wages, high-order positions and reason, and it is not contingent to phenotype. On the other hand, the racialized peoples were considered lower beings, savages, undeserving of any sort of monetary compensation for their labour. As Quijano summarises, “capital, as a social formation for control of wage labor, was the axis around which all remaining forms of labor control, resources and products were articulated” (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 539). The model of racial division, which was one of the essential axis of difference, then, was exported from the colonies in America to other parts of the world which were colonised or under the influence of European colonial power. Therefore, global capitalism is necessarily linked to colonial models, modernity and Eurocentric thought. In spite of having been debunked, the myth of a biological and evolutionary difference of human ‘races’ still lingers on. Like Anibal Quijano, Stuart Hall, Jamaican theoretician, one of the precursors of Cultural Studies, who in his adult life settled in Britain, works with the notion of racial classification as a fictive constructed category. In the lecture *Race: The Floating Signifier* (1997), Hall starts by establishing that categorising is a human cultural impulse. Categorising, then, per se, is not a harmful activity, but rather the way in which humanity signifies the world. According to him, the problem lies in a portion of those humans using created categories as devices to achieve power. Rejecting any form of biological explanation that localises ‘race’, Halls states that

race is one of those major concepts, which organize the great classificatory systems of difference, which operate in human society. And to say that race is a discursive category recognizes that all attempts to ground this concept scientifically, to locate differences between the races, on what one might call scientific, biological, or genetic grounds, have been largely shown to be untenable (HALL, 1997, p. 6).

³ See <http://www.indexmundi.com/jamaica/demographics_profile.html> Accessed on 28, Nov., 2017.

Regardless of the extensive work done to deconstruct the biological premise, as Hall illustrates, it is still widely accepted that racialized peoples are and have always been inferior to whites. The Enlightenment, which advocated for States being governed apart from the Church and that all human beings should have a right to freedom, happiness and property did not include racialized peoples in its ideology. Unsurprisingly, it “found expression as reform in England and as revolution in France and America [the United States].”⁴ England and France, both European countries and the United States, unlike most of America, was constituted of a white majority who were free and were given access to property and waged labour. In the Americas, the Haitian Revolution, accomplished by formerly enslaved Africans, led by Toussaint D’L’Overture, was the only successful application of some Enlightenment postulates, with the crucial difference that the revolutionaries questioned the racial axis. L’Overture and his comrades fought to abolish the notion of racial difference.

In colonial Jamaica, there were many revolts and resistance movements, but none of them was able to bring down the colonial power. Independence came only in 1962, as it has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, making it one of the last countries in the Americas to go through this process. The colonial period was officially over, but the power operating has remained as an extension of the colonial structures. Nowadays, Jamaica’s national motto is “Out of many, one people”; the phrase is engrained in the country’s coat of arms. The symbol was first designed in 1661 by William Sancroft, who later became archbishop of Canterbury, in England. Even though it has gone through some changes over time, to this day, the escutcheon still features the English flag and an English royal helmet and mantling; on each side of the shield, there is a member of the Taino nation, embellished with white and red feathers, colours which represent England. The shield is completed with a crocodile and some fruit. Before the current motto, the phrase read was written in Latin “Indus Uterque Serviet Uni” which in English means “the Indians twain shall serve one Lord”⁵. According to the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner*, the motto was changed in 1962 to best suit the new nation that was born.⁶

The motto in English seems to have been inspired by one of the mottos of the then-booming United States, which read “E pluribus unum” (Out of many, one). This is one out of many indications of how much the United States influenced the ones making decisions during

⁴ See <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>> Accessed on Dec. 15, 2017.

⁵ See: <<http://digjamaica.com/blog/2015/08/10/the-story-of-jamaicas-motto-coat-of-arms>> Accessed on 26, Dec., 2017.

⁶ See: <<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20120404/lead/lead93.html>> Accessed on 26, Dec, 2017.

the governmental transition period in the Caribbean island. In the 1960s, its economic growth skyrocketed and the cultural product of the “American Dream” was imported all around the globe through movies, television programs, advertisements, and massive production of home appliances and other goods. This “dream” is what Boy Savage, the father of the protagonist from *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), is after. Ready to assimilate and to escape his life and financial debt in Jamaica, he relies on his light skin to pass as white and collect his share of the promise of a better life, like the lives of the characters he has seen in movies. After World War II, the U. S. took advantage of how economic powers such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany were weakened to accelerate and impose its dominance, utilising neoimperialistic practices. Apart from the motto, the perdurance of the coat of arms as a national emblem in Jamaica illustrates the pervasiveness of coloniality. In an editorial piece published before the commemoration of fifty-three years since the Jamaican independence, the newspaper *Jamaican Observer* reflects on the years which had passed since the moment of scission and what “out of many, one people” really encompassed⁷. It is argued that the

National Motto was created because the leadership of the new independent Jamaica and colonialists happily vacating the country wanted to: First, assure the wealthy and potential foreign investors that they had no need to fear the desperately poor black masses. Second, it sought to convince the poor black people that those with wealth were their genuine brothers and sisters. This was intended to head off violent expressions of the ever-present class struggles and any flirtation with communism (The Jamaican Observer, 2015).

The purpose of instilling the ideal of unity was to tranquilise the Eurocentric global North, since cohesion meant peace and stability to exploit the natural resources and the potential for massive tourism on the island. Additionally, in the Enlightenment-inspired discourse of independence mandates for freedom and equality, the trap is to make the colonised subaltern subjects believe they have become one and that such promises are meant for all. This is what happens with Margot, the protagonist of *Here Comes the Sun* (2016), as she ruthlessly goes after such freedom and success, unaware that, in fact, they were not meant for her. During an interview about being queer in Jamaica, novelist Nicole Dennis-Benn is asked to talk about beauty in her home country. The author instantly evokes the motto, stating that

[i]n terms of beauty, many Jamaicans would mindlessly rattle off our motto, “Out of Many, One People,” because as children it was drilled into our heads to silence dialogues about racial, ethnic, and class disparities. It’s sort of like hypnosis to numb the pain of our colonized history. Growing up dark-skinned, I surely felt it. Year after year, only certain girls — those of a café au lait hue, from upper-class families — would go on to represent our country in Miss World and Miss Universe

⁷See: <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/editorial/Out-of-many--one-people--Motto-or-myth-_19221909> Accessed on 26, Dec, 2017.

competitions. Subsequently, many darker-skinned working-class girls — like my character Thandi in *Here Comes the Sun* — and even working-class boys spend money they do not have to bleach their skin to try to increase their worth. Classism and complexionism are still very sensitive topics in Jamaica (DENNIS-BEN, 2016).

Hence, the idea behind homogenising the population in the level of discourse bore no resemblance to actual material reality; there was neither revision nor affirmative action in order to avert the operating racist colonial structures in the building of the new nation-state. Furthermore, looking back, it is out of this racial and labour dynamic that another new geocultural identity surfaced: Europe, or, as Quijano specifies, Western Europe. The European identity has in its origins

two principal founding myths: first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 542).

When referring to the recently created European identity, the Peruvian sociologist spells the word as *id*-entity, which allows for a digression concerning the prefix “id”. As psychology scholar Saul McLeod explains, in Freudian psychoanalysis, “The id engages in primary process thinking, which is primitive, illogical, irrational, and fantasy oriented. This form of process thinking has no comprehension of objective reality and is selfish and wishful in nature” (MCLEOD, 2006). In addition, the word “entity” is defined as “something that exists apart from other things, having its own independent existence”⁸. Hence, Quijano seems to subvert the European construct that they are the beings of logic and reason, controllers and masters of the world. Exposing the self-centeredness and lack of awareness of their individualistic views as selfish and unreasonable rather than an innate inheritable position they are entitled to. Furthermore, Eurocentric thought proposed that the European men of reason were the ones suited to make history. Their female counterparts were not encompassed in the definition of rationality, but rather viewed as a complimentary piece, which would represent emotion. So, the independent being is equipped with the skills to conquer, to think, to write, to have a voice, to be the universal norm, whereas all the others would be their objects of investigation, defined by otherness.

Therefore, difference was fundamental in building not only Western identity, but also its worldview, thought processing systems and knowledge production. Walter Mignolo, an Argentinian semiotician, explores this aspect of coloniality and proposes what he calls border thinking in *Local Histories/Global Designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking* (2000). Drawing from the works of thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Edouard

⁸ See <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/entity>> Accessed on Dec, 4th, 2017.

Glissant and Abdelhebir Khatibi, Mignolo proposes an epistemological shift not only in the content that derives from decolonial research but also in the tools which are utilized to conduct this investigation. The scholar posits that it is necessary to produce a double critique, which means that one has to analyse how hegemonic power operates and how local realities are organised and, at the same time, add a perspective that departs from neither location. What Mignolo means is that decolonial knowledge should be produced on the border of the colonality of power, intersecting knowledges, including the ones which are located outside or at the margin of the dichotomical power dynamic (oppressed vs. oppressor, colonised vs. colonizer, men vs. women, black vs. white). He suggests that decolonial scholars should produce “an other thinking”, not another — opposing doubles of the hegemonic ones — but rather a way of thinking that comes from different locations. For instance, understanding history from a linear progressive perspective makes no sense, “an other thinking” surfaces from a “spatial confrontation between different concepts of history. [...] ‘An other thinking’ is possible when different local histories and their particular power relations are taken into consideration” (MIGNOLO, 2000, author’s emphasis, p. 67). According to Mignolo, the

epistemological potential of border thinking, of “an other thinking”, has the possibility of overcoming the limitation of territorial thinking (e.g. the monotopic epistemology of modernity), whose victory was possible because of its power in the subalternization of knowledge located outside the parameters of modern conceptions of reason and rationality (MIGNOLO, 2000, p. 67).

This is a demand not only for scholars but also for writers and artists. Michelle Cliff, the author of *No Telephone to Heaven*, puts this in to practice. She created a narrative which did not follow a linear progression. Her characters have the need for spatial — physical and mental — (dis)location in order to understand who they are, why they are and who they can potentially become. To some of the characters in the novel, ‘an other thinking’ arises once they become aware of the macrostructures that define and control them and of the past (that is still present) which has been erased or distorted. Walter Mignolo affirms that macronarratives,

from the perspective of colonality, are precisely the places in which “an other thinking” could be implemented, not in order to tell the truth over lies, but to think otherwise to move toward “an other logic” — in sum, to change the terms, not just the content of the conversation (MIGNOLO, 2000, p. 69-70).

Altogether, a scientific, cultural and artistic production needs to have a comprehensive understanding of how the colonial/modern system operates in Latin America to be able to create beyond these parameters. Freedom from the colonality of power will not come until Latin America realises it is not an equally located extension of Europe, nor part of the West — even if westernised. This has to be coupled with the understanding that Latin Americans have

never been nor should aim to become part of the global North. Overall, decolonial knowledge can be produced in a space where subjects have stopped uncritically replicating structures which have been built to subdue.

1.2 Coloniality of gender and Queerness

In the elaboration of the coloniality of power, Aníbal Quijano establishes that the “binary, dualist perspective on knowledge, particular to Eurocentrism, was imposed as globally hegemonic in the same course as the expansion of European colonial dominance over the world” (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 542). The theoretician analyses extensively the dualist cognitive models imposed by the colonial/modern system concerning many aspects such as ‘race’, labour control, capital, knowledge, identity, ethnicity, progress and science. However, Quijano fails to offer an analysis regarding another essential axis of the power control of this model: the coloniality of gender, which encompasses gender and sexuality. It is the Argentine scholar, Maria Lugones, who coins the term in 2007. This aspect of coloniality is also exploited later on by Walter D. Mignolo, editor of the book *Genero y Descolonialidad* (2008). Aníbal Quijano does not go much further than saying that “[i]t is probable (although the question remains to be investigated) that the new idea of gender has been elaborated after the new and radical dualism of the Eurocentric cognitive perspective in the articulation of the coloniality of power” (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 556). When he does refer to gender and sexuality in his earlier works on coloniality, he analyses them through the lens of sexual access. As Lugones observes, “Quijano’s framework restricts gender to the organization of sex, its resources, and products” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 194), consequently reproducing modern patriarchal and heteronormative standards.

In the article *Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System* (2007), Maria Lugones lays down the foundation for the problematization of three key aspects of gender: first, sex as a binary category (male/female); second, gender categories as ahistorical, universal and pre-colonial/Modern; and finally, heretosexuality within this system not only as the normative aspect of sexuality, but as a constituent force of the system as a whole in the elaboration and maintenance of power.

The Eurocentric category ‘gender’ based on the binary man/woman has been portrayed as universal and innate to human beings for centuries; however, this assumption has been questioned, problematized and treated as a social construct rather than a biological aspect for quite some time, for instance, by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). Regardless, the argument that sex is a biological category composed of male/female is not frequently contested. Maria Lugones brings Julie Greenberg’s work on intersexuality to illustrate how what is understood as biological sex is also socially constructed. Greenberg explains that

XY infants with “inadequate” penises must be turned into girls because society believes the essence of manhood is the ability to penetrate a vagina and urinate while standing. XX infants with “adequate” penises, however, are assigned the female sex because society and many in the medical community believe that the essence of womanhood is the ability to bear children rather than the ability to engage in satisfactory sexual intercourse (GREENBERG apud LUGONES, 2007, p. 195).

Hence, as we have seen, once more it is evident that even medical/biological knowledge is not always objective or grounded on irrefutably tangible evidence. Furthermore, as Gayatri Spivak points out in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1984, 1988), the law is one of the *dispositifs* of the Capitalist Eurocentric system; therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of legal systems does not recognise the intersex state. However, nowadays, some countries do allow people to self-identify. Nonetheless, quite often, this self-identification still must be done within the binary parameters, male/female. Lugones argues that the discourse of sexual dimorphism has been an important part of what she categorises as the “light side” of the colonial/modern gender system. What is more, the dark side took shape in the bodies of racialized peoples, “[t]hose in the ‘dark side’ were not necessarily understood dimorphically. Sexual fears of colonizers led them to imagine the indigenous people of the Americas as hermaphrodites or intersexed, with large penises and breasts with flowing milk” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 195). Additionally, as it has been shown by Native-American writer Paula Gunn Allen and others, Lugones highlights that “intersexed individuals were recognized in many tribal societies prior to colonization without assimilation to the sexual binary” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 195). Gunn Allen’s work allows the understanding that if the colonised were not seen within the parameters of sexual dimorphism (before becoming “the colonised”) and if there is a pressure and a pattern of behavior for intersexed children’s parents to opt between raising their child as either female or male following prescribed gender norms, “[t]he naturalization of sexual differences is another product of the modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of ‘race’” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 195, author’s emphasis). Focusing further on Gunn Allen’s work around Egalitarianism, Maria Lugones broaches how some Native

American tribes were organised around a female centered culture, which does not mean the configuration was hierarchical. Colonisation did not introduce a shift of power, for power structures as such did not exist. As Lugones explains, for “Allen, the inferiorization of Indian females is thoroughly tied to the domination and transformation of tribal life” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 199) since, with the new colonial setting, their cosmologies were classified as inferior. Moreover, as Gunn Allen explains, the clan structure was to be replaced by nuclear families; the people, intrinsically tied to their land, were dispossessed, displaced and dependent on white institutions to survive, all the while deprived of their ancestral spiritual connections. Lugones also mentions the work of Michael Horswell, who, like Allen, studies Native Americans. Horswell also reports that many Native American tribes have referred to sexual behaviour nowadays classified as homosexuality with no negative connotation; hence, compulsory heterosexuality as we have it, seems not to have been present before the colonial process in those cultures. Horswell also uses the term *third gender*. This nomenclature, however, is not supposed to mean one other specific gender classification besides man/woman, but “rather a way of breaking with sex and gender bipolarities. The ‘third’ is emblematic of other possible combinations than the dimorphic” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 201, author’s emphasis). Once again, the dimorphic, complementary sexual classification has its objective biological roots questioned. According to Horswell, different variations of a third gender have been found across many Native peoples in the Americas.

Another key element in Lugones’ theorisation is Nigerian sociologist Oyeéronké Oyewùmí’s work concerning the Yorùbá society. In *The Invention of Women: making an African sense of Western gender discourses* (1997), Oyewùmí explains that prior to colonisation, Yorùbá society was not organised based on hierarchical gender relations. There, research and accounts that classify Yorùbás as men or women since always are yet other forms of the coloniality of knowledge at play. Such gender divide and translation of Yorùbá terms into male/female and men/women were a way of making their culture cognisable to the Western frame of thought, without any concern about their cosmology, perpetuating the alleged universality of these categories, representing an inexistent dynamic of power. Oyewùmí states that this colonisation of the bodies did not take place without resistance from the Yorùbás, regardless of how they were categorised in this new system. It is also naïve to assume that the colonial power has been able to completely obliterate the Yorùbá cosmology. As the Nigerian sociologist delineates, the colonial/modern gender system co-exists with the unsexed perspective of humanity native to this African society.

Moreover, drawing from theories of women of colour and “Third World” feminists, Lugones thinks of the space of intersectionality and positionality and affirms that there are two basic aspects of the coloniality of power nowadays: everyone under its domain is gendered and racialized, even though those categories did not always exist.

The indissociability of ‘gender’ and ‘race’ and the awareness that both are created and socially constructed are fundamental in any analysis which comes from a decolonial perspective. Maria Lugones establishes that one of her aims is to make visible how the articulation of all the aspects of coloniality have been subjecting people of colour. She claims that “[w]e need to place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations (LUGONES, 2007, p. 189)”. Silvia Federici in her historical reconstruction of the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism, *Caliban and the Witch* (2014), recounts that

[u]ntil the abolition of the slave trade, as Barbara Bush and Marietta Morrissey have documented, both women and men were subjected to the same degree of exploitation; the planters found it more profitable to work and "consume" slaves to death than to encourage their reproduction. Neither the sexual division of labor nor sexual hierarchies were thus pronounced. African men had no say concerning the destiny of their female companions and kin; as for women, far from being given special consideration, they were expected to work in the fields like men, especially when sugar and tobacco were in high demand, and they were subject to the same cruel punishments, even when pregnant (FEDERICI, 2014, p. 110-111).

This passage by Federici makes evident what Lugones proposes: during the colonial period based on slavery, gender division and norms were reserved to white people, and, depending on the region, to *mestizos* as well, because they were the ones seen as human. Later on, gender norms started to be applied to all people, but not without the inextricable factors of coloniality in place. In *Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System* (2007) Lugones concludes that

[u]nderstanding the place of gender in precolonial societies is also essential to understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision making and authority, and economies. Thus, it is important to understand the extent to which the imposition of this gender system was as constitutive of the coloniality of power as the coloniality of power was constitutive of it (LUGONES, 2007, p. 202).

After having conceptualised the coloniality of gender, Lugones moves on to further investigate and propose possible analytical and practical ways of resisting, marking and escaping this system. In *Toward a Decolonial Feminism* (2010), Lugones adds Aparicio and Blaser’s notion of non-modern to localise practices, cosmologies, knowledges and ways of living which do not ascribe to coloniality; such relations and values are “constituted to be at odds with the dichotomous, hierarchical, ‘categorical’ logic” (LUGONES, 2010, author’s

emphasis, p. 746). Non-modern arrangements are in no way connected to historical time, or to the time prior to the birth of the colonial/modern system. As Lugones sees it, learning and acting from these practices might be a path towards the decolonization of the bodies. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the character Harry/Harriet finds in non-hegemonic ancestral healing practices a path towards healing, not only physical but also spiritual, not only individual but also communal.

Within the scheme of coloniality of gender, European women were the opposite of European men, following the binary logic; they were configured in opposition to the other. The same, as we have seen, did not apply to the colonised. Lugones delineates that “the civilizing mission, including conversion to Christianity, was present in the ideological conception of conquest and colonisation. Judging the colonised for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilizing mission justified enormous cruelty” (LUGONES, 2010, p. 744). According to her, this reasoning is how the colonised became female and male —not men and women. “The colonial ‘civilizing mission’ was the euphemistic mask of brutal access to people’s bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual violation, control of reproduction and systematic terror (LUGONES, 2010, 744)”. Lugones argues that turning the colonised into humans was not part of the colonial project but turning them against each other was a necessary means of maintaining control, especially with the expansion of capitalism.

Christian confession, sin, and the Manichean division between good and evil served to imprint female sexuality as evil, as colonized females were understood in relation to Satan, sometimes as mounted by Satan. The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory, and thus of people’s sense of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality (LUGONES, 2010, p. 745).

However, coloniality has not succeeded in erasing and replacing the colonised’s world views entirely. Memory is in the body, and in spite of violent repression, resistance has always existed. Through oral exchanges, dance, food, written records and rituals, non-modern existences have lived on. That is why Lugones borrows from Walter Dignolo the concept of colonial difference. This idea revolves around the notion that there is a space of existence in the intersection between the colonial and the non-modern. By seeing coloniality, one is able to see the consequences of people not being treated as human, but also,

[t]o see the coloniality is to see both the *jaqi*, the persona, the being that is in a world of meaning without dichotomies, and the best, both real, both vying under different powers for survival. Thus to see the coloniality is to reveal the very degradation that gives us two renditions of life and a being rendered by them. The sole possibility of such a being lies in its full inhabitation of this fracture, of this wound, where sense is contradictory and from such contradiction new sense is made anew (LUGONES, 2010, p. 751-752, author’s emphasis).

This fracture, which she refers to as a *fractured locus* is a space where resistant subjects inhabit and exist. Similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's conceptualisation of borders and living in the borders in *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987), Lugones' *fractured locus*, presents itself as a gap in which existing is not (solely) mediated by the coloniality of power, or in contrast with it. It is not a space of binaries, hierarchy and opposition, but instead, it has the potential for transformation beyond these paradigms.

Appropriated from the global North, the concept of queer and queerness is also a place that allows for multiple existences without the necessity of hierarchical degrees of belongingness. This will be further explored accordingly in the following chapters; however, as Michael Warner, a literary scholar from the United States explains, the "preference for 'queer' represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal (WARNER, 1993, p. xxvi, author's emphasis)". Such understanding is complemented by the queer Spanish theoretician Paul Preciado, who states that

[d]ifferently from what happens in the United States, queer movements in Europe follow the anarchist and the emerging transgender cultures to fight the "Sexual Empire", proposing a deontology of identity politics. There is no longer a natural basis ("woman", "gay", etc) to legitimate political action. What matters is not "sexual difference" or "the difference of homosexuals", but the *queer* multitudes. A multitude of bodies: transgender bodies, men without penises, gounis garous, cyborgs, butch women, lesbian gays... "Sexual multitude" appears, then, as the possible subject of queer politics (PRECIADO, 2011, p. 19-20, author's emphases).

Even though both quotes seem to resonate what Lizabeth Parivisini-Gerbert (1997) points out as a lack of concern for the actual materiality and danger of the racialized, gender-marked bodies in the Americas, it is possible to take from those conceptualisations the communal essence of queerness, an aspect, as we have seen, native to many non-modern peoples. Instead of tirelessly categorising and dividing individuals or carelessly homogenising them as the same, queer allows for people to exist to the fullest of their potentialities without being organised hierarchically, since all queer subjects are already at the margins of society. Instead of creating new centers at the margins, the idea is to respect and value individuality, being and working as a whole towards change and/or resisting the boundaries which circumscribe the normal.

In 1980, Adrienne Rich, a white lesbian theorist born in the United States, published an article entitled *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, which would become a game-changing reference in gender studies and queer studies. The writer's life-long partner

was Michelle Cliff, the light-skinned Jamaican author of *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). Rich must have been profoundly intellectually influenced by her partner, since, in her article, she is one of the very few white feminists up until that time to show some concern in relation to what would be later on described as an intersectional understanding of gender, race, class, colonial power and sexuality. Rich maps the ways white male-centered power has controlled bodies of people marked as women. The author, similarly to María Lugones, sees heterosexuality as an institution; her idea is that “heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution; even, or especially, by those individuals who feel they are, in their personal experience, the precursors of a new social relation between the sexes” (RICH, 1980, p. 637). The author illustrates how those labelled as women have been forced towards acting as competitors, eliminating solidarity which could be harmful to the structures of a Capitalist society.

Additionally, Adrienne Rich also shows how non-heterosexual women have been treated as sick, as freaks or as non-existent. One of the possible solutions to bring about change in the current global capitalist system we live in, Rich believes, is to promote lesbian affection. This conceptualisation is not limited to homoerotic relations, but it also encompasses non-heteronormative relations between women. As we will see in the following chapters, a similar approach is taken by Caribbean-Canadian writer Dionne Brand in her collection of essays *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections, Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, Politics* (1994), in which she sees lesbian affection as a means of existence for Caribbean women, especially but not only in fiction, apart from and beyond the marks of coloniality and the encounters with whiteness. In this regard, María Lugones makes a bold statement: “I do not believe any solidarity or homoerotic loving is possible among females who affirm the colonial/modern gender system and the coloniality of power” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 188). In this dissertation, I will investigate both examples of lesbian affection and of relationships between females who act within the logic of this system, in order to map how and when these interactions take place.

Having the effects of compulsory heterosexuality in mind, American Scholar Jack Judith Halberstam⁹, in *the Queer Art of Failure* (2011), explores how the logic of failure and success is inextricably connected to the modern/colonial capitalist system and the meaning of these concepts in queer subjects/art. Halberstam states that “heterosexuality is rooted in a

⁹ Jack Halberstam is a transgender man. When *the Queer Art of Failure* was published he had not transitioned yet and the name on the publication, as you will find in the references of this dissertation, is his birthname, Judith Halberstam.

logic of achievement, fulfillment, and success(ion)” whereas queer subjects reject the normal, resisting the normative mandate for human (re)production. Furthermore, his goal is to map

anticapitalist queer struggle, [...] anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming. [The queer production] is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing, it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art and for being (HABELRSTAM, 2011, p. 88).

Inspired by a quote about succeeding and failing from Quentin Crisp’s *the Naked Civil Servant* (1975), Jack Halberstam proposes that failure outlined by hegemonic parameters holds the potential to create a space for queer expressions to exist beyond the norm. As an example of the radical negation of these parameters, he cites Antiguan-American Jamaica Kincaid’s work. According to him, in her novels, Kincaid “withhold[s] happy endings, and she adds a fine shading to the narrative of colonialism [...]” (HALBERSTAM, 2011, p. 132). Halberstam problematizes the notions of failure, emphasizing that it is important to investigate “what happens when failure is productively linked to racial awareness, anticolonial struggle, gender variance, and different formulations of the temporality of success” (HALBERSTAM, 2011, p. 92). This dissertation also seeks to investigate how these dynamics affect queer subjects in both novels, mainly failure in *No Telephone to Heaven* and success in *Here Comes the Sun*.

It is known that non-heterosexual behaviour has always been present in Caribbean societies (KEMPADOO, 2009), but nowadays it is seen as deviant behavior, which is to take place, if ever, far from the public eye, as reported by sociologist Kemala Kempadoo in *Caribbean Sexuality: Mapping the Field* (2009). There is a widespread belief that sexualities other than heterosexual are a product of whites (Europe and the United States). Adrienne Rich’s postulates and the historical implications of the development of the heterosexist global colonial capitalist system outlined by Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2014) are complemented by Maria Lugones quotation of Pete Sigal’s work. She tells us that Sigal established that the “Spanish saw sodomy as sinful, but Spanish law condemned the active, not the passive partner, in sodomy to criminal punishment. In Spanish popular culture, sodomy was racialized by connecting the practice to the Moors and the passive partner was condemned and seen as equal to a Moor” (LUGONES, 2007, p, 201). Considering that Moor was the term used to refer to black people, it is evident that since the genesis of colonial domination, there has been the ever-present imposition of power through the means of sexual differentiation, abuse and subjugation and racial difference. Therefore, it is not surprising that

affections that confront the colonial logic and that inspire ideas of loss of power are rejected by society and as something positive.

Thomas Glave is the editor of the anthology *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay writing from the Antilles* (2008) and one of the founders of J-FLAG (The Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals¹⁰ and Gays), the first human rights organisation in Jamaica concerned with LGBT peoples' rights¹¹. At the Oslo Freedom Forum, in May 10, 2011, he delivered a speech that was a mix of short story, chronicle and prayer, which was later on published under the title *Jamaica: Toward a Queer Prayer* (2012), in which he recounts some of the events he, his friends and queer Jamaican people in general experience having been born and living in the Antillean country.

It should come as no surprise that somewhere, on a day not so different from this one, some “lesbian bitch” (as one has sometimes heard those people referred to in Jamaica), or a woman perceived to be a lesbian, is raped and perhaps murdered, maybe eviscerated: yes, for that is what she deserved, isn't it? Because a woman should be a woman, goddamnit, and not aim to be like a rassclaat man, no true? She, the bitch, should know her damnblasted place, no true? Know her place even though some of us say that we are not, in Jamaica, like South Africa: we do not have “corrective rape” here. We are not ignorant and dirty like those whom some of us would consider disgusting black Africans, even though many of us, if not most, also are black. And lesbian bitches and faggots in Jamaica should know their place because this kind of carrying on, this faggotness and lesbianness and simple filthy perversion, is pure wickedness, nastiness, filthiness. It is an abomination (so it has been said). It is a sickness, a white people ting, a (to some, to many) Satanic ting. . . a ting we cannot bear inna dis ya country, Massa God: so annihilate de battyman dem, de sodomite dem (GLAVE, 2012).

Through his performance, Glave paints a picture in which many of the aspects we have seen come together. The dark side of coloniality, addressed by Lugones, of having the colonial gender system being enforced violently, the use of “otherness” to refute the notion that there is something wrong within our own society, once it is much worse elsewhere. The realisation of the colonial project in having colonised subjects, many of whom of African ascent, seeing Africa as inferior, less developed and overall bad. The call for queer Jamaicans to remain in the shadows, which would allow for normative people not to be disturbed and ignore their existence. A cry for God's ‘help’ to ‘clean’ the country from sin, a device used since the very beginning throughout the Christianisation of the peoples in the Americas. Glave concludes his speech by saying that despite death, violence and rejection,

¹⁰ According to their website “[t]he term all-sexual was adopted in 1997 to reflect a continuum in sexual identity, which captures the consensual bisexual and transgender experiences of sexual minorities more so than any sexual activities or behaviours. It is not intended to capture or include persons who are orientated to have sex with animals, children or family members”. It is interesting to notice that there is a need to explicate in the “about” section of the organisation that advocating for non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people does not involve bestiality, paedophilia and incest. <<http://jflag.org/about/>> Accessed on 10, Jan, 2018.

¹¹ According to their website <<http://jflag.org/about/>> Accessed on 10, Jan, 2018.

many more lesbians and gay men, and some transgendered people, have found in J-FLAG a place in Jamaica that they can call “home,” of a kind; a place that they can call their own; a place where, on a day not so different from this one, or one exactly like it, they can sit down, recalling at some point the beauty of our gorgeous bluegreen Caribbean, and actually touch the miracle of their own living flesh, and say, or think, *But yes. I exist. I’m alive, here, and that is a good thing. Alive, here, where, at least for now, no one will try to toss acid upon me, or spit in my face and call me an abomination or cut off my hands and hate me because in me they see nothing but filth, just sickening filth. Not here, where I can be alive. Where I can have flesh, a face, and my own hands* (GLAVE, 2012, author’s emphases).

Overall, having established that the categories sex, gender and heterosexuality are neither universal nor inherent to human condition and, furthermore, are not even determined by biology, it is possible, first, to debunk the pathologising discourse surrounding non-heterosexual/heteronormative people and trans*/non-binary people, second, to refute the homogenising myth some feminist currents propose that “all women are the same in the face of patriarchy”. This homogenisation, coupled with the abstraction of the body as discursively constructed in its entirety, is one of the problems with essentialist Eurocentric feminist discourses, according to Caribbean scholar Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert. The author argues that

the indivisibility of gender relations from race and class, the intricate connections between sexual mores, skin pigmentation, and class mobility, the poverty and political repression that have left women’s bodies exposed to abuse and exploitation— seem alien to the concerns of European American feminist thought (PARAVISINI-GERBERT, 1997, p. 7).

Therefore, a decolonial critical analysis cannot come from theories which assume “women” as one comprehensible category composed of subjects who have been through similar experiences. Such analysis must take into account how racialized, “Third World”, gender non-conforming, non-heterosexual people have felt in their bodies the consequences of the categories produced being violently enforced. Maria Lugones reminds us that “[d]ecolonizing gender is necessarily a practical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social” (LUGONES, 2010, p. 746). As African-American lesbian writer of Caribbean descent Audre Lorde writes in *Sister Outsider* (1984),

[t]hose of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (LORDE, 1984, p. 34).

Then, the demand is to move on to mapping how these violent normative impositions have affected both the bodies of those who abide by the norm and those labelled as outsiders, and to learn from the life experience, knowledge and art of those who have had to resist to exist, in order to find ways to dissolve and expose the artificiality of these paradigms. However, the point is not to establish new paradigms that would replicate the binary hierarchical logic of insiders/outside, central/marginal to the norm and stimulate the classification and objectification of people to make them cognoscible, but rather recuperate, create, transform and respect spaces of existence.

1.3 Decolonizing Epistemology and Creativity

Considering that the axes around which colonial power are articulated have been enforced on the body/mind but created in the sphere of discourse, it is no surprise that History and Literature have worked as *dispositifs* to spread, promote and perpetuate the Eurocentric hegemony. Writer Edouard Glissant, born in Martinica, a French department in the Caribbean, in his book *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989) argues that

Literature and History were at the same time proposed in the West as *instruments of this Totality* (moving from primitive linearity to a global system), but that in this proposed Totality was inserted the unprecedented ambition of creating man in the image of the Western ideal, with degrees in the elevation from Caliban to Prospero (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 75, writer's emphasis).

Western History and Literature, with the letters 'h' and 'l' capitalized, not only mirror these ideals, but also speak in their silences: they prevail as true, complex and high quality; and, consequently, histories and stories which do not reproduce the norm are discredited, dismissed, annihilated or labeled as exotic or specific. The demand, then, as outlined and proposed by many scholars such as Audre Lorde (1982), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Gayatri Spivak (1988), Stuart Hall (1996, 1997), Walter D. Mignolo (2000), Anibal Quijano (2000, 2007), Sueli Carneiro (2005), Grada Kilomba (2008), among others, is to dismantle the hegemonic cognitive models which define that the knowledge produced by heterosexual, cisgender, white men is universal, neutral, superior, and, ultimately, the truth. As Anibal Quijano explains in the article *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*,

[t]he colonizers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning. At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught them in a partial and selective way, in order to co-opt

some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power (QUIJANO, 2007, p. 169).

Hence, at first, the colonised were deprived of access to education and resources, then, they were admitted with restrictions in controlled environments, mediated by the rules of the colonisers. As we will see in the following chapter, this is what happens in *Here Comes the Sun* to Margot, who believes she is actually climbing the social ladder and that it is happening because of her merits. In reality, she is being used by her wealthy boss to fulfill his economic interests. To a certain extent, something analogous happens to Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, who attends university in London and is pushed to study what the British find her fit to study, which she refuses to do.

Hegemony has us thinking that any sort of knowledge produced outside the standards of the geographical North is invalid, inferior or unscientific. Therefore, decolonial thought must question Eurocentric narratives passed along as facts and also contrast them with other perspectives of history. As Grada Kilomba utters in her 2015 performance *Decolonizing Knowledge*, “there is an apprehensive fear that if the colonial subject speaks, the coloniser will have to listen, would have to listen to be forced into an uncomfortable confrontation with other truths, truths which have been denied, repressed and kept quiet as secrets” (KILOMBA, 2015, 05’00). The silence around racism, sexism, compulsory cisgender and heterosexual norms, epistemic violence (SPIVAK, 1988) and epistemicide (CARNEIRO, 2005) must be broken.

The reflections of writer Edouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* are key to understand how the current Caribbean people and historical consciousness, or lack thereof, came to be. The author focuses on the French Caribbean; however, it is reasonable that, to some extent, the propositions are transposable to other Caribbean territories that went through the experience of modern slavery. Glissant reminds us that the

Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as happened with those peoples who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 61-62).

Despite the fact that this past is unattainable in its totality, there must be an effort to creatively recreate it and unveil what has been omitted or scattered around. Such work can be done and has been done in many ways, including through literature, rituals, dance, performances, archive research, and academic research, “[b]ecause the Caribbean

consciousness was broken up by sterile barriers, the writer must be able to give expression to all those occasions when these barriers were partially broken” (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 64). So, writers have the collective task of creating dangerously to outshout the silences, of escaping the given representations, and of recuperating the past — neither linearly nor monolithically — without any expectation of apprehending it entirely according to Western parameters, or of creating History, with a capital ‘h’.

Furthermore, it is necessary for the theoritician to localise and position all the subjects involved, deconstructing ‘otherness’ and ‘universality’. However, such work should not be done by merely establishing how different from the Eurocentric Subject the colonial Other is since this has been the strategy of the colonial enterprise in creating these boundaries. Gayatri Spivak states that

[i]n the face of the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow, a possibility of political practice for the intellectual would be to put the economic ‘under erasure,’ to see the economic factor as irreducible as it reinscribes the social text, even as it is erased, however imperfectly, when it claims to be the final determinant or the transcendental signified. The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 281).

Here, Spivak explains how identifying the other is another epistemological trap. The homogenizing “other” cannot be located, as it is supposed to represent the whole of colonised subjects. The “other” is an incomplete signifier, whereas the ‘self’ is still realised only in the coloniser. Furthermore, Spivak adds that “the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West. This concealed Subject pretends it has ‘no geo-political determinations’” (SPIVAK, 1988, pp. 271-272); in other words, there is no such thing as an unengaged, unlocalised, neutral subject. Widespread assumptions and stereotypes elaborated by hegemonic discourses must be destabilized multilaterally and by varied voices. As Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie posits in her 2009 TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*,¹² “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story”. Adichie also argues that, traditionally – and here I assume she refers to the modern/colonial world – the stories that have been disseminated and survived across borders are the ones created by the people in power. She highlights that many of these stereotypes have been passed on through the Western literary production, which, when she

¹² TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” delivered at a TED conference in 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/> Accessed on Aug, 15, 2017.

was growing up, would be easily accessible in places where Nigerian literature was scarcely found.

Having established that the colonised territories are unquestionably heterogeneous, it is of utmost importance to highlight that the strategy of othering has been deployed within the societal ensembles created throughout the colonisation process. There cannot be a decolonising epistemology which does not take into the consideration the interrelationships and intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, mobility and vulnerability. Decolonial theoreticians, intellectuals and artists cannot take for granted their own positionality. Rather than assimilation, appropriation and revision of imported theories from the geographical North such as Feminism or the LGBTQ+ movement can be useful; however, careful and ample analyses must be made in order to assess if these theories hinder the existence of the peoples from invaded and colonised territories, apart from and beyond the Eurocentric referential.

In spite of the discourse of liberation and solidarity, more often than not, theorization and practice derived from the United States and Europe needs to be revised, appropriated and transformed before being applicable in the so-called “Third World”. Professor Angelique V. Nixon, in her article *Relating Across Difference: Caribbean Feminism, bell hooks, and Michelle Cliff’s Radical Black Subjectivity* (2009), offers a brief analysis of bell hook’s theorization of feminist thought and the emancipatory struggle. Nixon praises hook’s extensive contribution regarding liberating practices and the promotion of solidarity and strengthening of Radical Black Subjectivity. However, the scholar points out that hooks, at times, fails to effectively consider other realities of the African Diaspora. Nixon highlights that when hooks writes ‘black’, she chiefly refers to African Americans, disregarding, for instance, the experience of Caribbean women. Even so, Nixon recognises that, in many aspects, the experiences black people and people of colour have been through in the United States can be transposed to the Caribbean reality. Nevertheless, it is essential to take into consideration the experiences and the colonial past of the women who do not inhabit the global North. Angelique Nixon continues her article presenting some of the theoretical literature produced by and about the Caribbean reality. The author affirms that

within the Caribbean community, creative and scholarly work has and continues to engage with Black Feminist Thought across the African Diaspora, while also cultivating regional and locally specific definitions and (re)definitions of Caribbean Feminist and Womanist Discourses (NIXON, 2009, p. 346).

This task is undertaken by many, including Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, professor of Caribbean Literature. In the first part of the article *Decolonizing Feminism: The Home-*

Grown Roots of Caribbean Women's Movements (1997), Paravisini-Gerbert discusses the effects of using theories from the United States and Europe to analyse Caribbean women's literature and movements without much concern as to how the setting being studied differs from the places where these theories have been developed. She writes that

as scholars committed to studying Caribbean women we must anchor our work in a profound understanding of the societies we (they) inhabit. The evaluation of a differing reality from the theoretical standpoint of other women's praxes comes dangerously close in many cases to continued colonization (PARAVISINI-GERBERT, 1997, p. 4).

In the essay Towards Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean (1998), Patricia Mohammed sets out to analyse how and where western feminist thought around sexual difference and equality has been present in the Caribbean, taking into consideration particularities amongst the islands and adjacent territories. Mohammed's revision of theorisation and practices has the Caribbean as the focal point, rather than a 'case study' of feminist development. Discussing identity and difference, the scholar covers feminism but not without tracing a historical background and addressing issues of masculinity and male identity as well, covering issues of race and class. Taking into consideration differences within the Caribbean, without a mandate for a homogenising theorisation, Mohammed turns her attention to actions being taken, rather than just discursive practices.

Decolonial theory is necessarily bound to praxis and one of the movements of the decolonization process is to mark whiteness. By localising the actors and speaking subjects, the myth of impartiality is weakened. Scientific objectivity is put into question, as neutrality is exposed as a marked place. Non-heterosexual, non-cisgender and racialized subjects cease from being specific, whereas the 'universal', which is defined by the Eurocentric norm, has its underlying positionalities exposed. Grada Kilomba calls for an

epistemology that includes the personal and the subjective as part of academic discourse, for we all speak from a specific time and place, from a specific history and reality— there are no neutral discourses. When *white* scholars claim to have a neutral and objective discourse, they are not acknowledging the fact that they too write from a specific place, which, of course, is neither neutral nor objective or universal, but dominant (KILOMBA, 2008, p. 31, author's emphasis).

The discourse of the universal subject is not, as we have seen, solely present in academia. In hegemonic Western literature, 'white' has always been the default for unmarked characters, which has found reflex in Westernized literature. When race is only mentioned concerning non-white/racialized characters, one is positioning all those whose bodies and subjectivities have been circumscribed by race – black, brown, native peoples, *mestizos*,

latinos – as the Others. A possible strategy to change this perception in fiction is to localise all the characters.

One of the decolonial demands for now is to create art, identities, subjectivities and existences apart from and beyond the encounter with whiteness. In *Playing in the Dark* (1993), Toni Morrison's focus is on literature in the United States, and how racial difference in language has been a crucial point in the development of the national literature. Eager to set themselves apart from the European tradition, some of the white elite writers in the United States used what they had of "different" — Africans and natives — to help shape national identity through literature. However, racialized characters are mostly present as worn out archetypes, with observable stereotypical characteristics. Contrary to that, Morrison shares that she does not have the

same access to these traditionally useful constructs of blackness. Neither blackness nor "people of color" stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread. I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language, which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work (MORRISON, 1993, p. x).

Toni Morrison is widely known and acclaimed particularly for her historical metafiction. Through her novels and her scholarship, the author has produced investigative work that shows how the racialized other has been constructed rather than simply represented through observation, as we are led to believe. In her novel *Beloved* (1987), Sixo tries to talk his way out of being punished by Schoolteacher, the man responsible for disciplining the slaves. In a dialogical game, he tried to convince his punisher that he had not stolen a piglet, but rather made a move to improve the productivity of the plantation, since once he was better fed, he would be able to work harder. Impressed, Schoolteacher admits his reasoning is clever; however, he still beats Sixo to show him that "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (MORRISON, 1987 (2004), p. 225). In other words, in spite of being able to skillfully build a convincing argument, Sixo, as an enslaved person, had no right to play with language, which belonged to white men. Through her fiction, Morrison invites us to reflect not only on history and common constructs of slavery and slaves, for instance, but also to pay attention to realities underlying language and the dynamics of power within the colonial logic.

In the preface to *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), Toni Morrison also analyses metaphors, stereotypes and other linguistic devices which have been fundamental in the development of the literary imagination in the United States, and, undoubtedly, in other former colonies where race has been used as a means of separating and

organising people hierarchically. Beyond literary criticism, Morrison thinks of this aspect in her own writing and argues that the difficulty her writerly self is bound to find “would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it (MORRISON, p. xi, 1993)”. Morrison’s concern is justified insofar as she wants to escape the linguistic constructions within the same language she is questioning.

Therefore, a cognitive shift beyond the binary way of thinking is necessary in order to effectively bring about change. In Toni Morrison’s own words, “[t]he kind of work [she has] always wanted to do requires [her] to learn how to manoeuvre ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains” (MORRISON, 1993, p. xi). Hence, the intentional omission of common racial codes in the short story *Recitatif* is Morrison’s exercise of imagination, working with language and representation beyond the common resources of racially-marked discourses and characters, as she writes the story of two girls, one black and one white, and the reader never gets to know who they are. Racial tension is a fundamental part of the life of both characters. Right at the beginning, the narrator, Twyla, says “[i]t was one thing to be taken out of your own bed early in the morning - it was something else to be stuck in a strange place with a girl from a whole other race (MORISSON, 1988)”¹³, as Morrison explains in *Playing in the Dark* (1993), “*Recitatif* was an experiment in the removal of all racial codes from a narrative about two characters of different races for whom racial identity is crucial” (MORRISON, 1993, p. xi). So, Morrison does not produce a race-free fictional world, nor ignore racial issues as if they were non-existent, but rather sets out to dislocate the commonly used tropes, forcing readers not to rely so much on pre-conceived ideas. Here, the work of Morrison is important not only because she is a writer and scholar who reflects on, proposes and creates decolonial practices but also because she was a huge influence to Michelle Cliff, the writer of *No Telephone to Heaven*, and to Nicole Dennis-Benn, the author of *Here Comes the Sun*.

Still on the politics of representation, as it has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, with the birth of modern/colonial identities, there has always been a pressing need to create and reinforce a homogenous European identity, respecting the variety and individuality within the norm. All those who did not fit the category, ‘blacks’ and other people of colour, were essentialised and stereotyped. Therefore, essentialism has been used as a means to dehumanize and circumscribe people(s) who come from various locations, cultures,

¹³ *Recitatif* is available at <<https://genius.com/Toni-morrison-recitatif-annotated>> Accessed on 06, Jan, 2017.

communities, ethnicities. In the essay *New Ethnicities* (1996), Stuart Hall proposes a brief history of representation of black subjects in the 20th century, Britain being the focal point. At the beginning, essentialism worked to undermine 'black' subjects and that was reflected in how they were represented in the media/arts. After that, as the author explains, as black people start to conquer space in the realm of representation and cultural and post-colonial studies gain more force, essentialism is used within a project to deconstruct the negative imagery previously perpetuated. The idea was to build a positive image, according to modern/colonial standards, in which black subjects were do-gooders and upstanding citizens. The strategy used in both moments was similar, albeit dichotomous. However, Hall states that, in the path of the representation of plural identities, one "can no longer conduct black politics to the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject the new essentially good black subject" (HALL, 1996, p. 444). Then, the next move in black representation politics is in allowing for multiple representations, good, bad and all in between, which depicts subjects who are not stereotypical replicas. According to Hall, this trend does not come to overcome or dismiss what has been done before, but rather, as a way to escape essentialism in order to produce aesthetics outside/beyond/apart from the modern/colonial binary categories. Consequently, literary and art critics can no longer "resolve the question of aesthetic value by the use of these transcendental, canonical cultural categories" (HALL, 1996, p. 448), since these are artificial fabrications that derive from the myth of neutrality and objectivity.

Drawing from Stuart Hall's indication, the current but not exclusive move within black politics of representation is to go beyond the far-reaching homogenising essentialisation to make room for the particularities of location, not only geographical. There is a need to revisit notions of 'race', femininity, masculinity, gender norms, sexuality, class difference and mobility within what has been referred to as the black experience.

The critical point here is, what Radical Black subjectivity and Queer subjectivity have continuously stated, that blackness, much like queerness, must not and cannot be defined by paradigms established by whiteness. The Eurocentric/Modern/colonial structures and cognitive models will never be enough nor appropriate for subjects who are marginal to the norm, to exist and represent themselves. The decolonial creation process involves going beyond and apart from the fictions meant to define the othered. Brazilian queer performer and researcher Jota Mombaça, commenting on the current conservative wave both in Brazil and worldwide, writes that despite violent attacks and discourse, the marginalised choose to gather and resist,

instead of fighting alone from our insulated positions, we choose to nurture ourselves so as not to let their rise stop us. And we need to keep doing it. We need to keep imagining. [...] We need to tear apart their war against our radical imagination in order to be able to dream of worlds that do not exist yet, even if every week the reactionary tornadoes of totalitarianism compel us to defend the things we thought we had already established. Even if they force us to defend the obvious one thousand times, we need to overcome their determination, dreaming even further—above, beneath, within, against, and around of their world of containment. We need to embody, as an intensity and as our matter, the spell that allows us to speak in two or more languages at the same time: one that confronts the gag imposed by the right-wing crusaders; and another that leads beyond what they meant for us (MOMBAÇA, 2017).

Therefore, fighting together and going beyond homogenising set ups become strategies to prevent from erasing the subjectivity and particularities of these subjects. The demand now is for language, representation and imaginable worlds in which a wholesome not-defined-by-others existence is possible. It is necessary to conceive worlds where those who have been branded as outsiders, non-human and who have had to hide parts of who they are to survive in society can exist; overall, the call is for societies based on the coloniality of power to cease to exist as they are, and morph into communities in which those who have been misrepresented or completely written out of history can have a place, which is not in any of the spaces and practices of dominance categorised as the centre of the discussion over the last 500 years.

Edouard Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989), writes that effecting change is in the hands of those who have been misrepresented, silenced or completely written out of History. The writer's vision is that

[w]ith U.S. history and literature, their capitalization removed and told in our gestures, come together once again to establish, beyond some historical ideal, the novel of the relationship of individual to collectivity, of individual to the Other, of We to Us. The cross-cultural imagination is the framework for this new episode. I am told that this collective novel cannot be written, that I will always lack certain concrete realities. But it is a fine risk to take (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 87).

The risk of failing alluded by Glissant is unimportant if one abdicates the Eurocentric Colonial/Modern standards of producing knowledge and art, and if one considers the risk faced daily by those who refuse normative mandates, especially when those are labelled as a menace to the national project, as alluded by Jota Mombaça (2017). Following this logic, failure is almost default to those who reject it. The power of language and literature to affect change has been discussed in length by Audre Lorde. Throughout her life, the author advocated for theory combined with practice, and for creating bonds and solidarity through literature. In her unparalleled collection of essays, letters and musings, *Sister Outsider* (1984), Lorde affirms that poetic language

is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless, so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. [...]. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before (LORDE, 1984, p. 37).

Therefore, creating art and fiction is potentially one of the best ways to escape the vortex of fictions which have been invented to classify, represent, signify and circumscribe subjects marginal to the norm, which might come across as nonsense to the coloniser/imperialistic/Western eye. Such perception is even more evident when one comprehends that these fictions have been continuously spread, internalised, reproduced, and sold as fact. It is about knowing that the linear historical time is yet another piece of fiction thought out to give us the impression that progress has been made, barriers have been completely overcome, and what is seen as the past has ceased to exist; notions that the coloniality of power axiomatically disproves. It is time for our stories. It is not necessarily about coming up with entirely new worlds ignoring the reality of the current ones, but rather, as Audre Lorde proposes, it is about laying the foundation for changes to be made to allow these subjects to (be)come home.

In both novels analysed in this dissertation, the authors, as I will argue, contribute to decolonial aesthetic, shedding light on locations (gender, race, class, countries) not usually mapped as such. There are plural subjects and locations that have to face the macro and micro consequences of being under the control of coloniality. The unravelling of both narratives allows for reflections about what success and failure may mean from different locations. Non-conformity, assimilation and the idea of navigating between both is a theme present in both books, highlighting the paths of roads less travelled, or previously only trodden in the unrepresented dark.

2 FAILURE IN *HERE COMES THE SUN*

My thoughts about you are frightening
but precise. I can see the house on the hill
where we grow our own vegetables out back
and drink warm wine out of jam jars
and sing songs in the kitchen
until the sun comes up
Yrsa Daley-Ward

Nicole Dennis-Benn's debut novel *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) was elected "Notable Book of the Year" by *The New York Times*¹⁴. During an interview given to the newspaper in July, 2016, the Jamaican-born writer said she had moved to the United States at seventeen to attend university, but mostly because of the class structure. As she explains "my family was working class and it's very hard to move up. On top of that, with being a lesbian in a homophobic place, the U.S. seemed the best choice". In another *New York Times* interview in May, 2016 the writer said that "[she] wanted readers to see the other side of paradise; [she] wanted them to see the real people behind the fantasy life advertised in commercials". Knowing that the breath-taking beach scenery, people's hospitality and reggae as an unengaged movement of weed-smokers were the pictures that came to mind when outsiders heard the name of her home country, Dennis-Benn took upon herself to write a novel that would provide people with other perspectives of and other alternatives to the single story most foreigners have of Jamaica. As Professor Wendy W. Walters, a specialist in African American Literature in the context of diaspora, puts in her introduction to *At Home in Diaspora*,

diasporic authors use their writing to resist, explore, and revise "the social heritage of slavery" as lived in contemporary discrimination. Against the "social death" of slavery and the social negations of contemporary racisms, black writers embrace authorship as a means of reinstating not one but sometimes multiple resistant selves (WALTERS, 2005, p. xiv).

The author of *Here Comes the Sun* has created characters whose lives are affected not only by class, gender and racial tensions but also by their attitudes concerning sexuality and

¹⁴ From the author's website <<http://www.nicoledennisbenn.com/aboutNicole2.html>> Access on 10th Aug. 2017.

overall effects of coloniality. As María Lugones posits in “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” (2010), colonized women have not been considered part of humanity. According to Lugones,

[o]nly the civilized are men or women, Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species – as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. The European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason (LUGONES, 2010, p. 743).

The consequences of not having been included in the concept of humanity when it was established as a category coupled with the subsequent enforcement of the normative standards of that category have burdened racialized bodies. In her 1980 article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, Adrienne Rich broaches how compulsory heterosexuality affects women’s lives. The argument is that it is one of the main axes in the oppression of women, in the perpetuation of the Capitalist system and in the invisibility or demonization of lesbian erotic relationships and of affection between women. In the essay, Rich, quoting Kathleen Gough, explains that part of the power exercised by men over women’s lives lies in controlling women’s labour – including prostitution – and the product of such labour, while promoting the fallacy of class mobility for these subjects. Italian-American Scholar Silvia Federici makes similar connections regarding the control of women and their labour in her historical reconstruction of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the expansion of colonisation entitled *Caliban and the Witch* (2014). Federici outlines that

[...] capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations - the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury - by denigrating the "nature" of those it exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization (FEDERICI, 2014, p. 17).

Here Comes the Sun is set in 1990s Jamaica, overridden by unbounded environmental destruction, the expansion of luxury resorts, neoliberal practices, and a meltdown of the country’s financial sector. The colonial period in the Caribbean nation officially ended in 1962, however, colonial practices have lingered on. The novel’s protagonist is Margot, a black woman who during the day is part of the staff of the Palm Star Resort and by night works as a prostitute in the same place. As times goes by, Alphonso Wellington of the Wellington Empire – which included many farms and properties all over Jamaica –, the owner of the hotel, invites her to recruit for, train and run a prostitution ring together with him. She hesitates before accepting the position. However, wishing for a better life, Margot brushes aside any doubts and wholeheartedly believes that her life will change for the better after having been “promoted”, that is, she feels her hard work will result in recognition and

rewards. In her musings, she ponders that the position of “boss lady” will be temporary. She will have to be in this place only until she gets a proper job, such as general manager of the hotel. What is more, in the prostitution ring she follows the same exploitative capitalist logic that her boss makes use of in all of his enterprises.

Margot, like her mother Delores, has pinned her hopes on Thandi, her much younger sister. Delores believes that the teenager will be the one to remove them from poverty and allow them to move far away from River Bank, a former fishing village that saw its fishermen run out of jobs due to a long-lasting drought and the massive constructions happening in the surrounding areas. Both Margot and Delores invest all their money, time and energy into making sure the girl is getting the most out of her prestige education. Delores sees the teenager as her golden ticket out of material poverty whereas Margot firmly believes in protecting her so her sister will not have to go through what she had to when she was a teenager, namely, having her body sold by her mother to various men.

Conversely, the young girl does not think a good education will be enough to secure a reasonable job and she feels that the secret to her success is in lightening her skin. Thandi is convinced that with lighter skin she will be able to get a decent job, date popular boys, and that everyone will find her more beautiful and pleasant, deserving of good things. In spite of being an excellent student, Thandi discovers that her scholarship had nothing to do with her academic achievements. Alphonso had created this fund at the request and after a lot of insistence from Margot, who, besides being his employee, was also his mistress. The teenager finds out about this only towards the end of the novel. Feeling that she has nothing to lose, Thandi goes to Alphonso to ask him to interfere in favour of her boyfriend, Charles, who was in trouble with the police. The owner of the hotel starts to undress the girl, who is aware of his intentions. It dawns on her that “she has no ownership of anything. Not the scholarship. Not herself. [...] She exists merely as a debt to be paid” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 336). Aware of her immobility, symbolized by the body of the rich white man on top of hers, Thandi realizes the condition she is relegated to. Before Alphonso can take his pants off, Margot arrives and, overcome by rage, confronts her boss about what is going on. The man replies that he had thought Thandi was a “gift” sent by Margot, as a means of thanking him for all she owed him. Nonchalantly, he adds his employee was interrupting and tells her that

‘You people with your drama just continue to amaze me. Margot, you have a business, a responsibility. You work for me. So you’re the last person I expect to be telling me who I should and shouldn’t have. I hired you to do what you do because you’re the only person without a conscience. Then you have the nerve to blackmail me with it.’ His eyes turn from jovial musing to stone. ‘Your sister, as far as I am concerned, is fair game’ (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 339).

As Alphonso sees it, Margot is nothing more than a servant. There is no partnership based on equity. Being the manager of the prostitution ring had given Margot the false impression of climbing the social ladder. Nonetheless, to him, Margot's value lies solely on the amount of profit her work and her body can generate; she is only seen as productive force. Here, his posture towards Margot is intimately connected to how the colonial matrix of power operates, as seen in chapter 1.

Undoubtedly, Alphonso's character can be read as the embodiment of the capitalist logic, subduing and consuming the weaker links of the chain of power. Destroying River Bank to expand his hotel business by removing the dwellers and paying them next to nothing; widening his prostitution scheme by having Margot recruit vulnerable girls and women, he exploits and dehumanizes subaltern subjects in order to obtain as much profit and power as he can. All of that is done with the support of his investors, who will spare no efforts and, if necessary, will resort to violence and intimidation to get what they want.

Margot, on the other hand, is the subject in a state of vulnerability who longs to break the poverty cycle. However, she hopes to do so within and reproducing the oppressor's logic. The vision of her sister's body being treated as an object, as merchandise, while she is being accused of not having a conscience, makes her realise that the freedom and success she aches for would come – if it ever did – at a very high cost. For her, freedom equals being able to choose what she works with, where she lives and with whom she has relations. Above all, as Margot sees it, success means having money and exercising power and control over others, which consequently, in her perspective, means being superior to those around her.

2.1 “**Membah dis, nobody love a black girl**”

The way in which the body is perceived has been through dramatic changes during the period known as modernity. From the beginning of what Europeans call the great navigations, throughout the invasion, exploitation, obliteration, and theft of the cultures and knowledges of populations in territories outside of Europe, to the birth of the historical period known as the Enlightenment, coupled with the development of Western science and medicine in hegemonic discourses, the body has gone from being a holistic entity connected to nature and to one another, to become a circumscribable material object. Historian Silvia Federici affirms that

the body was increasingly politicized in this process; it was denaturalized and redefined as the "other," the outer limit of social discipline. Thus, the birth of the body in the 17th century also marked its end, as the concept of the body would define a specific organic reality, and become instead a political signifier of class relations, and of the shifting, continuously redrawn boundaries which these relations produce in the map of human exploitation (FEDERICI, 2014, p.155).

As we have seen in the first chapter, Jamaican-born theoretician Stuart Hall, one of the developers of the field known as Cultural Studies, proposes that the category "race" is discursive, socially constructed and unfixed (1997). This postulate is also present in Aníbal Quijano's (2000) theorization of coloniality. Hall elaborates on our cultural impulse to categorize the world in order to be able to ascribe meaning to it. The author highlights that analysing race as a category is important

when the systems of classification become the objects of the disposition of power. That's to say when the marking of difference and similarity across a human population becomes a reason why this group is to be treated in that way and get those advantages, and that group should be treated in another. It's the coming together of difference, or categorization of our classification and power. The use of classification as a system of power, which is really what is very profound and one then sees that across a range of different characteristics (HALL, 1997, p. 2).

Drawing from the works of W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon, Stuart Hall is one of the theoreticians who dismantles the myth of biological determination. The dynamics of power created from these arbitrary differentiations, which establishes white Europeans as the superior race, shifts and reconfigures according to the location and the modern history of a specific place. There is nothing in the actual bodies to justify discrimination. The parameters that circumscribe whiteness are contingent to the particularities of a given community. In societies where the power of coloniality is in place, the parameters which dictate "racial superiority" are directly connected to the skin colour of the majority of the members of the ruling class. By outlining some of the ways in which the discourse of race is socially constructed, Hall creates an epistemological space of analysis in which "[t]he term black is referring to this long history of political and historical oppression. It's not referring to our genes. It's not referring to our biology" (HALL, 1997, p. 4-5). Note that it is not being said that distinctions do not exist. However, it is only in the way society organises those differences into "systems of meaning, that the differences can be said to acquire meaning and become a factor in human culture and regulate conduct, that is the nature of what [he calls] the discursive concept of race" (p. 10). Hence, there is nothing innate that validates the oppression of racialized subjects and there is no possibility of describing homogeneously "black experience" or "black people".

Alice Walker, writer and activist, is accredited to have coined the term “colorism” in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). According to the writer, colorism is mostly about people from a given “race” treating others from the same racial or ethnical group differently based on the shade of their skin colour: the lighter the skin, the more accepted someone is. Walker remarks that colorism is a halting force, just like colonialism, sexism and racism (WALKER, 1983, p. 290-291). It is important to notice that, if we take into consideration Hall’s propositions, it is easy to realise that colorism is another device that organizes people hierarchically in order to ensure members of the ruling class will maintain power and to promote the whitening and erasure of racialized populations.

The reality of colorism, also referred to as complexionism, is pungent in Jamaica. In celebration of the 2017 Black History month, the Jamaican Peace Corps website, which is run by volunteers, asked some of their members to give statements of their experience working in Jamaica as a person of colour. Stephen Camarco, a graduate student from Indiana University Bloomington in the United States, who went back to his home country to work as an environmental volunteer, wrote an article entitled “Diversity As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica”, in which he shares Alice Walker’s views and gives an idea of how it translates in Jamaican society. Camarco explains that

[c]omplexionism and racism are two different issues, but with similar roots. Complexionism tends to be between people of a similar race. It can be described as a bias or prejudice from an individual against another person of a similar race, but [who] is darker in complexion. Complexionism places the value of beauty, self-worth, and power based on skin tone. Social class also influences attitudes about complexionism. Historically, Jamaica’s upper class has been comprised of mostly fair skinned people, while darker skin people tend to make up the majority of the working class. The intersectionality of race and social class in Jamaica has a major influence on the country’s culture (CAMARCO, 2017).

The lived experience of complexionism is present in Nicole Dennis-Benn’s testimony in an article piece for Elle magazine called “Growing up with Miss Jamaica”. The writer recounts her childhood and the effects of this type of prejudice while she was growing up. Dennis-Benn touches on how the concept of beauty takes shape in the island. Non-white individuals with lighter skin are seen as more attractive, more likely to become successful. Most models and contestants in beauty pageants and the majority of people from the middle and upper middle class have lighter skin, whereas most working-class citizens have a darker skin colour. Writing from the perspective of someone who grew up working class, the author writes that “[m]any of us were too busy being children to acquiesce, too innocent to realize that our bodies were exposed wounds; our flesh, the perpetual shame” (DENNIS-BENN,

2016b). Here it seems that from Dennis-Benn's account, even though children are born into a system based on racism and complexionism, it takes some time until they fully understand how it operates and hierarchically organises people.

In the foreword to a 2007 edition of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize of Literature, African-American writer Toni Morrison, recalls her creative process while writing the novel and her perceptions prior to its conception. The author confesses she was mostly concerned with the

tragic and disabling consequences of accepting rejection as legitimate, as self-evident. [She] knew that some victims of powerful self-loathing turn out to be dangerous, violent, reproducing the enemy who has humiliated them over and over. Others surrender their identity; melt into a structure that delivers the strong persona they lack. Most others, however, grow beyond it. But there are some who collapse, silently, anonymously, with no voice to express or acknowledge it. They are invisible. The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has "legs," so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws, and images, reinforces despair and the journey to destruction is sealed (MORRISON, 2007, p. 5).

The protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, much like Thandi in *Here Comes the Sun*, is a girl who aspires to unattainable ideals of whiteness, which go beyond the colour of one's skin. Similarly, both characters are taken over by self-loathing and low self-esteem. Finding objective signifiers in the world and working towards achieving their goals – for Pecola, having blue eyes like Shirley Temple's, and, in Thandi's case, lightening her dark skin –, they hope to change their societal status and the way they have access to the human experience. The strategy of using child characters helps to illustrate what Hall (1997) exposes, that is, the devices of racial discrimination are discursively constructed and do not find its signification in biological features. The verisimilitude of childish innocence makes it feasible to have these characters who set out to resolve structural problems, which they do not realize are at play, go after an objective, isolated solution. Needless to say, both Pecola and Thandi's journeys along this path end in failure.

Caribbean-Canadian author Dionne Brand points out in the article "The Body for Itself" (1994) that "[t]he burden of the body is as persistent an image in Caribbean women's literature as it is in Black women's lives" (BRAND, 1994, p. 39). In *Here Comes the Sun*, all the main characters are affected by racist and colorist structures. Delores puts on a brave front; however, her spirit has been broken throughout her life. From the continuous abuse by a respected member of the community, which results in Margot's birth; to her trip to the big city, where she is ridiculed, Delores self-loathing turns into violent behaviour towards Margot and even Thandi. Before going to Kingston, her mother, Mama/Grandma Merle, warns

Delores not to wear the yellow dress she likes so much because she was too big and black for it, a remark which is intimately connected to the logic of colorism. However, 18-year-old Delores feels like Queen Elizabeth (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 90) in her outfit. The woman thinks she has done a good job dressing in a way that will allow her to blend in with the crowd, but people are able to tell she is not from the city. After an embarrassing sequence of events, we are told that

[i]t was as though a veil had lifted from her eyes. When she looked down, all she saw was her black skin and how it clashed with the dress. With her surroundings. With everything. It had collided with the order and propriety of the colonial mansion that day, and the uniform line of those high-color Catholic schoolgirls. Something about that trip changed her, and on the bus ride back her home looked different: the sea-green of the nauseating sea, the sneering sun in the wide expanse of a pale sky, the indecisive Y-shaped river that once swallowed her childhood, and even the red dirt from the bauxite mines caked under her worn heels, seemed like a wide-open wound that bled and bled between the rural parishes (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 91).

Here, it is evident that Delores feels like an outsider not only because of her skin colour but also because of the way the citizens of downtown Kingston react to the way she dresses and the patois she speaks, which are contingent to where she comes from. She starts to despise everything about herself and believes that money will buy her way out of the environment she grew up in, a mindset which she passes onto her daughters. Delores is caught off guard when she sees a drawing Thandi has made of her; the narrator reveals that the mother's perception is that

[i]n her daughter's drawing, she saw the lines in her face, her double chin. She saw an ugly woman— an ugly black woman with bulging eyes too wide to be peered into before looking away, and nose too flat on the broad face. In this sketch she was not human, but a creature. This is how her daughter sees her — bull-faced and miserable. All Delores's secrets and insecurities are exposed in the gaze of this child (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 201).

On the other hand, Thandi is proud of her drawing and, while showing it to her mother, the young girl wishes she had been more precise because she holds her mother's opinion in high regard. The picture-like depiction of herself through her daughter's eyes destabilises Delores, who has spent much of her life finding her black skin to be ugly and trying to hide her vulnerability. The imposed standards of beauty preconized by the ever-present shadow of coloniality have Delores reproducing her internalised hate for herself and dark-skinned people, which prevents her from seeing a human representation – instead of a beast – in the drawing.

As Thandi is the youngest in a long line of women who have been silenced, diminished and violated, it is not a surprising that her storyline provides us with a multi-layered portrayal of the effects of child abuse, low self-esteem and of what the search for

ideals of whiteness can do to a racialized subject. Without the knowledge of her family, Thandi resorts to an abrasive skin “treatment” provided by one of the women in her village, Miss Ruby, to try to achieve her main goal. Having her body wrapped in plastic film, she is forced to wear a coat under the Jamaican sun in order to allow for the concoction to work. The sun, which is one of the main attractions to tourists, becomes an enemy to the young Jamaican. Thandi’s discomfort is increased in moments when she nearly suffocates. The burning sensation caused by the whitening cream can be read as a projection of the feeling she felt for inhabiting a body so brutalized and marginalized by the norm. During this process, Thandi is presented with the opposite of what she was looking for, restraint instead of liberty.

Thandi’s short-term aim is to attend the sweet sixteen party of a schoolmate. In her dreams, she strongly believes that once the teenagers she goes to school with see her with lighter skin in a beautiful dress, they will welcome her into their group and a handsome boy will ask her to dance. She does not stop the bleaching even after Charles calls her beautiful and begs her not to proceed doing that. After having been rude to him, Thandi decides to look for Charles at his house and finds him bathing his helpless mother, Miss Violet, who, after his father left, was never the same. “Thandi shudders from the stench, which reminds her of sickness. But it is the more potent mixture of piss, faeces, and something else that makes her swallow the box lunch she ate at school earlier. The darkness doesn’t permit Thandi to see much farther than the doorway” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 225). The old woman is reminiscing about the past; it is as if time had stopped inside that shack. The teenager is absolutely shocked and disgusted by what she witnesses, and she cannot hide it from Charles. The young girl, then, begins to consider that all that Delores has told her over the years, her mother’s insistence on her having a respectable career and removing herself from poverty was the woman’s strategy to save her child from the fate assigned to most women in the village. From then on, the attempt to lighten her skin is not only about having her beauty recognised by others; it is also about being seen as beautiful by people above her social class, it is about escaping the cycle of poverty, violence, oppression and dehumanization people in River Bank are put through generation after generation.

Just before the party, Delores notices how pale Thandi’s skin is and compares her to a corpse. The issue of skin colour causes many inquiries to surface. Enraged, the mother asks if that is the reason why the girl never brings home any schoolmates. Delores demands to know if Thandi is ashamed of having a black mother, if the girl does not want other people to see she lives amongst black people. Delores, then, questions where her ‘real daughter’ is, since the one in front of her, on top of having bleached her skin, is not even able to speak in *patois*

anymore. To all of her inquiries, she gets no reply because Margot walks in and the discussion takes another turn. The confrontation amongst the three women is a critical moment in the narrative. Margot speaks up, revealing the succession of abuses she had been submitted to by Delores. In spite of purposefully applying makeup to make her skin look lighter when she goes to work at the hotel's front desk, Margot does not side with Thandi in the skin-bleaching issue. The older sister foreshadows what the teenager will experience first-hand later on: regardless of her skin colour or any other body modifications she might try, they (people from her school) will not see her differently and her place in society will not change (DENNIS BENN, 2016, p. 236).

Eventually, Thandi goes to the sweet sixteen party. However, despite having been able to make her skin less dark, the girls at the ball pass her by as if they did not know her and the staff do not show her to the snacks and refreshments tables, as they do to other guests. The final blow comes in the form of a fair-skinned boy's dismissal of her. She is completely crushed under the wheels of racism and classism. Here, it is clear that the exclusion, isolation and invisibility she experiences, and the way the upper and middle-class children perceive Thandi is not only because of her skin colour, but also because of her social class and of where she comes from. Had Delores not come from the working class, the girl might have been welcomed by her schoolmates. As it had happened to her mother many years before, reality sinks in.

Despite not having happened at the sweet-sixteen party, a dance with someone who cared for her was granted to Thandi. The teenager and Charles go to an empty unfinished hotel and find comfort in being alone, protected from the sun. Once they arrive, Charles surprises Thandi twirling her around, as if they were "a couple dancing to slow music" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 182). While they dance, both start to imagine what the space will be like, but soon decide to wait until the sun goes down. The darkness provides a sense of security, so, after the sunset, they find a spot to sit and relax. However, the two begin to talk about the construction. First, they wonder if what happened to other villages — being dismantled to give way to luxury resorts — would take place in River Bank. At first, Charles ponders that "the beach won't be ideal for amateur swimmers, since one can easily drown if not aware of Pregnant Heidi's wrath" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 183). In spite of what he said, Thandi is worried River Bank dwellers will be evicted. Charles promptly responds that he would not yield up their homes to the owners of the development without putting up a hard fight.

Nevertheless, Charles is not present when the evictions start. Since he beats to death the man who had abused Thandi, he has to become a fugitive and there is a ten-thousand-American-dollar reward in exchange for information regarding his whereabouts. Delores is convinced that Thandi knows where Charles is. When she tries to persuade her daughter to go to the police, the girl replies that he was defending her, implying she has feelings for him. The mother's response is an extensive monologue in which Delores goes back to the refrain that money and a good education are to be her passport to freedom, claiming that Charles had an ulterior motive to say he loved her, affirming that black girls are not deserving of true love. Delores' speech ends with a gut-wrenching piece of advice, "[u]se yuh head, chile. Yuh can't place more value on dis boy an' his foolish love over money. If it mean so likkle to you, then you'll lose everyt'ing. 'Membah dis, nobody love a black girl. Not even harsel. Now get up an' guh get yuh pay" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 281). Again, Delores is reinforcing the ideas which have been instilled in her concerning the worthlessness of a black woman as an individual. The fact is that Delores sees true love as unachievable by black women, so she tries to break her daughter's spirit before the world does.

2.2 (Ac)cursed affections

Caribbean-Canadian writer Dionne Brand in the book *Bread Out of Stone* (1994) proposes a brief but rich analysis of how racialized women's bodies are commonly represented in contemporary Caribbean literature. Brand comments that a high number of black women characters – many of whom are created and analysed by male writers and critics – are present in narratives as mere representations in the dichotomy coloniser–colonised; “their approach to the Black female body is as redeemer of the violated, and builder of the binary pedestal” (BRAND, 1994, p. 35). Brand suggests that some attempts to break with the colonizers' stereotypical constructions of the exotic oversexualized black Caribbean body might have stripped women characters of depth and sexuality, depriving them of their own bodies in all their capabilities and potentialities. The author argues that if the representation of such bodies is meant to be something other than the actual women, how can one speak of a body which exists for itself, which possesses sexuality, which is not fixed and one-sided? Thereupon, the question becomes how to represent this body without a wider moralising

undertone, in a way that its sexuality, its movements, its sensations, pitfalls and multiplicities are depicted?

One of the possible solutions given by Brand is illustrated through the analysis of literary anticolonial, antipatriarchal texts. Brand, who sees something different in the way the novelist Jamaica Kincaid creates her characters, highlights that “the texts reject these conventions and talk about what we really are concerned with in our daily lives: not only external, the encounter with ‘whiteness’, but the ongoing internality” (BRAND, 1994, p. 44, author’s emphasis). Brand adds that women writers whose work feature black Caribbean women characters who experience sensuality and sexuality for themselves – not to satisfy a man’s desires or for any other ulterior motive – do not just want to propose new paradigms, but rather, they are about “unfixing the fixed” (BRAND, 1994, p. 45) and questioning widely accepted and reproduced literary representations.

Undertaking the task of unfixing what has been established and continuously reproduced is a job which requires a broad, multi-layered perception of the (in)human experience. As scholar Anh Hua, quoting Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan highlights “for queer diasporic subjects, neither the homeland nor the diasporic location can offer spaces of ‘safety’, ‘authenticity,’ and belonging, since queer identities, experiences, and sexualities are written out of the nation and out of the diaspora” (SINGH; SKERRETT; HOGAN, apud: HUA, 2008, p.195). In “Who’s Allowed to Hold Hands?”, published in 2017 on *The New York Times*, Nicole Dennis-Benn, who has experienced the (dis)location just mentioned, confesses she thought she would have a lot of freedom to be a lesbian in the United States. However, she found hostility in many places, and coming from different people, including compatriots who are part of the Jamaican diaspora in that country. Evoking M. Jacqui Alexander’s ideas in her article “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas”, the anthropologist specialised in African-American studies in the fields of race, gender and sexuality, Jafar S. Allen, in his piece “Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjunction” outlines that

some bodies, such as those of the lesbian and the “prostitute,” cannot be included as citizens in former colonies of the Caribbean precisely because they embody sexual agency and eroticism radically out of step with the aspiration of the nation to advertise itself as independent, developed, disciplined, and poised to join in the number of putatively civilized states (ALLEN, 2012, p. 219, author’s emphasis).

In the 2016 article “Breaking Taboos and Loving the Characters We Fear”, Nicole Dennis-Benn admits that she had a hard time giving life to the character “Margot”. Allowing for her creative process to take place, the author was obligated to face her own fears and

insecurities of writing and was also forced to put aside much of her own judgment to be able to create a Jamaican lesbian character, giving literary form to what she calls Jamaica's biggest taboo — homosexuality. However, Dennis-Benn was able to write her characters inspired by the works of authors such as Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison, who, as outlined in the first chapter of this dissertation, are linked to decolonial aesthetics. Dennis-Benn states that “their beautiful literary work documenting sexuality, especially female sexuality, gradually gave me permission to write my own” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016d). Turning her attention to works by Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison made it possible for her to overcome some of her internal conflicts. Hence, it is not surprising that unconventional literary depictions are present in her work.

Nicole Dennis-Benn's characters' subjectivities, attitudes and perceptions are revealed and shift throughout *Here Comes the Sun*. One of the examples is the character Verdene Moore, Margot's secret lover. The way in which she is treated by the dwellers of River Bank illustrates the rejection faced by the ones who are not within the norm. She is continuously excluded and ostracized by the people from the community she grew up in. Villagers do not want to be associated with her. Verdene is the only important character in the novel who goes through the diasporic experience. After a scandal at her Jamaican university, she moves to London to live with her aunt Gertrude. For her, going back to River Bank does not mean returning to the embrace of her community. In spite of the fact that, theoretically, England is supposed to be a less homophobic country, Verdene is not able to live her sexuality overtly whilst living there. Under her aunt's guidance, she marries a man, but she cheats on him with multiple women. Regardless, living in England has provided her with what she calls “foreign privilege”. The villagers dislike and are afraid of her, but they do not touch her. Part of this fear comes from how unknown she has become to them, after having spent so much time overseas.

Another character that challenges established literary conventions is Margot, who fits the two abject categories highlighted by Alexander and Allen — the lesbian and the prostitute. The way in which the protagonist of the novel is written challenges twice the nation-building project of the “new” postcolonial black woman. The depth with which this character is written makes multi-layered readings possible, especially when we analyse her relationship with her body in varied contexts and with different people. Margot's bodily experiences can be interpreted both as representative of the effects of colonial power — as abovementioned, a strategy of representation quite recurrent in Caribbean contemporary literature — and as generators of affection for her body in itself.

As a prostitute working in Alphonso's luxury hotel, Margot sees herself as a "personal tour guide on the island of her body" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 10). The narrator tells us that when Margot first started in the prostitution business, she felt disgust and would take long baths, rubbing her skin, making sure every trace of her clients had left her body. As time goes by, though, she goes to bed even without taking a shower, with semen stuck to her legs. The scene, very rich in detail, portrays how Margot is disconnected from her body in these moments. The narrative voice ponders that for her

[r]eplacing the disgust is a liquid hope that settles inside her chest and fills her with purpose. She rolls over in the bed she shares with her sister knowing that one day she won't have to do this. That one day Thandi will make everything better. But until then, she must work (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 10-11).

Detachment seems to be a survival strategy. Seduced by the promise of success and progress that can be achieved simply through individual effort, Margot rationalises prostitution as a "necessary evil" in which she will have to engage only temporarily and which will pay off eventually. However, sex-work is far from being a springboard which will provide people, especially women, employed in such activities, with class mobility. As political activist Angela Davis writes in her 1981 *Women, Race and Class*, in times of crises and precarisation of these people's life conditions, such as the historical period depicted in *Here Comes the Sun*, the tendency is for the oppressed to be more exploited. In spite of having been written thirty-five years ago, Angela Davis' thorough study of the development of liberation movements in the United States from the 19th century to the 20th century provides a fundamental perspective to the understanding of how capitalist structures have taken shape, often with the approval of some of these movements. The historical overview is key to understanding how countries which once were under slave-based colonial ruling have contributed to building and reproducing such structures. As Davis explains:

the class structure of capitalism encourages men who wield power in the economic and political realm to become routine agents of sexual exploitation. [...] Both racism and sexism, central to [the Capitalist class'] domestic strategy of increased economic exploitation, are receiving unprecedented encouragement (DAVIS, 1981, p. 201).

The capitalist formula of success was not meant for a subject like Margot. The fallacy of success achieved through individual effort systematically makes the life of racialized Caribbean women – such as the character – more and more precarious. With the epidemic growth of neoliberal policies and predatory tourism, working-class women are increasingly more exploited. As literary scholars Sharpe and Pinto (2006) describe in their studies of Caribbean sexualities,

[t]he ease with which the global North can consume the bodies of black and brown-skinned men and women is linked to a transnational economy in which Caribbean

nations are transformed into service-oriented labor centers for Europe, the United States, and Canada (SHARPE; PINTO, 2006, p. 250).

Stuck in a system simultaneously racist and sexist, Margot is dehumanized, treated as merchandise by those in positions of power and driven to shield herself from her humanity in order to keep on living. At the same time, she uses this knowledge to recruit for the prostitution ring (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 146). When looking for new workers, she states that she needed girls able to fulfill tourists' fantasies and that the darker the skin of the girl was, the better it was for business.

During one of her encounters with a regular client, her mind drifts away and she catches herself thinking of another person's eyes, lips, which, in her words, are feminine, someone who wants more than her body – and one can assume it is her lover Verdene – but rapidly Margot re-focuses on the task at hand. In order to be able to pull through, the woman has to stay away from deep personal emotions. We read that

[w]hen it's all over, Margot spirals down and down, crashing like a big tree uprooted by nature's merciless ax. She lies next to Horace, postcoital disgust and a lurking disappointment coiling in her belly like days-old milk. She's human again. Horace reaches for her, touches her arm, and she flinches. She never wants to be touched in this state (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 60).

Once her work is done, Margot comes back to life. Not surprisingly, much of her living takes place way beyond the hotel walls. The protagonist has a secret relationship with another woman, Verdene. As Pinto and Sharpe (2006) highlight, “[t]he acceptance of a queer person within a given community [...] is contingent not just on the invisibility of his or her particular sexual practice but also on the absence of any political activism around his or her sexuality” (SHARPE and PINTO, p. 259). Their relationship is kept from everyone they know because non-heterosexual behaviour is seen as evil where they live. Both of them know that presenting themselves as a couple in front of the community is not feasible at all.

As Maria Lugones explains, the process of colonisation, which aimed at installing the heterosexual norm, made an effort to demonize any sort of behavior marginal to this norm; it established that “[t]he behaviors of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful” (LUGONES, 2010, p. 743). Silvia Federici, when recounting the history of witch hunting, explains that the endeavor started in Europe in the hopes of suppressing and eliminating all forms of transgressions of the norm, such as healing through herbs, cults to pagan gods, women's circles, cannibalism, bestiality, homosexuality — referred to as sodomite behaviour. This strategy was used in the invaded territories Europeans call the ‘New World’ not only to do the

same, but also to spread terror and to weaken localized form of resistance against colonial power. Federici posits that

the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that this persecution [witch hunting] would be planted in the body of colonized societies, and, in time, would be carried out by the subjugated communities in their own names and against their own members (FEDERICI, 2014, p. 237).

In time, both coloniser and colonial subjects would demonize and persecute whoever took part in those practices. Additionally, as Adrienne Rich points out in her aforementioned article, the naturalization of heterosexuality causes the lesbian existence to be seen as a pathology that, consequently, should be cured and highlights that the norm is imposed and reinforced through violent means. All of these ideas are, to some extent, still ingrained in the imaginary of contemporary societies. The oppressors see and treat the racialized people as un-human and the oppressed have assimilated and reproduced the heteronormative norm, condemning those who trespass it.

As the readers come to discover in *Here Comes the Sun*, Margot has always had a troubled relationship with her mother. At the age of ten, on an occasion in which she showed innocent signs of affection towards an older girl — Verdene — Margot is deemed sick by her mother. When the news about the incident at Verdene’s university broke, Delores wondered if Miss Ella’s daughter had taken advantage of Margot. Delores puts Margot inside a basin and bathes her, as an attempt to wash the evil out of her child. Following Miss Gracie’s advice, she uses Guinea bush to make the girl healthy again. However, Margot does not give up and continues to go over to Miss Ella’s. Margot’s mother washes her daughter every day and warns her against her “sodomite” neighbour.

When Verdene moves from River Bank to London, Margot is heartbroken and nothing Delores does seems to make the young girl snap out of her misery. When Margot is fourteen, Delores chooses to accept a tourist’s proposal, trading her teenage daughter’s body as she did her merchandise. Apart from the financial gain, Delores sees the sexual act with a man as a means of curing Margot of her “illness”, as she describes it, a redemption for both of them. The stallholder is convinced Verdene had cursed her daughter, unwilling to accept the possibility of having a daughter who was not heterosexual and counting on otherness to exempt anyone with whom she had familial bonds from an ‘ungodly’ behaviour. Margot is so helpless after Verdene’s departure that Delores decides to take her daughter to an obeah woman who, in Margot’s account, used “black magic” and wanted her to drink goat’s blood. Years later, Margot tells Thandi she also believed herself to have been sick at that time, not because she had feelings for another girl, but because of the yearning she felt. Differently

from her mother, her perception of having an illness came from feeling abandoned and having had her heart broken.

Verdene's family also believe she is diseased. Upon marrying a man in London, she hears from the priest that "God had intervened and *healed* her. Made her *whole*." (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 174, author's emphases). The move to England takes place after she is caught in bed with another woman, Akua, her college roommate. Verdene felt their relationship was something natural; however, the residence hall director who saw the two together thought they "were no different from witches warranting public execution" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 103). Once the news got to River Bank, her mother was disheartened. Miss Ella was never to leave her house again. Even so, she is concerned with her daughter's safety. Knowing that Verdene would be under threat if she stayed in the village, Miss Ella decides to send the girl away. Akua, however, is not as lucky. When she returns to her hometown, she is gang-raped and left for dead. By chance, a passer-by sees her lying there, she begs him to leave her be, which he refuses to do. Years later, Verdene was to receive a letter written by her former lover, which included a photo of Akua, her husband and five children. Akua shares that she is a prominent member of her local church and the letter ends as follow: "*May God be with you, always. He works miracles*" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 104, author's emphasis). Here, it is clear how the norm is enforced through both the violation and subjugation of the rebel body and through the discourse of hegemonic religion.

Verdene had stayed away from Jamaica for many years but when her mother passed away, she decided to move back to the pink house she had inherited. In the novel, we get a first glance of how Verdene is seen in the village through Thandi's account of all she has been told over the years. The narrative voice states that Thandi believes Verdene is evil because the woman is said to lure little girls into her house to abuse them; she is described as "the Antichrist, the snake every mongoose should have hauled off the island and eaten alive; the witch who practices obscene things too ungodly to even think about" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 29). Thandi recalls the day when a gardener found on Verdene's lawn a dead dog that allegedly had bite marks on its body. The teenager highlights that dogs of the kind were seen as repugnant and treated as rubbish by the community, who, upon hearing of the discovery of the dead dog, started to feel sorry for the animal. Overcome by fear, Margot's sister decides to run as fast as she can until she reaches Verdene's neighbour's lawn due to the fact that "[s]he knows she's safe in front of Miss Gracie's house because [...] Miss Gracie is a woman of God. She is inclined to have fits of the Holy Ghost in public, preaching in the square at the top of her voice while clutching a Bible" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 29). Miss Gracie is

respected by many of the community as a pious member of the church, in spite of her problems with alcohol abuse.

As the reader comes to discover, there had been four dead dogs left in Verdene's yard. On one occasion, the message "The blood of Jesus upon you!" had been written with blood on the walls of her house. Coincidentally, this is the same utterance that comes out of Miss Gracie's mouth whenever she crosses Verdene's path. The owner of the pink house finds it rather strange that the first dead animal is left on her property the first time Margot spends the night. She is convinced Miss Gracie has something to do with the dog corpses and decides to confront her about it. The old woman is not at home, but Verdene ends up meeting Charles, who argues that Miss Gracie did not have the strength to pull that trick on her own. Verdene, then, requests his help to bury the canine. The boy replies by asking her why he should do so. Verdene confesses she is tired of it all and wishes to be treated as a human being. Concomitantly, she bursts into tears.

It is stated that "[a]ll the frustration Verdene has been holding back comes spewing out in this young man's presence. She has never done this with Margot — not since the first incident — because she fears it might scare her away" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 171). Acceding to her request, "[t]he young man raises his hand and rests it on Verdene's shoulder — a gesture Verdene did not expect or even think she needed. But she does. 'All right,' he says" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p.171). Displaying sympathy towards the woman unlike any other villager before, Charles helps her in the disposal of the body. The boy's uncanny kindness is also implied when he is with Thandi and they meet his dogs. The girl finds it quite strange that he has given biblical names to his dogs: Cain, Abel, Joseph and Mary. She is surprised to see how he talks of the animals as if they were people, to which Charles replies that it made perfect sense since they were, as he sees it, as smart as or even smarter than human beings.

Charles is wary, but he agrees to do yard work for Verdene in other occasions. He has tea with the woman inside her house and when he is in trouble with the police, he goes to her place looking for refuge. Before leaving, he looks the woman straight in the eye, which symbolises respect, trust, and also shows that he has no fear of her. The last thing he says to her is "yuh know, ah used to be afraid ah witches" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 273). Charles is one of the characters who is most dehumanized. From an early age, he is obliged to fend for himself and his family. It seems that in him, apart from the wretched consequences, oppression has made room for sympathy. He is the representation of a subaltern subject who is denied access to fair conditions of living, to the status of an individual, but who develops

his humanity in the sense of generosity and compassion. His last words to Verdene are a sign of recognition.

In one of the last chapters of the novel Thandi starts to recollect the full-moon night when she caught her mother and Miss Gracie carrying a bucket filled with goat's blood to Verdene's house and writing the bloody message on her wall. The older women claim they had seen the owner of the house killing the dog; nevertheless, in her musings, the teenager remembers that she had seen Delores and Miss Gracie together on many other nights planting dead dogs at Verdene's. The missing piece of the puzzle comes together to show how Nicole Dennis-Benn makes use of irony to expose the hypocrisy of it all. Margot's not being at home the first night it happened gave her mother more freedom to act; additionally, the older women were the ones who acted on a full-moon night which is also representative of the tradition of witches. On top of that, the Delores, who displays concerns as to whether her daughter had been taken advantage of, is the same one who will later consent and make profit out of the teenager's abuse by men who paid to violate her. To these villagers, it seems, the witch hunt is not about being a law-abiding citizen, as they trespass and vandalise someone else's property. It is not about making use of alternative knowledge and resorting to non-Cristian religious traditions, as both of them do. It is not about protecting the innocence of children, at least in Delores case. It is about reinforcing the heteronorm by creating an atmosphere of terror. In the public sphere of River Bank, it seems that queerness is a synonym of wickedness. There, queer still carries its original meaning, as an adjective, something "strange" or "unwell" and, as a verb, the act of "ruining" or "spoiling" someone's chances¹⁵.

Indeed some of the villagers see Verdene as a wicked witch; however, this is not her single story. Charles overcomes his wariness and discovers a kind side of the woman, but it is in her encounters with Margot that we have access to a whole new side of Verdene. Adrienne Rich in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" proposes the concept of a lesbian *continuum* in which women's affections towards one another — not necessarily sexual — surface as a means of resisting the male-dominated Capitalist society. Rich also exposes what it means to resist or question the imposed heterosexual norm. Here, Dionne Brand seems to resonate Rich's ideas. The Caribbean-Canadian author states that "for [her] the most radical strategy of the female body for itself is the lesbian body confessing all the desire and fascination for itself" (BRAND, 1994, p. 46). When the body and the sexuality of a black character is not defined through the eyes of a male character, according to standards imposed

¹⁵ See: <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/queer>> Access 10th Oct. 2017.

by society, or simply fulfilling the roles of mother or wife, it acquires other dimensions and layers.

The transformational power of this affection is already clear in the first passage of the novel in which Margot and her lover Verdene meet. Verdene's presence gives Margot earth-shattering sensations; it is as if the protagonist came to know or reveal a dormant side of herself. Their encounter in the middle of the night among the shadows is symbolic. It is stated that "the darkness becomes a friendly accomplice" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 16). As Halberstam posits, "darkness is the terrain of the failed and the miserable" (HALBERSTAM, 2011, p. 98). In the dark, these queer characters can find a space to exist. From Margot's perspective, the narrator tells us that:

[f]rom where she stands, the woman appears to be sailing toward her like an angel, the nightgown hugging her womanly curves. And Margot sails toward her, no longer cognizant of the steps taken over the cobblestone path or the fears hammering inside her chest. When she arrives at the foot of the steps, she looks up into the face of the woman; into those eyes that hold her gaze steady. She can never get them out of her mind, for they're the only ones that see her. Really see her — not her figure or the nakedness she so willingly offers to strangers, but something else— something fragile, raw, defenseless. The kind of bareness that makes her shiver under the woman's observation (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 16).

Verdene is the one who can see through Margot's thick skin, both surrounded by the opacity of the shadows. Margot's body is inscribed, prescribed and described in different ways, according to the place the character is, the space she occupies and who she interacts with, if not with herself. Even though Margot claims she can find herself only in Verdene's eyes, she is not able to be at ease and fully give into her passion and desire. The protagonist feels good in the company of the other woman; however, she is not able to rid herself of haunting thoughts of women who had been burnt alive after being caught in bed together. Public opinion considered their murders to be karmic justice. The violent imposition of the heteronorm, carried out by many agents in society, halts Margot from existing fully as a lesbian.

According to Kamala Kempadoo, social scientist specialized in gender and sexuality in the Caribbean, in her mapping of Caribbean sexuality, "due to the silencing, stigma, and discriminations that same-sex relations and behaviours face, public self-identification as 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'queer' is not common" (KEMPADOO, 2009, p. 6). When the two characters try to take their intimacy to the next level, Margot frequently backs away or interrupts her partner. Margot's body produces violent reactions: she shivers, shrinks, she is in shock. Her body had never felt that way before. It is stated that "Margot wasn't ready to see herself this way, wasn't ready to give herself this label" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 65). All

construction involves deconstruction and Margot feels it physically, mentally and emotionally.

Notwithstanding, Margot is comfortable in Verdene's company. At her lover's house, she sleeps with a thumb in her mouth; such imagery may be read as an allusion to childhood. Feeling new and raw, Margot seems to be going through a process of resignifying and discovering herself. As Freud proposed, "[i]n the thumbsucking or pleasure-sucking we have already been able to observe the two essential characters of one infantile sexual manifestation. This manifestation does not yet know any sexual object, it is autoerotic and its sexual aim is under the control of an erogenous zone" (FREUD, 1910, p. 10). One can argue that Margot's act may serve both as a soothing strategy to deal with stress; as a coping mechanism for the sexual desires, which she is not ready to fulfill yet, and as a way to give pleasure to her body, with which she has been reconnecting.

Verdene is also renewed in her meetings with her lover, "since being with Margot she has regained a youthfulness that enables her to ease into laughter, fits of playfulness, and a sexuality that oozes from her without effort, without any fuss" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 63). It is as if the character had got her liveliness back through the encounters with Margot. Temporally, the shift in Verdene's life also takes places outwardly. The memory of Miss Ella is still an overbearing presence in every corner of the woman's house. With many pictures spread all around, it is as if the old woman is watching and judging them, but Verdene seems unable to free herself from her mother's gaze. It might be partially because of guilt, partially because of love and because she misses Miss Ella, but before that is brought to her attention by Margot, Verdene had not realised how strong her late mother's hold on her was. On the day Margot remarks on Miss Ella's presence, the two make love and spend the night together. The morning after Verdene removes most frames leaving only one at sight, the woman looks around and notices that "[t]he room appears empty without the pictures, but now there is space for Margot" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 105). Her lover's affection is the promise of another way of living, of having a life of her own.

Likewise, while they were still seeing each other frequently, Margot's feeling of being alive was also rekindled in Verdene's company. The narrative voice states that "Verdene has brought color back into [Margot's] life. Before, everything was black-and-white: Make money or die trying. Feel pain or feel nothing at all" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 99). Their exchanges surface as a way of escaping the binaries Margot has been presented with. Nonetheless, Margot never stops hesitating between building a life with Verdene and going after power and money. Margot cannot seem to fathom what it is that she is feeling; in

many of her descriptions, she equates Verdene herself and being with her to a force of nature or to supernatural occurrences, portrayals that carry positive and negative connotations. Nature can be nurturing and calming, but also wild and ruthless. The supernatural may be a bridge to uncharted territories, which can be both wondrous and dreadful. Both images evoke the idea of the unknown, uncontrollable and unpredictable.

Regardless, Margot was first attracted to Verdene because the older girl showed her affection, as her own mother never had. However, unbeknownst to her, the beauty standards ingrained in the young girl's subjectivity may have contributed to arouse the child's feeling for the older girl. Verdene's body fits the formula of success which villagers have been taught as ideal. In a moment of intimacy:

Margot lets Verdene's hand rest on hers. Margot recognizes in Verdene the older girl she fell in love with— the teenager she once knew, with a worldliness that used to make her blush. A girl who, to Margot, was as mysterious as the force that altered the weather. At ten years old she felt her stomach jump the first time Verdene called her pretty. Come to think of it now, Verdene Moore must have been called pretty all her life. She had that good hair that touched her back and that peanut-butter skin— some would call it golden — the shade that could get her a job in those days as a bank clerk or flight attendant, or a crown on her head as Miss Jamaica. Nevertheless, when Margot gave Verdene this compliment, she smiled as though Margot's comment were a surprise. A generous gift (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 98-99).

Margot cannot help but notice the physical characteristics of her lover. Verdene, on the other hand, has never been able to live fully as herself; and, in Jamaica, privileges such as a good job that her lighter skin might have provided her with were never within her reach. Margot's compliment is the only recognition of beauty in a body which has transgressed the norms of compulsory heterosexuality.

As stated before, both Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand do not limit the notion of lesbian affection to sexual relations between women. Both authors expand the sense of "lesbian" to encompass relationships between subjects who identify as women and do not fit or reproduce the heteropatriarchal colonial norm. In the passage where Margot braids her sister Thandi's hair, we read that "[w]hen her sister was a baby with a head full of curls, Margot discovered that in the braiding she found escape from various men's untying, unclasping, and unbuckling. It was in this soft, delicate texture that the roughness of the other touches faded" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 34-35). The description of this intimate, pleasurable, sensory experience Margot goes through can be read as what Brand proposes when she talks about literary representations of the daily lives and the inside feelings of racialized Caribbean women. The experience gives pleasure to the woman or women involved in the situation — namely Margot and possibly Thandi; there is no male gratification at play.

Margot creates and throughout the years repeats a ritual in which the pleasure produced begins and ends in herself; it is a freeing, cleansing experience.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, at the age of ten, Margot, Miss Ella's pupil, met Verdene, who was around sixteen and already studied at university. The girls develop a platonic relationship. At first, Verdene believes her mother should leave the child to Dolores' care, but one day, the teenager finds Margot crouched in a corner, completely vulnerable and feeling miserable because she had been bullied. They exchange looks and when "Little Margot looked up into Verdene's face, her eyes large and watery, the pupils expanding into a well into which Verdene fell. Her fall was deep, endless; one that stirred her womb with a possessiveness, a feral instinct to hunt Little Margot's bullies down." (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 71). For the first time, the bond established through their gazes takes place. A connection which would be regained thirty years later, as previously mentioned.

During the same period, Verdene is presented with this kind of affection at university. Never before had she had such liberty to be close to and create bonds with other girls. Far from her watchful mother, Miss Ella, who is constantly worried about rules of etiquette and other people's opinions, the teenage girl gains autonomy as she

was encouraged to have an opinion and form relationships outside her family's claustrophobic circle. The girls on the university's campus were highly affectionate. They walked around holding hands. In the dorms they combed each other's hair, lay in each other's beds, hugged up on each other during lunchtime and between classes, and sat in each other's laps. More than schoolmates, they were sisters (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 101-102).

The familial "claustrophobic circle" described can be extended to the dynamics of her community, River Bank. Distant from that environment, in a place where she was encouraged to think critically and to create bonds with other women, she was able to give way to her blossoming sexuality, regardless of the traumatic consequences that ensued. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to highlight that even though Margot and Verdene grow up in the same place, the latter has a better socio-economic condition. Having access to more financial resources and better education, Verdene has a mobility which Margot can only dream of. The younger woman is not given the same opportunities to leave River Bank and learn who she is or who she could become. Albeit temporarily, Margot's and Verdene's affection enables them to access untouched parts of each other and themselves.

2.3 All that glitters is not gold or dawg a sweat an long hair hide it¹⁶

In the novel, there is still the male-dominated norm at work in the relationships between women. Just as Chimamanda Adichie remarks in the lecture *We Should All Be Feminists* (2012), people socialised as women are taught to see other women as competitors, not as allies. Margot had been hoping for a job as general manager of the hotel, but when the position opened up, Alphonso hired Miss Novia Scott-Henry, a former Miss Jamaica. On hearing the news, Margot asks Alphonso if the woman has provided him with sexual favours to get the job, to which he replied that Margot would eventually have her chance. As Margot reminisces, she had been working for the Wellington family for many years,

Reginald Senior saw the ambition that burned in her eyes — a flame that other men often mistook for lust. He hired her to work at his hotel and taught her everything she needed to know about running it. Everything she’s done since that day, every bitter compromise, every buried regret, was to lead to this point. That job should be hers (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 108-109).

Margot understands that her time would probably never come. The protagonist realises that she would be left in the margins indefinitely because from Alphonso’s perspective, she ought to be thankful for anything and everything she had access to, so she plots to get Novia Scott-Henry fired. The general manager is drugged and taken by Margot to one of the hotel rooms where Sweetness, whose real name is Juliette — Charles’ sister and part of the prostitution ring —, is there to help Margot frame Scott-Henry for having sex with an underage female. Margot hides in the closet and snaps pictures of the teenager and the woman together and observes that

[t]hey are magnificent, the both of them, moving like silkworms. Margot misses Verdene this way, lowering the camera after capturing enough pictures of Miss Novia Scott-Henry and Sweetness. She is forced to turn away from the sight of them, her own hunger— her own primal want— begging to be assuaged. Margot takes her things, the recorder, and, for good measure, Sweetness’s clothes, shoes, and handbag too. She tiptoes out the door, leaving it open for this private dream to become public (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 196).

Margot is operating as the male power. She consumes the scene as a spectator; she finds pleasure in the simulation of sex, which is going on against Scott-Henry’s will. In the

¹⁶ These two expressions, the former in Standard English and the latter in Jamaican, are presented as synonymous in the website *The Cultures of Jamaica* < <https://sites.psu.edu/cultureofjamaica/jamaican-proverbs/> > Accessed on: 30th, Oct. 2017. The meaning is slightly different in the book *Jamaican Sayings – Success*, in which Andrea Campbell explains that the Standard English version of the patois is “a dog is sweating but his long hair hides it”, which means, “those with money can afford to hide their weaknesses” (CAMPBELL, 2012, p. 5).

other woman's humiliation she will find her victory and the sham is put together at the cost of exploiting Sweetness, a vulnerable teenager. The scene triggers memories of love which now she refers to as a "primal want". Treating her feelings for Verdene as something wild, outside of reason, is a reproduction of the binary thinking and puts it outside the standards of good, effective, conduct. In order to achieve her goal, Margot ignores her emotions and favours what concerns reason. Miss Novia Scott-Henry steps down, but Margot does not get the job immediately. Alphonso says she does not have what it takes to run the hotel. The owner claims that apart from having been Miss Jamaica, Scott-Henry was influential and a friend of his wife. With the understanding of how privilege works, fully aware that in her boss's eyes she had no merit, regardless of how hard she had been working, Margot makes use of blackmail to get the position she wants.

Ignorant about the methods her sister uses to get the promotion, Thandi is proud of Margot. While Charles is on the run, the teenager goes looking for him at Juliette's house. Her former friend treats her with animosity and Thandi seems to be oblivious as to why and believes the girl is jealous of her. Charles' sister confronts her with ideas that illustrate some aspects of coloniality. When it comes to knowledge, Juliette says she has no reason to envy Thandi because the girl has not learnt anything valuable in school and the kind of knowledge she has gained has only made her confused. Thandi is not the first one in the family to hear criticism about the school system. Maxi, the taxi driver, questions Margot's resolve and her certainty that a formal school education was all Thandi needed to change the life of the family for the better. He argues that schoolchildren learn the white men philosophy, and asked where their culture and heritage was.

Regarding culture and heritage, Juliette also points out that Thandi seems to have lost her language and identity, as she no longer speaks *patois* and has lightened her skin. Charles' younger sister reminds Thandi of the time when they were little children and in their reverie wished for light-skinned husbands, different from themselves, showing that the complexionism Thandi has suffered from was instilled in her and reproduced by her from a very early age. Provoked by what she has been told and in an attempt to insult Juliette, Thandi lets out that at least she is not a prostitute. Then, her childhood friend reveals many of the secrets Margot has been hiding, challenging Thandi to

'ask her how many of those big-money man she sleep wid. Ask 'bout her empire. Ask har about the girls she owns. Yuh sistah, Margot, is more of a whore than I will ever be. She's the biggest pimp on di North Coast. Yuh sistah sell out River Bank. She's di one who g'wan manage dat hotel dey destroying River Bank to build' (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 321).

Additionally, Juliette lets Thandi know that Margot tells everyone who will hear her that everything she does is in order to provide for her young sister. Thandi is shocked but not silent; the way she reacts surprises Charles' sister. In their hurt, Thandi and Juliette manage to find a sparkle of the friendship they used to have, showing that in spite of what makes them different, there is still the possibility of connection. It is then and there that Thandi decides to join forces with Juliette to find a way to save Charles, unconcerned about what it may cost her.

Juliette's resentment towards Margot is justified. The way the boss-lady treats Sweetness is a mixture of all the abuse and humiliation Margot herself had been put through in the hands of Delores, Alphonso and so many other men who have violated her body and integrity. When they first meet, Margot notices that beneath the alleged shame the girl felt for being known as the one who had had a threesome with a man and a woman, there was someone like her. The woman sees in Sweetness' eyes that she also has feelings for women, but is utterly ashamed of it. Preying on this vulnerability, Margot gives the teenager a kiss as encouragement before they frame Scott-Henry. Whenever Margot talks to Sweetness, she reinforces the structures that make the lives of subjects like the teenager more precarious, feeding her with empty compliments as an attempt to build her self-esteem and get what she wants, just as Alphonso does to her. And when the girl does not act as expected, Margot is brutal like Delores, purposefully wanting to hurt her. Sweetness threatens to reveal to Alphonso what had happened with Miss Novia Scotia-Henry, to which Margot replies:

‘Yuh t’ink because yuh give good pussy dat you have a voice? Dat yuh is worthy of an opinion? Yuh is nothing but a tar-black country girl wid not even a high school education. A girl wid nothing going for her but har long legs an’ big behind. Yuh t’ink anyone want to hear what yuh have to say? You’ll never talk to di Alphonsons of dis world without being laughed at. To them, you’re a servant. And will always be a servant’ (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 288).

Much to Margot's frustration, Juliette does not falter. Juliette lets the woman know that she does not care and leaves. The protagonist replicates this pattern of behaviour when she finds Thandi with Alphonso. Her younger sister wants to solve Charles' situation. Margot is absolutely disappointed that the teenager will trade her body for Charles' freedom. As she leaves the room, Margot tells her sister the exact same sentence Alphonso says to her and, in turn, she tells girls and women whom she employs in the prostitution ring: “Mek me proud” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 148, p. 339, p. 340). It cannot go unremarked that the idea of choice is rather tied down to the obstacles that Thandi and Juliette have to face. Their range of agency is extremely limited due to their age, gender, social class and racialization. It is interesting to notice the parallel between these teenagers' lack of options and Margot's

situation many years before, when she first got involved with the Wellington family. As it is stated at the beginning of the novel,

[a]t first she despised herself for letting him touch her. But then she despised herself for the pride that made her believe she had a choice. What she got from it (and continues to get from it) was better than scrubbing floors. She didn't want to lose this opportunity. All she wanted in the beginning was to be exposed to other worlds, anything that could take her out of this squalor and give her a chance to get away from Delores and the memory of what her mother had done to her (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 15).

Margot hopes to escape the memory of what she went through in the hands of her mother by submitting herself to more abuse. However, she did see a window of opportunity. That is what always kept her going, any possibility of mobility. Nevertheless, she fails to anticipate the long-term consequences of putting her ambitions above her relationships with her family, her “employees”, her neighbours and Verdene. The fact that Margot was to manage the new resort being built where River Bank still stands is a secret that has been hidden from all the villagers, including Verdene. Margot is eager for Verdene to sign the papers authorising the sale of Miss Ella's house and seduces her with promises of a brighter future together. In spite of being hopeful about the future, Moore feels something is wrong with how this situation has been handled. She suspects something is off when Margot keeps rushing her to sign the document without hiring a lawyer to revise it. When she discovers through men who have come to the house to push her to sign the contract that the company behind the deal is Alphonso's, Verdene realises that

[s]he had been fooled. Tricked into being vulnerable. By the type of woman who gave her the urge to sing along to the radio, feeling light and heavy at the same time. The type of woman who makes her think of rain-soaked October days in the midst of a drought. The type of woman who brought her to the kitchen — once on all fours— to lovingly cook her meals. And when they make love, the type of woman who cries as though Verdene has given her the best gift in the world. And yes, Verdene gave her everything — her whole self — and wanted for nothing. She thought that being with Margot would make up for lost years. She had begun to look forward. Verdene wipes her face. She feels old. Worn out and old. She smells something burning and remembers the pot of water for the cerassee tea. It was her mother's favourite pot. One she has kept and cared for over the years (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 315-316).

The smell and the burning of her mother's pot may symbolise both a call back to reality and the realisation that her dream of a completely different life with Margot had gone up in smoke. All the while marking the connection with her mother, which had been weakened, the seemingly unavoidable loss of the house she is so attached to would not be followed by a much-wanted future with Margot. After the revelation, Verdene severs all ties with her lover. Delores, like other villagers, is evicted from the house she rents and moves to another parish. Margot loses all the connections with the community where she grew up.

Undoubtedly, life in River Bank is not easy for the main characters, and society lets them know. It is pointed out that villagers do not call Verdene “Miss Verdene”, as it would be the norm for an older woman. And Verdene herself does not wish to have this title. When she meets Charles for the first time he asks her “What is it yuh want, miss?” [...] Verdene is taken by the title miss. ‘Please, call me Verdene’” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 169). Verdene’s surname is Moore, her mother’s house is one of the best in the village and she is able to have a good education; they definitely have a better economic condition than the other dwellers of River Bank. Margot’s family has no surname. Curiously, Thandi and Margot call Delores “Mama” and John-John, a villager, calls her “Mama Delores”, but all the others refer to her only by using her first name, she is not a “Miss” either. All of these women, for different reasons, and at different levels are deprived of living their humanity fully.

During one of the interviews to the *New York Times*, when asked about how her family had reacted to the publication of *Here Comes the Sun*, Nicole Dennis-Benn stated that her mother was concerned with the way the author had portrayed Jamaica. Dennis-Benn, then, broaches an issue she has to deal with as a writer, admitting that she has a hard time with

the pressure to play the role of ambassador. I constantly have to remind myself — and my mother — that I have an obligation to my creative process, which I must preserve in order to tell stories about a people — in the case of *Here Comes the Sun*, working-class women — whose lives are rarely reflected on the page with depth, compassion, honesty and respect (DENNIS-BENN, May 26th, 2016).

The author of *Here Comes the Sun* in her interviews, op-eds and chronicles always makes a point of questioning and destabilising stereotypical notions of her home country and its people. As Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie reminds us in the lecture *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009), the problem with promoting and reproducing stereotypes is not that they are completely untrue, but rather an incomplete representation of peoples, cultures, societies. Once those who, historically, have had the power to control the dissemination of narratives replicate these stories, they truly become the only public history of these peoples. When recounting to *Ebony* magazine her experience about her wedding ceremony, in an article called “In Her Own Words: Couple Makes History at First Lesbian Wedding in Jamaica”, she states that they had a hard time finding a venue that would accept hosting a ceremony meant to celebrate the union of two women. Even so, Dennis-Benn shares that in the *villa* they end up marrying, she found a welcoming environment, not only from the friends and family who attended but also from the staff. In her words,

[she] wished in that moment [she] could’ve recorded [her] Jamaican people full of nothing but well wishes and love—a side of Jamaica that the world needs to see; a side that media outlets would constantly silence with biased stories depicting ignorant thoughts that breed stereotypes of the Jamaican people, especially the

working class. [...] Their two helpers made sure that [they] were well taken care of, well fed, and of course, well ready to exchange [their] vows (DENNIS-BENN, 2012).

Dennis-Benn's wedding took place in 2012, while the novel's is set in 1994. In almost twenty years a lot of social change has taken place in Jamaica through activists and civil society movements. The writer's choice to create a narrative which takes place in the mid-1990s might have been an attempt to depict some of the consequences of the rampant expansion of tourism together with the long-lasting effects of coloniality. Even if the queer characters in the novel did not have the same luck to find comfort and acceptance in their community, the mosaic created by Nicole Dennis-Benn still allows for multiple readings of her women characters. Verdene's, Margot's, Charles' and Thandi's happiness is temporary and fragmented. It is the consequence of lives mediated by coloniality. Not completely overpowered, they manage to escape at times, but not to break away entirely. It is as if a locked door has been opened and we get to experience what has been hidden for so long. Instead of bringing these characters into the light, to be illuminated by the sun, Dennis-Benn invites the reader to experience the dark.

On one hand, in Margot and Thandi's relationship with Alphonso, we see the dynamic of power and the crushing forces of Capitalism and the logic of the white male who occupies the place of the coloniser. He is a character who takes advantage of subaltern subjects, convincing or coercing them into playing within the rules of the system, more often than not going against their own humanity. Concomitantly, in many of Margot's choices and in the consequences of many of her acts, it is possible to notice some of the effects of coloniality in the lives of subjects who do not occupy the place of the coloniser, especially the ones who are racialized women, like the protagonist. However, even if all acts of resistance are limited by their context, at times, in the affectionate relationships between the women characters, mostly in intimate private moments shared by Margot and Verdene, Dennis-Benn's literary constructions allow us to see modes of resistance and existence beyond the patriarchal heteronormative logic, giving characters such as these women more in-depth ethical representations.

Even so, as the story unravels, Margot becomes more and more ruthless, betraying Verdene, her sister, her village. The protagonist is able to conquer riches but at the expense of all her emotional bonds. As Charles had anticipated, the resort Margot oversees is in deep waters, as guests have been caught by Pregnant Heidi. The phenomenon of nature is a symbol of resistance. Charles had once saved Thandi from drowning because of Pregnant Heidi,

whose waves are described as “majestic, rising like the concave belly of a woman with child. The tale dates back to the days of slavery, when a slave girl named Heidi flung herself into the sea after finding out that she was pregnant with her master’s baby” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 125). The oceanic phenomenon is the representation of the nature that refuses to bend to colonial power. Charles is able to swim through it because he also resists this power and he knows and respects the ocean. The tourists, on the other hand, are ignorant about the force of ocean and have a firm believe that the resort has been thought out to best serve them.

The incidents in the sea resulted in a number of lawsuits and a huge financial loss, which “forced” Alphonso to cut back on people’s salaries. Nonetheless, Margot does not seem worried for herself. By that point, she had reached some economic stability. Margot reproduces the model of the coloniser and one could read her journey as a success story, as a remarkable exception; however, it is key to point out that her financial achievements become pointless, as she is completely alone.

She pictures Verdene on every surface, their bodies pressed together as they listen to the sound of water hitting the glass exterior. Margot imagines them looking out at the lush green of the landscaped garden surrounded by rosebushes, hibiscus, bougainvillea, and manicured hedges. A garden that Verdene would’ve certainly taken pride in maintaining. Margot had built this room so that they could watch the sunrises and the sunsets together (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 343).

Gloominess echoes on the walls of Margot’s luxurious new house, as she imagines Verdene in every corner. However, tired of waiting for the woman, Margot has casual sexual encounters with people she meets at the hotel, or, more frequently, with girls she hires; she “lives from one orgasm to the next, trying to fill her loneliness with other bodies before kicking them out” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 344). Other than those people, her employees are the only people she has contact with in her house. Margot yearns for human interaction, to no avail, as “they simply nod in agreement and apologize profusely. ‘Sarry, Miss Margot. Sarry. It won’t ’appen again.’” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 344). Most human beings she is able to have contact with are the ones whose services she pays for. Thinking of the people she used to value in her life, Margot has planned the house carefully, including

a small fountain by the pool, where a naked female statue pours water into a base that is shaped like an oyster— an inspiration Margot took from one of Thandi’s drawings. She had kept it, though Thandi, like Verdene, has faded from her life as if she were never there (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 345).

Verdene and Thandi are gone. The pervasive feeling of loneliness and emptiness throughout the last chapter is a mark of the queer aesthetics proposed by Halberstam. To Margot, achieving normative success is tied to all kinds of loss. As a mere pawn, the

protagonist of *Here Comes the Sun* is undoubtedly a satisfactory product of coloniality, which may rarely allow colonised subjects to succeed money-wise, but not without stripping them of their humanity and making them work in its favour against their own.

3 SUCCESS IN *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN*

Pressed into service, moved into the great house-
early on.

Daughters of the masters/whores of the masters

At one with the great house/

at odds with the great house

Setting fire to the great house/the masters/
sometimes ourselves.

Michelle Cliff

Literature as means to (re)tell and (re)create the past, the present and to pave the roads leading to futures that escape the norm was the weapon of choice in Michelle Cliff's revolutionary journey. The lesbian writer was born in Jamaica, in 1946. Since the independence of the insular country occurred only in 1962, Cliff experienced an officially colonised Jamaica, under British ruling, for sixteen years. Her family moved to the United States when she was three. Even so, while living in the States, the Cliffs would constantly travel to Jamaica. Therefore, the author grew up under constant dislocation and (re)signification of herself, being forced to reflect upon what it meant to be a light-skinned Jamaican both in the US and in her country of origin.

After spending almost a decade in the United States, Michelle Cliff went back to her homeland to study. As a teenager, she attended St. Andrews High School for Girls¹⁷, the same institution in which Nicole Dennis-Benn, author of *Here Comes the Sun*, studied with an academic scholarship. In 1960, Cliff's family moved back to the United States, more precisely to Staten Island, New York, a neighborhood heavily populated by immigrants from Caribbean nations. Having earned a bachelor's degree in European History from Wagner College, Cliff moved to England, where she studied the Italian Renaissance at the Warburg Institute. After that, she taught at different universities and wrote mostly non-fiction.

¹⁷ Michelle Cliff recalls her time at Saint Adrews during her interview to Opal Palmer Adisa (CLIFF, 1994, page 277) and Saint Andrews is mentioned in Nicole Dennis-Benn's biography on her website, <<https://www.nicoledennisbenn.com/aboutNicole2.html>>

Michelle Cliff was able to come out as a lesbian, only in 1978, in her thirties, before publishing her first work of fiction. Alongside Adrienne Rich, who would go on to be her life-long partner, the Jamaican-American writer became editor of *Sinister Wisdom*, a lesbian literary, theory and art journal. Both of them wrote what we could call letters of the editors as preface to the first edition to come out of their joint editorial effort. Cliff begins her text by broaching the importance of (self-)care, (self-)love and solidarity between women. The writer also touches upon the revolutionary changes that such love could bring about.

The historian Blanche W. Cook has said that revolution is a process, not an event. It is a process which requires courage and vigilance. Theory and nourishment. Criticism and support. Anger. And it requires love — for ourselves — for each other. We are women and we have been taught to love: men, children. Seldom — if ever — each other. Seldom —if ever—ourselves. We have been taught — and the dominant culture continues to tell us — to direct our affection outward: not inward. To choose to love both ourselves and each other is a revolutionary choice (CLIFF, 1978, p. 2).

Still in the foreword of the first issue edited by Rich and her, Cliff makes a point of commenting on works that had recently been published about various topics such as ableism, ageism, and race, including *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. As the author states, these pieces of writing had been called diversionary by a number of lesbian and feminists, since they discuss issues that caused division and highlighted differences between women. However, Cliff remarks, “unless we continue to address ourselves to this matter of difference and division, I do not think love between us is possible. Not a love which will translate into power and in turn bring forth revolution” (CLIFF, 1978, p. 3). This statement is closely connected to what Maria Lugones posits regarding homoerotic love (as we have seen in Chapter 1): it is impossible if it reproduces modern/colonial structures. Examining distinctions among the many lesbian experiences and the ways hegemonic normative thought may potentially be present in both discourse and practise is a way to (re)create existence outside these parameters. Ignoring potential backlash from the sectors which claimed every struggle should focus solely on causes directly connected to their specific demands, Cliff, not only in the editorial piece, but throughout her life, always made a point of addressing questions of modern/colonial societies.

We live in a culture in which the word love masks other emotions and is used to justify varied forms of oppression and objectification. What June Jordan has named “a steady-state deep caring and respect” seems in the mainstream almost nonexistent. We live in a culture the Renaissance helped create. In which slavery and genocide are sanctioned. And the power remains in the same hands (CLIFF, 1978, p. 3).

Aware of the implications of the normative Eurocentric order, Cliff sought to utilise, revisit, and rewrite what has been taught as history to colonial subjects, which in reality is the European account of historical events. Similarly to Edouard Glissant's proposal, one of the author's main goals was to excavate into memory, dreams, oral stories, artefacts, in order to (re)tell the histor(ies) of African, Indigenous and creole peoples which had been mostly erased, obliterated and lost. As scholar Françoise Lionnet explains in an article about Cliff's first novel, *Abeng* (1984), the writer

is involved in an "archeological" enterprise, not unlike that of Michel Foucault in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Digging underneath the colonial process of subject formation, Cliff examines the various cultural strands that make up Creole culture: the European and the African influences, braided together; the experience of dispossession, which is characteristic of slave societies; and the concomitant need to question the tenets of Western humanism. [...] That system of thought has created the illusion that memory and history can define self and give meaning and authority to each utterance (LIONNET, 1995, p. 33).

In a 1991 interview given to Judith Raiskins, which was only published in 1993, Michelle Cliff says she sees herself as a Caribbean writer but not only that. To some extent, she considers herself an American writer as well. Nonetheless, she admits that whenever she enters the "Jamaican mode", she feels the most natural. Meryl Schwartz, in the introductory section of "An Interview with Michelle Cliff" (1993), states that Cliff's novels, most of which contain overt semi-autobiographical aspects, are

[set] in the United States, the Caribbean, and England, Cliff's work reflects her own experience of diaspora while representing a wide range of imperialism's manifestations and effects. Her texts explore the ways in which colonialism's racist ideology intersects with a variety of oppressive ideological systems, including those based on class, gender, and sexual orientation. As one form of resistance to experiences of silencing as both colonial subject and woman, Cliff's fictions give imaginative life to the suppressed history of women's anticolonialist activism (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 596).

However, before publishing novels, poetry and testimonies, Michelle Cliff had spent most of her academic life trying to give evidence that she had the intellect to produce scientific knowledge. Her move to England, referred at times as the "motherland", in order to obtain a degree in higher education was highly influenced by the need to prove herself and to be validated by Europeans. Cliff stated that she chose the Italian Renaissance as an object of study because "it was about as far from the country I grew up in, the homeland, my background, and so forth, as I could possibly get. It was very idealized. And that was comfortable for me because I didn't have to confront personal stuff at all, or historical realities" (CLIFF, 1993, p. 60). However, she did not stay away from matters close to home

for long. As Meryl Schwartz observes, Cliff's participation in the struggle of women of color and lesbians played a major role in her becoming a fiction writer:

she had begun trying to use language to represent herself, and she discovered that in internalizing colonialist ideology, she had lost access to crucial parts of her identity. Thus, her career as a writer began as a process of trying to reclaim the self through memory, dreams, and history (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 594).

It was when Michelle Cliff was 34 that her first fictional/semi-autobiographical book, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980), was published. It was a prose/poetry collection of writings down the road of self-discovery. Her debut already displayed themes such as race, identity, patriarchal societies, compulsory heterosexuality, dislocation, fragmentation, history and in-betweenness. Even though the book is short, it addresses different parts of her life, from birth, infancy, teenage years and adulthood, weaving connections with ancestry and the colonial past. From the beginning of her literary career, Cliff historicized her story, pointing out that being a creole did not mean coming from nowhere, having no past, but rather having to excavate and break silences in order to recover a lot of what was lost or muffled. As a commentary at the back of *Claiming an Identity They Taught me to Despise*, Audre Lorde wrote that

[b]y choosing to explore densities of color and sexuality with a language that is sweet and strong, Michelle Cliff reconstructs a black woman's journey toward self-definition with writing that is brilliant, intense, and unavoidable in its honesty. Rich in imagery that evokes all of our struggles, her words sometimes speak from the edge of my dreams. This book is passage through a sisterhood of selves; as women of color having complementary histories, we are indebted to her (LORDE, 1980, n.p.).

Indeed, Cliff kept on treading the path of self-definition for the rest of her life. During her interviews, she would constantly reaffirm that she was writing about herself and coming into herself as she wrote (CLIFF, 1993b, p. 598), which reinforced the notion that identities are provisional and complex. To Cliff, writing (about) herself and writing the history of her homeland and other territories she inhabited, walked hand in hand, so much so that Lionnet categorises Cliff as an autoethnographer, explaining that

her narratives belong in a new genre of contemporary autobiographical texts by writers whose interest and focus are not so much the retrieval of a repressed dimension of the private self but the rewriting of their ethnic history, the re-creation of a collective identity through the performance of language (LIONNET, 1995, p. 39).

During her interview to Schwartz, Cliff positions herself as part of a group of political novelists, that is, writers whose works are committed to exposing power dynamics and advocating for change. Hence, throughout her life, Michelle Cliff never ceased to write

having Black Radical subjectivity in mind. Her first novel to be published, *Abeng* (1984), tells the story of the early years of Clare Savage, who is also the protagonist of *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), the literary work which is the focus of this chapter. Between the fictional chronicles of Savage's life, Cliff released *The Land of Look Behind* (1985), a collection of prose and poetry that dug into what it meant to "pass" as white at times, and what it meant to be not only Caribbean, but of multiple locations. In the preface of the book, later replicated in *Negotiating Academic Literacies: Teaching and Learning across Languages and Cultures* (1998), the author descanted on what it took to create a Caribbean character,

[t]o write a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands of us retracing the African past of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification. Or a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the art forms of those of 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 (CLIFF, 1998, p. 33).

Therefore, according to what Michelle Cliff expressed, fiction set in the Caribbean should aim at subverting hegemonic literary forms and at questioning the status of "fact" of Western history. However, Cliff's and other African-American, Indigenous and Caribbean writers' proposal of radical anticolonial black writing goes beyond that. Apart from literary and historical texts, there is the cosmological notion that time does not happen linearly and that dreams, tales and personal stories are all a part of history. The idea is that past, present and future intermingle. In an interview to Opal Palmer Adisa (1994), Cliff states that there is a passage in *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison which says "that everything is now. Time is not linear. All things are happening at the same time. The past, the present, and the future coexist" (CLIFF, 1994, p. 280). According to Cliff, this statement coincides with how she had always written, non-linearly, as she did in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).

Michelle Cliff, who passed away in 2016, would still go on to publish amongst many articles and essays, *Bodies of Water* (1990), a collection of stories that focuses on how the United States is seen through the eyes of a resident immigrant. Three years later, *Free Enterprise* (1993) came out. The novel, a historical metafiction, imagines the story of historical figure Mary Pleasant, an African-American woman who gave John Brown money to buy weapons for the Harper's Fairy raid. Through Cliff's fiction, Pleasant, a very little known character who played a major role in the historical event, is given a story and a place in history. After that, Cliff published in 1998 *The Store of a Million Items*, a collection of short

stories, most of which dealt with the experience of children growing up in Jamaica and the United States.

In her last decade, Cliff was particularly prolific. *If I Could Write This in Fire*, which came out in 2008, revisits some of her most acclaimed essays and offers other musings on what it means to be a writer and to write from and about a (de)colonial perspective. The non-fiction work was followed by *Everything is Now* (2009), a collection of short stories which deal with the opposing binaries of the Modern world. In her last novel, *Into the Interior* (2010), Michelle Cliff repeated the theme of the fragmented Jamaican character who travels from her homecountry to the USA and England in the hopes of making sense of her feelings of displacement.

Throughout her writerly life, Michelle Cliff produced works both of fiction and non-fiction in which autobiographical writing was predominant. Never did she abandon or overcome the issues pertaining her identity. This comes as no surprise considering that she underwent a shift from the artificial, linear, hegemonic mindset to a cyclical and amalgamating understanding of life. Utilising autobiographical aspects did not mean writing her autobiography time and again. Instead, it was a lot more about putting into words and revisiting memory, experiences and sensations and (re)signifying what it meant to be a queer colonised person of colour living in diaspora. Cliff appropriated the forms first proposed by the colonisers, for instance, the novel and more precisely the *bildungsroman* in the case of *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) in order to make it her own. By mixing hegemonic techniques with other non-European traditions, Cliff was a part of the movements which sought to locate themselves and their homelands beyond the parameters of whiteness, while understanding that it was a part of their identities.

3.1 “You’re hardly the sort they were ranting on about”

One of Michelle Cliff’s most notable works of fiction, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), a hymn to revolution, paints a picture of economic, political and identification turmoil in Jamaica through the story of Clare Savage, the Savage family, Harry/Harriet and Christopher. The name of the protagonist is not a coincidence as Clare means “light” in French and “Savage”, the family name, stands as an adjective which means simultaneously untamed and uncivilised. One of the story lines of the book focuses on Clare’s coming of age.

The protagonist goes through physical and emotional displacement as her journeys take her to different places, including her own self. She moves from Jamaica to the United States at the age of 14, then moves to England to go to university —not without visiting Jamaica—, to eventually drop out and travel around Europe with Bobby, a former U.S. soldier whom she had met and started dating. In the end, Clare returns to her homeland, where, after roughly two years of teaching children what was not in the official history books, she joins a guerilla group that hopes to make a statement against imperialistic forces by raiding a movie set run by American and British people. The light-skinned daughter of a middle-class family, Clare is forced to come to terms with her multiple identities to be able to go home to herself.

Having a character with two first names, Harry/Harriet, is also a strategy Cliff utilises to address the issue of fragmentation and in-betweenness. The character is born from their¹⁸ mother's abuse by Buster's father. Buster is the one hosting the party in which Clare has a one-night stand with Paul, an upper-class young man. Harry/Harriet grows up in the master's house, and they are neither treated as a legitimate child, nor as a servant. Never having been gender conforming, they are seen as an aberration by the ones in their family, father's and brother's social circles. Growing up, Harry/Harriet, dissatisfied with the world they live in, becomes a nurse and makes their mission to take care of wounds, literal and metaphoric. Through healing, Harry/Harriet brings together people with the will to change in order to make a difference. Moreover, their name and the option to be called only "Harriet" are two very significant aspects of the character, as we will discuss later in this chapter.

Christopher's name is also meaningful: it is an allusion both to Jesus Christ and to Christophe, one of the leaders of the Haitian revolution, alongside Toussaint L'Ouverture. Michelle Cliff mentioned those references in the 1993 interview to Meryl Schwartz. In the novel, the story of Christopher's coming of age is also told. The dark-skinned garden boy who grows up in the squalors of the "dungle", orphaned at an early age, is left alone to fend for himself. He experiences the oppressive forces of the modern/colonial society without any chance of mobility. As a young adult, Christopher goes to work for the H. family, for whom his grandmother had worked before. After being refused a piece of land to bury his long-dead grandmother, in an attempt to give her the dignity of a proper burial, Christopher, under the influence of rum and rage, kills the couple, their daughter, the maid, and later, Paul, the

¹⁸ There have been many attempts to implement pronouns which represent gender non-binary people. Since "they" (instead of "he/she") has been used to refer to a singular subject for over 600 years, the most used forms of gender non-binary pronouns to date are "they/them/their/themself". For more on this see: <https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/>

family heir. He runs away from the crime scene and the murders are never solved. Growing progressively insane, he roams the streets aimlessly.

Working as a mediator of worlds, Harry/Harriet struggles to bridge the gaps in Jamaica. Although, Christopher and Clare never actually meet each other, their paths cross twice, in two violent moments. First, when Christopher murders Paul and his family on the same day Clare had had sexual intercourse with the rich man in a wild party. Then, at the very end of the novel, when Christopher is transformed into the movie monster, Clare is in the truck with the guerrillas, ready to attack the film set before they are ambushed. The fact that these two characters, who are fairly the same age and circulate in the same places during their adolescence, do not interact, is not a coincidence. Michelle Cliff explained in her 1993 interview to Meryl Schwartz that the two are quite similar and, at the same time, worlds apart. The author adds that Clare's and Christopher's journeys are representations of the race and class divide in Jamaica, where these two factors are inextricably entwined. In spite of the gender factor, which is also operative, it would be next to impossible for a dark-skinned working-class boy and a light-skinned middle-class girl to develop a relationship other than the servant/master dynamic. Even so, albeit for different reasons, they end up dying at the same moment.

As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the invention of race (QUIJANO, 2000), how it works as a floating signifier (HALL, 1997) and how it is intrinsically connected to class, gender and the control of labour (QUIJANO, 2000) has left the colonial and colonised territories with a watercolour stain of inequality, immobility and vulnerability. Being white, or *backra*, in Jamaica, is not necessarily connected to skin hue, but rather to economic power. Julieta Paredes, one of the outstanding names of Communal Feminism from Venezuela, offers a better understanding of these relationships. Drawing from the Aymara cosmology, Paredes affirms that

Blanquitas, blancos, for us, are not the people who have fair skin, but those who accept the privileges of a patriarchal, colonial, and racist system because of the clarity of skin. In the same way with our male brothers, it is not for being men but for accepting the privileges that a patriarchal, colonial, racist system gives them; they use it and do not fight it (PAREDES, 2016).

Hence, black and white are about hegemonic power. Nonetheless, Michelle Cliff makes a point to highlight how a parcel of privileged Jamaicans will refer to their non-European ancestry conveniently to display power or set themselves apart from white Europeans and Americans, even though they occupy the economical and political space of whiteness in Jamaican society. Right at the beginning of the novel, a servant is met with

disdain when he warns his bosses about the dangers of being white once the black, working class succeed in giving power to the people. The mistress claims that they were not white; therefore, they were not worried. “The mistress taking pity on the houseboy and deciding that his words came from benign concern. Flattered nonetheless that even this ignorant countrybwaï did t’ink she white. Not understanding his use of metaphor” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 20). To which he replies softly “So you say, missis. Wunna t’roat may still be cut” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 20), and leaves the room. By analysing this passage, it is possible to understand how these mechanisms function. The masters underestimate their employee’s intelligence and intellectual capacity. Thus, they fail to recognise that he refers to how they occupy the space of whiteness, and that he has a much deeper understanding of how class and race operate in their country. As scholar Angelique V. Nixon explains,

[t]he upper-class of Jamaica are implicated here in the re-construction or perpetuation of class and racial structures in which "whiteness" is the ideal and associated with money and status — revealing how the colonizer/colonized dynamic is continuously played out in these master/servant relationships of power/powerlessness (NIXON, 2009, p. 358).

Hitherto, race has been analysed through the lens of the modern/colonial system. Nevertheless, Cliff’s proposal in *No Telephone to Heaven* is not only to denounce how these axes work, but also to take upon herself the task to aid in the construction of Radical Black subjectivity. The idea, as Hall (1997) observes, is that blackness and the black experience cannot mean solely the oppression because of skin colour, but rather it needs to be built as not one but many expressions and understandings of the world, which distance themselves from the Eurocentric worldview. This move allows black people to become subjects and to exist outside and beyond the parameters of whiteness, escaping from the place of “other”.

During her interview to Meryl Schwartz, Michelle Cliff talked about how her students in the United States read her, “I know most of my students at Trinity don’t believe I’m black —the white students. The black students don’t seem to have a problem with who I say I am” (CLIFF, 1993, p. 608). She adds that in Jamaica “how one is perceived is not based just on skin color, but on property and privilege, and if some people see somebody like me, they assume that my alliance is with the colonizer” (CLIFF, 1993, p. 608), which corroborates the premise that race indeed is a floating signifier. Michelle Cliff was aware that being light-skinned and coming from the upper-class put her in a privileged position. However, in the same interview she remarked that a difficulty light-skinned people faced is that others assume they have a white outlook on life because of the way they look (CLIFF, 1993, p.607), which

is not true. Those were fundamental factors in her writing, in her teaching, in how she was treated in different countries she visited and in her search for identity.

If in *Abeng* (1984), the protagonist, Clare, had learnt about class divide and compulsory heterosexuality the hard way, the journey to understand what it meant to be a racialized, colonised subject was crucial for her in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Feeling overwhelmed during most of her stay in the United States, Clare's reclaiming of her African ancestry later in life comes as a means for her to understand who she is and wants to become. Clare is light-skinned like her father, Boy, who tries to cultivate in his daughter a sense of pride and privilege because of their skin colour. On the other hand, her younger sister Jennie's skin was darker than hers. Like their mother, the youngest Savage would never pass as white in the United States, regardless of which story Boy tried to tell. The gap between the parents grows wider because while her father is desperate to be accepted, enjoy white privilege and to have them assimilate into the culture of the United States, her mother, Kitty, feels trapped under the racism she observes in that country. Scholar Françoise Lionnet, in the first chapter of *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (1995), analyses Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984), stating that

[h]aving light skin and straight hair, Clare Savage in *Abeng* embodies the physical idea of the assimilated— a situation that estranges her from her darker skin sister and mother and thus isolates her from that part of her own heritage. Alienation is therefore a given that must be dealt with before the narrator can begin to make sense of the past (LIONNET, 1995, p. 30).

In the sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), this divide is heightened in the first chronological part of the novel, when the Savages move to the United States. At this point, Kitty, Clare Savage's mother, is a representation of the diasporic subject whose husband wants to strip from her culture and make her ignore the violence and racial hatred in their new country. The protagonist, then, is caught between her parents' antagonistic feelings and the new dynamics of racialization.

When they first arrive in the United States, their middle-class status in Jamaica bears no ground. The fact that they are from a country whose name Americans can barely pronounce puts them in the place of the exotic, underdeveloped and unsophisticated. At the beginning, Boy and Kitty get a job at a laundry shop called "White's Sanitary Laundry". Boy delivers the clean laundry; hence, he is seen and has contact with the clients whereas Kitty is at the office doing clerical work, not dealing directly with customers. Her workmates are two African-American women, who do not trust her, signaling that "the black experience" is not one, but many and that it does not guarantee solidarity amongst the people who are placed

under this racial category. Meanwhile, Boy Savage tries as much as he can to pass as white. As a supporting argument to his claim, he states that his ancestors owned sugar plantations (CLIFF, 1987, p. 55). Yet again, another instance of how race is tied to economic power and control, since being landowners meant having money and status and not descending from enslaved Africans. He tries to fit in the U.S. way of life and pushes Kitty to stop visiting her Jamaican cousins who believed the United States was a place where their people went to make money and be able to eventually move back to Jamaica and live comfortably.

It gets to a point where Kitty decides to perform an act of rebellion. At the laundry place, she is responsible for writing short notes that are sent along with the clean clothes. She is required to sign them as “Mrs. White”, a fictitious character that was meant to make customers feel welcome. The woman starts to write small notes saying things like, “WE CAN CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES BUT NOT YOUR HEART. AMERICA IS CRUEL. CONSIDER KINDNESS FOR A CHANGE. WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACK-HEARTED (CLIFF, 1987, p. 81)”. Kitty uses her invisibility in her favour, and believes no one will notice the change of tone in the messages. Eventually, Boy discovers some of texts in her purse and demands that she quits. The woman says, “Busha, is maybe time cut the cotta (CLIFF, 1987, p. 82)”. Here, there are two important references. First, she calls him “busha”, which is Jamaican for “overseer”, during slavery, the person responsible for supervising and enforcing punishment on slaves. Second, she uses another expression which was part of the vocabulary of enslaved people in Jamaica, “cut the cotta”, which means separating, in their case, getting a divorce. Boy is taken aback and says he cannot live without her, they have sexual intercourse and he thinks she has changed her mind about leaving.

On the contrary, she is unsettled. Feeling smothered and confined to a life which she had not wished for, Kitty decides to take her act of rebellion to the next level and writes the most striking note, which reads “HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER” (CLIFF, 1987, author’s emphasis, p. 83). Kitty feels relieved as she places the notes in the clean laundry. The following day she arrives at the laundry shop only to discover that Georgia and Virginia, the two women who worked alongside her, had been fired. Cliff’s subtlety in naming both women after slave states from the U.S. cannot go unnoticed. When Kitty asked Mr. B, the owner, why he had fired them, he replied that a customer had complained about the notes and neither would admit to having written them. Kitty is taken aback and confesses she had produced and sent the messages, but the shop owner would not believe her. Mr. B tells Kitty that “that kind is no good. Unstable. You know what I mean.” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 83). Here, it is clear how engrained racial prejudice is in

social relationships. The African-American women were not given the benefit of the doubt and were referred to as bad, the claim is supported by a racist determination logic that suggested that all African Americans were innately less mentally capable. That is the last drop, Kitty cannot stand living in the US and decides to return to Jamaica, leaving Clare behind and taking Clare's sister, Jennie, who was more physically like her, back home.

Boy is convinced Kitty will return, but she never does. He and his older daughter can only count on each other to survive. Clare's subaltern position is potentialised when Boy enrolls her in high school. When they meet the principal, Mrs. Taylor, they are told that Clare will have to start a year behind. Her father then lets the headmistress know that his daughter speaks Latin and French and that she has already read the major classics of English literature. To no avail, as Mrs. Taylor replies, "We are professional educators here. We are talking about degrees of emotional development. Children develop differently. Children from underdeveloped countries develop at a different rate than American children" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 98). Since she is seen as a "Third World" child, it seems that the colonial education Clare had been given served no purpose other than the colonization of knowledge. In spite of having been taught according to Eurocentric standards, she was still subjected to the discourse of biological underdevelopment. However, the humiliation does not stop there.

The power dynamics in which the principal is the white bearer of knowledge and the Savages are untamed creatures in need of being dealt with permeates their whole interaction. Regardless of the fact that English is the official language in Jamaica and that Boy had been talking to her in "the King's language", when it is time to fill out the enrollment form, Mrs. Taylor states she will do it herself; "to save [him] any difficulty" with the language. The need to tick the "race" category arises, to which Boy replies "white... of course" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 98). Immediately, the head teacher starts to confront him, questioning the veracity of his answer. Caught off guard, Boy tries to bring up his grandmother and is shut down by Mrs. Taylor, "Are we to hear of your entire family tree —slave and free?" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 98). Imposing her authority, she claims to be familiar with "island people", since she has vacationed in Montego Bay. The narrating voice says the "woman acted as if she had been hired by the government to track down Savages trying to pass for white" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 99). Here, the wordplay between Clare and Boy's surname and the meaning of the word as a noun is even more evident. The woman moves on to question about his wife's family and Boy blurts out that they are separated. The incongruence of the affirmation matches the absurdity of the situation. The fact that Clare's mother was away would not erase the blood which ran in Clare's veins.

Moving away from the discourse of education, Mrs. Taylor brings up yet another field which has been used as a means to invalidate non-hegemonic thought: the discourse of Western medicine. She refers to her husband, who is a doctor, saying that he was quite knowledgeable in handling people of the likes of the Savages. The principal makes it clear to the Savages that her husband

[...] would call [them] white chocolate... I mean, have you ever seen a child's expression when he finds a white chocolate bunny in his Easter basket? He simply doesn't understand... he thinks it strange. I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens (CLIFF, 1987, p. 99).

Forms are made of small boxes in which colonial subjects do not fit. In a metonymic sense, the message is that institutions have not been thought out to embrace the complexity of the Caribbean. From an early age, Clare learns that there is no place for her in the school system, or in a society that rejects differences. Throughout Clare's journeys, being able to pass as white was a provisional solution, always dependent on where she was. Nonetheless, due to colorism, Clare, with her light skin, had always had an "advantage". In London, in order to declare herself a legal resident, the protagonist shows her savings account in which she had stored the money given by her uncle — from her mother's side. What she hears from the old lady who checks her documents is that she is in no way like the other Jamaicans. Instead of confronting the racist, xenophobic remark, Clare nods in agreement, hoping no one else had seen her doing so (117). At this point, she chooses to accept the advantage over other Jamaicans in diaspora, which is provided by her skin colour and money. However, in London, Clare feels more alone and empty than ever. She is completely detached from self and others. The momentary enjoyment provided by the study of the European images soon wore off.

At this point, Clare seems to be devoid of human interaction, but in Liz, a classmate from university, she finds a glimpse of affection that looks promising. Her friend invites her to spend a long weekend at her old school. There would be reunion and Clare would be her guest. The intention, from both parts, to develop their friendship into a romantic relationship is latent. The invitation brings back memories from Clare's adolescence, in which, together with her school friends, she would devour the pages of comic books that told stories set in English schools similar to the one Liz was inviting her to meet. The protagonist agrees to go along. Liz's old schoolmates treat her politely, but they are eager to reminisce about the past and do not want to spend much time with her. Clare ends up roaming the school grounds alone. She finds a statue which had been gifted to the school by "the Colonial Dames of America in 1958, in loving memory of their country woman, Pocahontas" (CLIFF, 1987, p.

136). The protagonist decided to enter a church near the statue and discovers memorials ‘in honour’ of the Indian princess. Clare finds images of the woman’s baptism and her impression is that as if she were a savage, she had been tamed and given another name, Rebecca. Clare read on a pamphlet that she had died from a fever on her way back to America. All of this is too much for Clare to bear, she thinks of how lonely Pocahontas must have felt and projects this feeling onto her own current state. The protagonist decides to leave that place immediately. She is unable to find Liz so she leaves a message with one of her friends. After having spent much of her teenage year fantasising about being in a school in England, much like that one, Clare found identification not with Liz’s old schoolmates, but with the statue of Pocahontas and all that it symbolises from the perspective of a colonised subject.

One day, Clare is at a university lecture and a march of the National Front¹⁹ passes by. The professor tries to continue the lesson, without paying attention to the manifestation. However, the racist, xenophobic chants outside penetrated the windows. Clare was distraught by them and started to daydream about the window breaking but nothing happens. The following day, a poster was placed at the bulletin board in the Senate House cafeteria, “WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE” (CLIFF, 1987, author’s emphasis, p. 137). At the sight of it, a colleague makes a condescending racist remark and goes on to tell a story of a time when her uncle had to sew the lips of a man in Uganda after they had been bitten off during a fight. To which Clare impatiently tells her to fuck herself (CLIFF, 1987, p. 138). Clare leaves her, takes a sit at a table and is soon joined by Liz. Her friend wants to know why she looks distressed, and when Clare answers, Liz questions her as to why she had given that woman the time of day, since she was just an idiot. The protagonist, then, tries to explain that her discomfort is not only because of the encounter at the cafeteria and wants to know if Liz had not been upset about the march on the previous day. Unfamiliarized with what Clare had been talking about, Liz replies that it had been rather annoying and that she had to move her desk in the library. To Liz, the march was just inconvenient noise; to Clare, it felt life threatening.

Persistently, Clare tries to put her point across and Liz dismisses her worries, saying that the protagonist was not the focus of the protest, because of her light skin and “educated” manners. The protagonist tries to explain that she was a part of the people being targeted and Liz, who believes she is soothing her friend’s spirit, says that she doubted Clare’s relatives

¹⁹ The National Front is a British political party known for its far-right and fascist position.

acted like the men in Uganda had. Clare hopes to end the conversation by saying that some of her ancestors had been Caribs, who were cannibals. Instead of refraining from speaking, Liz talks as if ancestors did not matter. This is the critical moment when Clare realizes that even the most well-meaning white English friend/once romantic interest would be bound not to understand the racial tension and the marks colonization had left on invaded territories and its people. The history of Liz's ancestors is well known to anyone who has had a modern/colonial education, for her ancestors were protagonists in hegemonic history. On the other hand, Clare had never had comprehensive access to her African and Carib origins and felt how painful it was to have them being erased once again from her history. Following this episode, Clare receives a letter from Harry/Harriet, which begins like this: "I find myself close to my choice, girlfriend. How about you? Jamaica needs her children" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 140). After that, the protagonist drops out of the institute, meets Bobby, the soldier, and leaves London. She is not ready to go back to Jamaica yet, but she writes H/H back saying she feels the time is near.

Later in the novel, Clare's return to Jamaica symbolises her choice to embrace and dive into her blackness, her position as a colonial subject and her role in decolonising History. As Angelique Nixon wrote,

To love blackness then is to resist and struggle against systems of oppression designed to make us hate ourselves. By transforming representations of Blackness from the most marginal of positions, Cliffs novel powerfully creates a space in which to love Blackness is to become a radical subject in the throes of resisting neocolonialism-in what I dare call a feminist revolution and coming to Black radical consciousness (NIXON, 2009, p. 262).

While on the truck with the other guerrillas, Clare is living by her choice and her truth. She realises that "[s]he belongs in these hills. And she knows this choice is irrevocable and she will never be the same. She is the woman who has reclaimed her grandmother's land. She is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveler. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 91). Giving herself to the struggle to liberate her people from colonial/modern domain is to take a stand and choose to be a part of it. By positioning herself and living away from the illusory protection that her colour or class privilege had provided over the years in some contexts, with all the contradictions and plurality, Clare is finally able to become herself.

3.2 "What history do you bring to your students?"

As Audre Lorde wrote on *Sister Outsider* (1984), drawing from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), the "true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships" (LORDE, 1984, p. 123). Paulo Freire advocated for a revolution in the Brazilian educational system; his proposal envisioned that students would be active subjects in their learning process, teachers would work as guides and not as bearers of all knowledge and society would be a part of the process. His views resonated with educators and philosophers all around the world, especially with the ones from former modern colonies, such as Lorde and bell hooks²⁰. Lorde transposes his thoughts to reflect upon our places as colonised subjects and how class, gender, race and sexuality operate within us.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, when Clare Savage enrolls at university, she is advised to choose the School of Oriental and African studies, but she chooses to follow a completely different path: studying the Italian Renaissance. Here, this move is very similar to Michelle Cliff's in real life. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the author claims she chose this subject because it was as far from her reality as she could fathom. At the Warburg Institute, Michelle Cliff wanted to distance herself from her experience as a fragmented diasporic subject and focus on how the impression of the times had remained in the images of Renaissance—theoretically beautiful, harmonic, balanced, perfect and whole. Cliff's option can be read through Grada Kilomba's analysis of the violent hierarchy of power we live in, which decides "who can speak and what they can speak about" (2008). The author of *No Telephone to Heaven*, just like her character, wants to prove she is able not only to study, but also to master Eurocentric culture.

Looking back, Cliff states that "[she] studied the Renaissance without dealing with the fact that the slave trade began in the Renaissance and that there were slaves in Europe even as Michelangelo was painting the Sistine ceiling. [She] wasn't even aware of it. [She] had to educate [herself] about that later" (CLIFF, 1993, p. 71). So, part of the author's project is that, through her fiction, people will be able to comprehend that there is not just one side to History. "Historiographic metafiction appears, then, willing to draw upon any signifying practices it can find operative in a society. It wants to challenge those discourses and yet to use them, even to milk them for all they are worth" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 133). This what

²⁰ bell hooks refers to Paulo Freire on a number of occasions, establishing a fruitful dialogue with the author's postulates in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994).

we are given in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), a mix of European, African and creole forms. For instance, when Clare and Harry/Harriet talk to an American tourist who approaches them as if they were exotic creatures, they decide to have fun. Michelle Cliff explains that “they're playing with him like Anansi would. So they're using an essentially African type of discourse, but they're conducting it in the King's English (CLIFF, 1993b, p. 58)”. The author mixes form and language in order to appropriate the form. The interaction takes place on their terms, just like the novel format is used and molded by Cliff to convey the messages in the way she wishes.

Without a doubt, Harry/Harriet is the most fundamental character in the process of decolonization. Harry/Harriet is raped by a man when they were a child. They see the abuse as a representation of what colonisation had done to all of the colonised; some colonised subjects, even replicated the actions and did the same to other colonised people. Clare is shocked to hear their testimony, but Harry/Harriet comforts her saying that Hyacinth, the maid who watched over them, gave the child a bath and soothed their spirits by telling Anansi stories (p. 129). Early on, Harry/Harriet's colonial wounds were tented and healed by non-Hegemonic care, tradition and affection.

Furthermore, Harry/Harriet is the one who helps Clare return to her homeland and to find her voice. They are also responsible for healing and bringing the community together, in spite of how they may treat them. Harriet's choosing precisely this name to herself is not incidental. Rather, it is a strategy, through intertextuality, to pay homage to Harriet Tubman, a formerly enslaved African-American who aided many in the struggle for freedom. The similarities cannot have been incidental. During the American Civil War, Tubman was a nurse, just like Harriet in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Both used their knowledge of non-Western medicine to cure, for instance, administering local plants as medication. Moreover, just like Tubman did prior to John Brown's Haper's Fairy raid, Cliff's character recruited people and made way for the civil unrest to take place. Such parallel seems even more justifiable when we turn our attention to Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* (1993), which is a historical metafiction that retells and reimagines events around Haper's Ferry. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley in *Thiefing Sugar* (2010) also makes this comparison. “Harry/Harriet is a myth who builds on ‘real life’ black women's history. Her name and travels repeat those of another revolutionary who chose the same first name Harriet (née Araminta Ross) Tubman” (TINSLEY, 2010, p. 181). Furthermore, Tinsley points out that Tubman's voyages towards emancipation and her work as a healer (physical and spiritual) would place her within a group of racialized women in the 19th century who were described as different from others, who “at

times become — female men, men in dresses, and travellers whose genders change as they move” (TINSLEY, 2010, p. 181). Hence, the linkage between the historical figure and Cliff’s fictional character highlights how gender has always been provisional, especially when it comes to migrant racialized subjects.

Harry/Harriet is the one to open Clare’s eyes and to help her understand how colonial structures were still all around and to call her attention to the need for the people to reconnect to their own past, instead of accepting the single story which they were taught: “we are of the past here... We expect people to live on cornmeal and dried fish, which was the diet of the slaves. We name hotels Plantation Inn, and Sans Souci... A peculiar past. For we have taken the master's past as our own. That is the danger” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 127). The colonial presence is all around, from the naming of establishments to the food available to the working class.

Harry/Harriet also brings Clare’s attention to the ruins of the slave hospitals. Clare is curious as to why there were hospitals if enslaved people were treated so badly. Their friend’s answer is that they were expensive assets, so they were taken care of only to make sure they would not die and avoid financial loss to the master. In fact, Harry/Harriet emphasises that, in the present time, the lives of some working-class people on the island were not much different from the reality of slaves. Clare’s friend stops the digression and apologises for it, but justifies it by saying that the cane fields, the ruins, the landscape tell (hi)stories one may not notice at first but which are there nonetheless (p. 132). Here, Harry/Harriet’s comment illustrates the pervasiveness of the coloniality of power.

Natural landscapes are present in the novel not only to illustrate the pervasiveness of coloniality but also to suggest decolonization. The first part of *No Telephone to Heaven*, “Ruininate”, is chronologically one of the last moments of the novel. Ruinate, very common in Jamaica, as explained, is a type of vegetation which grows on land that has been cleared for agriculture but subsequently abandoned. A ruinate forest is made of thick bush, which grows thicker with time, and is hard to be removed. The Ruinate is a symbol of the process of decolonization. It is impossible to go back to the original stage, however, the exploitation and devastation will not prevail. The land once exploited will grow vegetation which is a mix of all it has been, and it will resist further invasion by resignifying its configuration.

As Hall preconises in the article “New Ethnicities” (1996), which has been broached in chapter 1, the shift in black representation is in moving away from homogenizing tropes and bodies which would represent the whole in a positive sense, as opposed to the commonly produced hegemonic representations, to encompass the particularities of different locations from which black subjects come. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Michelle Cliff strongly

denounced how Jamaica is still used as the sight of production of colonial and neocolonial fictions (advertisements, tourists' perspectives, film sets). As Angelique Nixon points out, "Cliff's representation of Jamaica reveals the extent to which the Caribbean is consumed as the West's "other" and even more so the United States' "other." Throughout this novel, Cliff critiques of the commodification of Black culture" (NIXON, 2009, p. 357). Furthermore, Cliff wants to show that the particularities of Jamaica and its people are lost, as the country is seen as a "paradise up for sale".

In the eleventh section of the novel, entitled "Film Noir", this is easily observed when we analyse the aspects which surround the story of being filmed. According to the script, in the film set which Clare and the rebels hope to bring down, the story of Nanny and the Maroons will be re-enacted. Nanny's history had already been explored by Cliff in *Abeng* (1984). Additionally, Clare and Harriet's stories in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) are closely intertwined with Nanny's. A real-life hero of the eighteenth century, Nanny²¹ was born in Africa, more specifically present-day Ghana, and, together with her siblings, she was taken to the island we know as Jamaica to be enslaved. Nanny and her brothers managed to escape enslavement and, once in the Blue Mountains of Portland Parish, they started organising the maroon resistance. The Africans joined forces with local indigenous peoples and together they started raiding British farms. Queen Nanny or grandmother Nanny died a free woman and helped over a thousand enslaved subjects to become free. Even with documents which corroborate Nanny's existence, little of what is known of her history is documented in History books. Apart from that, the town which was named Nanny Town is a symbol of maroon resistance.

Cliff, however, carries Nanny's story with her, and her argument is that if England is meant to be the motherland, Jamaica, like Nanny of the Maroons, is the grandmother. Rooted in ancestral knowledge and strength, the island and its people need to reconnect with and regain their power in order to change radically. In the article "Caliban's Daughter: the Tempest and the Teapot" (1991), Michelle Cliff writes that

[t]his powerful aspect of the grandmother is apotheosized in Nanny, the African warrior and Maroon leader and "Science-woman" (as the Maroons called her), precolonial woman par excellence, whose boiling cauldron so mesmerized the Red Coats that they tumbled in and disappeared; to whom were entrusted magical pumpkin seeds, bearing huge fruit in one day to feed her starving troops; who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and fire the lead back at her attackers. She is the Jamaican Sycorax. The extent to which you can believe in the powers of Nanny, that they are literal examples of her Africanness and strength, represents the extent to which you have decolonized your mind (CLIFF, 1991, p. 47).

²¹ For more on Nanny's (hi)story, see <http://www.eiu.edu/historia/Eberle2017.pdf>

In the above-quoted passage, it is evident that to Cliff, Nanny symbolises the unrevealed and the unexplainable through a Western perspective. The Grandmother represents a fragment of the cosmology, knowledge and power that have been lost, scattered or annihilated. Section VII of *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), “Magnanimous Warrior!” is about this figure, what she represents and how she is deemed senile in a sick land that needs her powers. This imagery is a depiction of how a land overridden by coloniality needs to find its strength in those who have resisted and in the traditions which have been obliterated. Furthermore, being able to apprehend Nanny’s story not from an eurocentric perspective, which would categorise (hi)stories about her as fictitious and untrue, is an objective example of how the decolonising of knowledge can take place. At the same time, Cliff exposes what can happen to the strongest of symbols of resistance when coopted by the coloniser mindset.

Cliff uses the (mis)representation of this story by the filmmakers (who have no vested interest in this legend) to reveal in more explicit ways how Jamaica is consumed vis-a-vis representation. The filmmakers are British and American, thereby representing the colonial and neocolonial powers that continue to adversely control Jamaica, among other countries in the “Third World” (NIXON, 2009, p. 362).

The appropriation of the Nanny’s story, and the choice of actors point to the ongoing cooptation of Jamaican heritage. The actress chosen to play Nanny was the one “called in whenever someone was needed to play a Black heroine, any Black heroine, whether Sojourner Truth or Bessie Smith” (CLIFF, 1987, p, 206). The narrator goes on to describe the fetishized designer view of Nanny’s costumes — a pair of leather breeches and a silk shirt.

Cliff’s wordsmithery is accentuated when, simultaneously, she is able to criticise how modern colonial power treats non-hegemonic cultures, and offers the reader two accounts of how Nanny might have looked like. This aspect of her writing is highlighted by Angelique Nixon, who writes that Cliff “produces oppositional images that deflect the colonizer’s gaze, celebrates Blackness while engaging in the differences among Black people across the African Diaspora, and finally she writes ‘revolution not only through characters but through (re)writing history/herstory” (NIXON, 2009, p. 357). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, after returning to Jamaica, Clare becomes a teacher whose teaching comes not only from the school books, but also from stories told by the people, long-forgotten documents and local traditions and practices. Being a teacher is the way Clare first finds to reconcile with her past and to help others reconnect with theirs.

3.3 “Cyaan live split, not in this world”

Michelle Cliff referred to Harry/Harriet consistently as Harry and used the pronouns designated to men. This is observed, for instance, in the 1991 (published in 1993) interview given to Judith Raiskin and in the 1993 interview with Meryl F. Schwartz. On top of that, to Raiskin, the author states that she consciously chose to write

the most whole and sane character in *No Telephone to Heaven* [as] somebody who was homosexual, which is what Harry is. People may want to think of him as a transvestite or something, but he's not. I think to live in this world as somebody like Harry, you have to be courageous, and he is, and he knows who he is. And Clare learns by his example too (CLIFF, 1993b, p. 69).

From a current perspective, Harry/Harriet is a character who defies binary categories of gender and sexuality. “Harry/Harriet [...] is ultimately queer, refusing to draw new lines, new boundaries, create new divisions and new definitions as s/he chooses her/his new identity” (ELIA, 2000, p. 352). However, it is fundamental to highlight that Queer Studies were in their infancy at the time Cliff gave those interviews. I argue that qualifying Cliff as trans/queerphobic or as someone who silenced some member of the queer community would be out of order and most definitely anachronistic.

While Cliff’s writing is an important and valuable addition to criticism of the bloody past of the Americas, it is not intended for those unwilling to recognize their own place in the racist, patriarchal and homophobic structures responsible for contemporary hegemony. Cliff often implicates her own heroines for their unwitting participation in racist, classist, and sexist systems. Her writing is a process of coming to terms with and overcoming these internal prejudices, so that the oppressive systems that continue today can someday be dismantled (BARNES; MILES, 2009, p. 4).

With that being said, it is useful to revisit some of her statements, as Cliff herself did time and again with History and normative behaviour, in order to promote a reading of *No Telephone to Heaven* which puts modern colonial structures under the microscope to examine how they operate. Michelle Cliff said in her interview to Raiskins, “I want to show homosexuality or lesbianism or gayness, whatever you want to call it, as a whole identity, not just a sexual preference” (CLIFF, 1993b, p. 69). Apart from the immutability that the word “whole” may evoke, this statement is a rough way of putting part of what queer theory postulates. Fundamentally, “queer theory aimed at challenging the binaries inherent in the earlier studies of sexuality, and critiqued essentialist ways of understanding sexual identities – whether normative or non-normative” (ILMONEN, 2017, p. 40). Proposing a similar interpretation of the identity of Harry/Harriet as a queer subject is Omise’eke Natasha

Tinsley. Much as I do, the scholar sees the relationship between Clare and Harriet as embedded in lesbian affection. In two chapters of her book *Thiefing Sugar* (2010), Tinsley chooses to add “[sic]” when quoting Cliff’s observations that contain gendered language assigned to men. This resource surfaces as a strategy to mark the inaccuracy of he/his/him when seeing Harry/Harriet from a queer perspective. Much like Maria Lugones proposed bracketing the word woman in “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” (2010); it is a way of using and destabilising languages which have fundamentally evolved based on binaries and cannot illustrate satisfactorily what escapes dichotomous systems.

Without a doubt, Clare is inspired by Harry/Harriet’s attitude towards life and their own self. However, it seems that such admiration arises from her friend’s resolve to be who they are, regardless of imposed norms. Living in-between, studying and learning different kinds of knowledges and constantly becoming more who they are,

Harry/Harriet knows about their history, understands the colonizer/colonized mentality, learns the ancient healing practices, and participates in the resistance. [They occupy] the ultimate position as radical Black subject distorting boundaries in this space of in-between (NIXON, 2009, p. 261).

The choice towards the end to present themselves solely as Harriet comes at the climax of the narrative, when selecting a standpoint is a means of representing a material body that is capable of making armed revolution happen. However, as Gayatri Spivak points out, identity claims solely do not generate agency instantly, rather agency “comes from the principle of accountable reason, that one acts with responsibility, that one has to assume the possibility of intention, one has to assume even the freedom of subjectivity in order to be responsible. That's where agency is located” (SPIVAK, 1996, p. 294). It is Harriet’s conscious decision that will make them one of the actors of revolution. The passage from the novel reads, “the choice is mine, man, is made. Harriet live and Harry be no more (CLIFF, 1987, p. 168)”. The symbolic death of Harry is beyond gender conformity. The image of Harry represented all they had been (through) up until that moment. Even though one does not stop being who they are entirely, burying Harry meant leaving behind the parties and social encounters with his family, to whom he had always been an outsider, with their alleged friends, to whom he had been an aberration, a plaything.

The show Harry/Harriet felt they had to put on in order to make living comfortable for the people in the social circles they participated was over. We are told that “everyone tolerates him, as if measuring their normalness against his strangeness. [...] [H]e is also one of them, though apart from them, reminding them of their wholeness” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 21). When Clare confronts them about their behaviour at the party they had gone to, Harry/Harriet

rhetorically asks, “Oh, man, girlfriend, is nuh what dem expect from me? Nuh jus’ give dem what dem expect? Battyman trash. No harm. Our people kind of narrow, poor souls. Foolish sometimes. Cyaan understand the likes of me” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 127). Hence, during the scenes in which Harry/Harriet participates in these social interactions, it is clear that they are not allowed a voice, and, in order to meet those people’s expectations, they consciously put on the mask of the flamboyant shallow gay man.

Concomitantly, what Cliff does is to create a layered character, who, in her words, is the most sane and whole of all of them (1993). Harriet is a force for change who decides to combat colonial structures. Cliff remarks that “Harry/Harriet is the novel’s lesbian in a sense; he’s a man who wants to be a woman, and he loves women, which is complicated” (CLIFF, 1993, p. 601). It is remarkable how the queer philosophy is pervasive in the novel. In the moment which follows their love scene, Harry/Harriet asks Clare, “Girlfriend, tell me something. Do you find me strange? Clare looked into her friend’s eyes. Mascara and eye shadow washed away by the salt water, the eyes stood out, deep brown. Her own eyes naked, green as the cane behind them.” She thought, Of course I find you strange;” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 131) at this point, the reader is led to believe Clare, much like the others, sees Harry/Harriet as an aberration; however, her reasoning is completed with “how could I not? You are a new person to me. At the same time, I feel drawn to you. At home with you. ‘No, I don’t find you strange. No stranger... no stranger than I find myself. For we are neither one thing nor the other.’” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 131). Here, queer subverts its original meaning of strangeness and we have both Clare and Harry/Harriet placed under the guise of fragmentation, in-betweenness and non-conformity.

Harry/Harriet is also the one who warns Clare that they will have to make decisions and position themselves, foreshadowing that “[t]he time will come for [them] to choose. For [they] will have to make the choice. Cast [their] lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 131). The moment in which the characters connect at a more vulnerable and intimate level allows them to access other parts of who they are, and their complicity is deepened. It is then that inward and outward change starts to effectively take place in Clare’s life. Analysing the scene of intimacy, Tinsley states that “covered in juices, the erotic connection to the landscape segues into an erotic connection between Clare and Harry/Harriet. Lying on the beach, the girlfriends’ bodies mix equally, effortlessly and pleurably with each other (TINSLEY, 2010, p. 189)”. Here, the erotic works as a source of power, as a means to free controlled bodies. As Audre Lorde wrote in *Sister Outsider* (1984), the erotic has the power to unleash unbeknownst parts of one’s self.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense (LORDE, 1984, p. 58).

Having been educated by her father to abide by the social rules of the country they had moved to, Clare becomes an adult who is unfamiliarised with her own self, not aware of her own needs or how to address them. From her adolescence throughout her twenties, the protagonist seems to “go with the flow”, surviving instead of thriving. Admittedly, she is affected by this lack of connection with herself, her past and her culture. The time spent at the beach with Harry/Harriet was a moment of self-discovery.

Even though Clare is under the influence of alcohol in both occasions, her moment of intimacy and heightened sensory experience with Harry/Harriet is entirely different from Clare's intercourse with Paul H., the rich Jamaican who is murdered by Christopher not long after their encounter. The protagonist's meeting with H. comes across as a protocol of a reality that forces compulsory heterosexuality onto people. Clare is drunk, “out of it”, and she seems to be acting according to what is expected of her at high-society “wild parties”, instead of paying attention to what she might want for herself. Unequivocally, in this normative environment there are certain expectations, even in moments of inebriation and apparent freedom from traditional standards.

Michelle Cliff was constantly questioned why Clare did not engage in other and more explicit lesbian sexual relations — and it should be noted that this fact does not exclude *No Telephone to Heaven* or the character Clare Savage from the lesbian *continuum*. As Ilmonen argues,

Lesbian writing could include literature with female relationships providing consolation, support, and possibilities for spiritual and emotional development. In applying [Adrienne] Rich's and [Barbara] Smith's definitions, *Abeng* clearly belongs to the continuum of lesbian literature, as it emphasizes the female-centered experience and cultural collectivity between girls such as Clare and Zoe (ILMONEN, 2017, p. 204).

Subtle but there, the lesbian subtext in *Abeng* (1984), which portrayed Clare's early years and her relationship with Zoe, a housegirl, cannot be erased. Their connection is beyond adolescent sexual awakening, as they break the unwritten rules of how servants and the master's children should interact; they begin to resignify their relationship, constructing solidarity and affection outside the norm. However, as they get closer, they are punished. Of course, as the weakest link in the chain of power, Zoe is sent away. In *No Telephone to*

Heaven, Clare's father either ignores or prohibits her from thinking too deeply about events and situations which caused her distress. Having not had much opportunity to deal with her feelings, it is not surprising that the protagonist finds it difficult to establish emotional bonds with other people. The writer Dionne Brand proposed that

women learn about sexual pleasure from women. The strict code of heterosexuality would have us think that we come upon sexual pleasure when we notice men or that we should. But codes are only necessary where there is variation, questions of power. The need to regulate reveals the possible (BRAND, 1994, p. 33).

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Clare is detached from her body. As a teenager, the protagonist is deprived of the company of her mother and sister and other women figures. All is left is what she learns in from observed behaviour. In spite of where she was, Clare lived in societies which impose compulsory heterosexuality, therefore, it is easy to understand that what happened at the party with Paul H. was not an example of the erotic, or the pleasure for herself, but rather, a compliance with the norm, as mentioned before in this chapter.

Never forgetting her project of decolonisation, Michelle Cliff explained that she did not think writing a romantic relationship between Liz and Clare would be interesting in the narrative because in the imaginary of colonized territories, including Jamaica,

lesbianism is seen as a Eurocentric, eccentric, upper-class behavior, for the most part. Decadent and exploitative of Third World women. Whereas for Clare to claim her lesbianism in the Caribbean would be to become a complete woman. That's the way I read it. If Clare had had an affair in Britain with Liz, which is suggested very strongly in the novel, it wouldn't have led her back to herself. It would have made her more foreign to the place she came from. But her love for Harry/Harriet is a step towards herself. And if she wasn't killed she probably would have gone the whole way (CLIFF, 1993, p. 601).

In this passage, it is clear that Cliff was aware of how provisional these categories were. Having a lesbian encounter in England would have been completely different from what happened in Jamaica with Harry/Harriet. Regardless of how much Liz seemed to like Clare as an individual, she did not understand the dimension and the implications of who she was and where she had come from and lived. Even though they could have had sexual intercourse, Liz would not have provided the emotional connection Clare needed.

Fragmentation is the common thread which twines the stories in *No Telephone to Heaven*. National and racial identity, family structure, sexuality, gender norms are provisional, wanting and the lines which delineate their limits are blurred. Quijano (2000) highlights that coloniality pushes colonial subjects to look for their reflections in a eurocentric mirror. Even though European habits, culture and traditions are inevitably part of who we are,

Quijano reminds us that the reflection we get is always distorted and disappointing because it shows what we will never be and have been taught to aspire to. In the article “Decolonial AestheSis²²: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings” (2013), Rolando Vazquez and Walter D. Mignolo talk about the permanence of the colonial/modern matrix of power and how it can be contested from a decolonial perspective. Coming from a theoretical standpoint that understands the effects of coloniality in the minds and bodies, which are indissociable, of colonial subjects,

[d]ecoloniality is at once the unveiling of the wound and the possibility of healing. It makes the wound visible, tangible; it voices the scream. And at the same time decolonial aestheSis moves towards the healing, the recognition, the dignity of those aesthetic practices that have been written out of the canon of modern aestheTics (VAZQUEZ; MIGNOLO, 2013).

Even though the concept only emerged years later, Michelle Cliff was deeply committed to the process of creating decolonial aestheSis. In *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Clare’s, Harry/Harriet’s and Christopher’s stories expose the wound of coloniality which is often “hidden under the rhetoric of modernity, the rhetoric of salvation” (VAZQUEZ; MIGNOLO, 2013). Moreover, the colonial wound is also metaphorically represented by the wound on soldier Bobby’s ankle. Like Achilles, that was his weakness, the wound that took away his strength.

Nevertheless, Clare was adamant about healing him. As they travelled around Europe, she bought all sorts of medicine, ointments, tinctures, to no avail, since “[h]is ankle might stop throbbing for a while, the lips of the wound move close together almost to join, but the least jolt and it would open again and the flow of pus would begin” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 145). Here, it is evident that a patch or medicine from Europe would not heal the wound, which ran much deeper. As Bobby tells Clare different stories about what caused it, the protagonist is obsessed to discover how he got hurt. The soldier’s wound provides her with a material situation she is able to manage. “Drawn to him as a friend; later, lover. But also as protector and healer. She felt her petty, private misery recede, faced with the concreteness of his broken

²² AestheTics become Eurocentered in eighteenth-century Europe when it was taken as the key concept for a theory of sensibility, sentiment, sensations, and, briefly, emotions, in contrast with the obsession for the rational. On the other hand, Kant mutated it into a key concept to regulate sensing the beautiful and the sublime. This was the starting point of “modern aestheTics” that emerged from European experience and local history, and that became, even already in Kant’s work, the regulator of the global capability to “sense” the beautiful and the sublime. In this way, aestheTics colonized aestheSis in two directions: in time, it established the standards in and from the European present. and, in space, it was projected to the entire population of the planet. Aesthetics and reason became two new concepts incorporated in the colonial matrix or power. [...] Thus, if aestheTics is indeed modern/colonial aestheTics and a normativity that colonized the senses, decolonial aestheSis has become the critique and artistic practices that aim to decolonize the senses, that is, to liberate them from the regulations of modern, postmodern, and altermodern aestheTics. (VAZQUEZ; MIGNOLO, 2013)

skin” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 145). The search for the origin and the truth behind it keeps her from focusing on the origin of her own invisible wounds. She feels attracted to him because like her, he is not whole. In fact, Clare lets it slip that sometimes she believes she is attracted to him because he is wounded, to which he replies if she means his ankle injury or because he is black. The implications regarding the colonial wound left in racialized bodies are evident in the storylines. Furthermore, Bobby, after a while Harry/Harriet and, eventually, Clare, all become aware of their colonial wounds.

In Clare’s search for completion, she and Bobby find themselves at a beach and they have sex while covered in the ocean water: “he entered her, coming into her along with the salt sea. Her own liquid rushed out, and they stood, bodies wrapped, one with water” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 155). In this part, there seems to be an allusion to Yemoja, who is known as the mother of all Orixas, queen of the ocean, deity of fertility. After the beach episode, Clare suspects she is bearing a child. When she shares her suspicion with Bobby, he decides to come clean and tells her his wound would not heal because of chemicals he had sprayed on enemy soil during the war. According to him, he has been contaminated and would infect the children he did not wish to have. The protagonist is taken aback by his disclosure. In spite of having prayed not to be pregnant, Clare had felt a thrill with the uncertainty. Now, she felt empty. “In the end she was removed from decision. Another reprieve from womanhood? Answered prayers? She could not tell. Something slid out of her suddenly—it could have been a late heavy period for all she knew, or a baby with half a brain” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 157). In this passage, it is evident how the construction of the gender “woman” is permeated by motherhood, as pointed out by Lugones (2007) and Rich (1980). The alleged baby that could have made her whole, according to hegemonic parameters, was already fragmented even before existing.

After this episode, Bobby’s war nightmares escalate and he is driven to insanity. Clare stands by his side, but he runs away. Before Bobby and she set out, she wrote Harry/Harriet saying a return to Jamaica felt more likely, but that she still needed more time. Once Bobby disappears and after all the places and moments she has been through, she is ready to go back to her homeland. Jamaica has the potential to bring about healing for Clare.

Having been away for such a long time, when Clare goes back to Jamaica she has to reconnect and re-learn about the places of her childhood and the country she had left behind. “She had arrived in Kingston with a high fever, in pain, entering the city on the sea as her ancestors had once done. Some concealed below. Some pacing above, bonnets protecting their finely complected faces from the brutal sun (CLIFF, 1987, p. 168). Here white, African and

native heritages are combined. Clare has a fever upon returning, just like Pocahontas, but she is able to survive; furthermore, we are reminded of how Europeans traveled to the Americas, and of how kidnaped Africans were taken there, chained in the ships' hold. All of those emotions affect Clare's mental and physical state. The protagonist goes to hospital and the doctor tells her she has a womb infection and that she is probably sterile. Once again, Clare's body denies the heteronormative logic of reproduction. Harry/Harriet is the one who goes to her, in order to provide her with healing and care.

She visits her grandmother's land and recalls and feels ashamed about her spoiled young self, who treated other people badly because of her class privilege. She decides to visit an old shop she used to go to and encounters Miss Cherry, the old post-mistress (p. 185). Miss Cherry does not let go of the fact that, in her eyes, Clare had abandoned Jamaica. The woman tells the protagonist about the hardships people had had to face over the years and how Kitty, Clare's mom, had been a truly honorable woman who valued her motherland. Clare is unsettled by this conversation but does not disagree with Miss Cherry, she is aware of the country's current dire situation, which is a consequence of all the history of exploitation that did not cease with independence.

Two years after Clare's return, Harry/Harriet, who at this point has decided to go by as Harriet, is thriving in their journey as a healer, even in the face of their people's suffering. One day, walking around the streets downtown, Harriet sees some of her patients/people cooking an unidentified piece of meat. Harriet tastes it, but she is unable to recognise what had been served to them until an iguana carcass is spotted. When Harriet arrives at home, Clare is holding a copy of the newspaper the *Gleaner*, whose headline announced the theft of the iguanas from the zoo. Distraught by the fact that those people had stolen the lizards out of necessity, Harriet decides it is time for Clare to meet the guerrillas.

Clare is grilled by a guerrilla, whose inquiries lead her to bounce around the corners of memory and self and to dig deep to produce answers to questions she had either asked herself many times or had never considered. The guerrilla, like her, had left her homeland to study in England, Clare was not alone in her geographical dislocation; another fellow diasporic subject had felt the need to return and seek justice. When the topic moves on to Clare's job as school teacher, she is able to explain how she has managed to mix hegemonic knowledge to the African, Native and Jamaican history and take that to her pupils. When asked if the history she taught was factual, she replies that it is "not simple as that. [...] I'm not outside this history—it's a matter of recognition... memory... emotion. When I study Tom Cringle's silk cotton tree, I wonder about the fact that I have never been able to bear a necklace around my

throat” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 194). In this passage, Michelle Cliff translates in literary language what it means to be a part of history, instead of approaching it as a sequential gathering of fixed past events. The effect of the past is present in the body of the colonised; the body carries ancestral memory which is accessed and understood through the decolonization of body and mind.

The interrogation continues and the guerrilla focus on the children Clare teaches and all Jamaican children who had been drinking water contaminated by mines and refineries. The woman tells Clare that if she had “been [t]here for the past two years, then [she would have] realize[d] all progress is backward, and the gaps become wider. People [were] being left for dead —more than ever” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 195). This sentence is fundamental to the understanding of the notion of progress and success. The growth of industries is presented as a symbol of evolution. The idea that the more is produced and extracted, the bigger the country will become, completely disregarding the lives of Jamaica’s working-class inhabitants is the fallacy perpetuated by coloniality. The pollution and destruction of ecosystems affect the population as a whole; however, while middle and upper class citizens do not have to drink contaminated water, for instance, the more vulnerable are left unattended and their lives do not count as lives that matter. If success meant the destruction of the people and land, this colonial/modern did not apply to Jamaica. The pressing need, then, is to resignify this category.

In the novel, at this point, Clare has been able to fathom what had been distorted and hidden behind the veil of coloniality and she decides to act upon this knowledge. On her last letter to Clare, Kitty wrote that her elder daughter should make something of herself and help her people. Kitty ended with a reminder: “daughter —never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself. There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it (CLIFF, 1987, p. 103)”. During the conversation with the guerilla, Clare remembers the content of the letter and makes the connection that aiding the revolutionaries and even becoming one of them would be the best (and only) way to live by her mother’s words. Here, personal success is intermingled with communal success.

The work of the revolutionaries based on Clare’s grandmother’s land led them to the film set in which a distorted Hollywoodian version of Nanny’s story was being shot, as analysed before in this chapter. In the very last scene of the novel, right before the guerrilla is ambushed, instructions to the scene about to be enacted was “the monster attacks Nanny, and Cudjoe rescues her” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 207). Michelle Cliff’s writing of this scene is layered. First, there is the patriarchal dynamic of the damsel in distress who needs to be rescued;

second, Nanny and Cudjoe were both Maroon leaders, and there is no account of his having rescued her; third, the monster is characterised as an inhuman beast and the ones attacking Nanny and Cudjoe in real life were the colonisers. On top of that, the director's instructions foreshadow what is about to happen in the novel. Once again, the monster that attacks the ones who resist is not an unearthly creature, but rather the Jamaican army, which has been assigned to guarantee the security of the film production.

Death does not always mean defeat. Once Clare assumes a position as a member of a community in which everyone is vital, to die resisting is to be a winner, especially because she dies by the hands of the State that is acting in order to guarantee the integrity of the colonial power. The protagonist of *No Telephone to Heaven* dies while trying to change the dynamics of the colonial/modern system, which has been killing her brothers and sisters for many centuries. As Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), failure in art can function as a means of resistance, "failure [works] as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent." (HALBERSTAM, 2011, p. 88). The replication of the dichotomies winner x loser, conqueror x conquered, powerful x powerless is destabilized, even if momentarily, by the guerrillas' attempt to put an end to the oppressive forces of coloniality. As Edouard Glissant wrote in *Caribbean Discourses* (1989), a "self-confident people has the ability to transform into a mythical victory what may have been a real defeat [...]. One can go so far as to argue that the defeats of heroes are necessary to the solidarity of communities" (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 68). This is closely connected to what we see in *No Telephone to Heaven*, since the guerilla's wish was not to repeat the model of oppression, but rather to attempt to bring it down and to allow the community to rise.

number of blank spaces. Her departure is followed by a variety of the sounds made by Right before her death, Clare remembers language, a meaningful action according to Françoise Lionnet "because 'language and identity are inseparable', poets have always known that in order to liberate the world one must start by liberating the word" (LIONNET, 1995, p. 30). Clare's recollection of language is followed by a long pause, signaled in the novel by a native birds. Sandra Almeida in *Narrativas da Diaspora: a Nostalgia do Retorno* interprets the significance of the bird chatter as a symbolism of the restauration of the land in its original pre-colonial form. She writes that "[u]pon [Clare's] death, the language acquired in diaspora is lost and turns in to the native language of birds; it is as if, finally, [Clare] had got rid of the colonial and historical language that hinders speech and agency to, then, finally embrace her

homeland” (ALMEIDA, 2009, p. 81)²³. The novel ends with the following words: “day broke” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 208). The announcement of daybreak may be an allusion to new beginnings, pointing to possibilities for both the author and other colonised people(s) to (re)write (hi)stories.

²³ In the original: “Ao morrer, a linguagem antiga adquirida na diáspora se perde e se converte na linguagem nativa dos pássaros, como se, finalmente, ela tivesse se livrado da linguagem colonial e histórica que impede a fala e o agenciamento para, então, finalmente abraçar sua terra natal.”

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

my english is broken.
 on purpose.
 you
 have to try harder to understand
 me.
 breaking this language
 you so love
 is my pleasure.
 in your arrogance
 you presume that i want your
 skinny language.
 that my mouth is building
 a room for
 it
 in the back of my throat.
 it is not.

--i have seven different words for love. you have only one. that makes a lot of sense
*nayyirah waheed*²⁴

The process of producing this dissertation involved diving deep into to the literary works with theories as flippers. It is only now that I come closer to putting an end to this research (for the time being) that I realise how much I have had to learn and unlearn in order to swim with the currents. Undoubtedly, my original questions were fundamental to keep me afloat.

Throughout the analysis, it was evident that the coloniality of power was an operating force in both novels. Nicole Dennis-Benn in *Here Comes the Sun* created a universe in which the advancement of Global Capitalism and neoliberalism affected the lives of the characters and in which nature seemed to be alternatively off balance and resisting this exploitative

²⁴ poem from *salt*. (2013) by nayyirah waheed.

growth. The characters' perspectives of class mobility, life improvement and worthiness were directly tied to the hierarchical dynamics of racial classification, labour control, compulsory heterosexuality and knowledge. Thandi, the protagonist's sister, wants to lighten her skin because she equates being black to being inferior. Her mother, Delores, shares this feeling of inferiority. Charles and Jullete are forced to find ways to support themselves and see no future for them in school because it was out of their reach. Jullete, however, thinks critically about the formal school system, arguing that it made working class people, like herself and Thandi, confused and alien to reality. Alphonso, the white owner of the hotel where Margot, the protagonist, worked at, thought that everything and anyone had a price. Through Margot's trajectory, Nicole Dennis-Benn exposes the Capitalist fallacy of social mobility for what it is: access to better education, work conditions and dignity are continuously denied to black, working class, queer subjects. Often, their bodies become commodities. In Margot's case, first, she resorts to prostitution, not as a choice of career path, but in the hopes that it will give her access to a better quality of life. Then, she is offered "advantages", but these come with a high cost, as she is asked to take part in the oppression of her peers and ends up completely alone.

If in *Here Comes the Sun* most of the choices Margot makes help maintain modern/colonial structures and lead her to a life of material wealth but spiritual and emotional loneliness, in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, the journeys Clare, the protagonist, and Harry/Harry go on are about locating and resisting this system through the decolonisation of their bodies and knowledge. Clare's geographical dislocation around the United States, Jamaica and Europe allows her to perceive how the colonial matrix shifted in order to guarantee power, hegemony and privileges to a specific share of society, namely, the ones who occupy the space of the colonisers. Once Clare becomes aware of how the colonial power works, knowing that it organises knowledge and people hierarchically according to place of origin, gender, class and race, she is ready to return home and help dismantle this system. From teenager to adult, Clare's journeys are about recognition and finding her place. Unlike Clare, Harry/Harriet learns from an early age about the underlying axis of coloniality. Therefore, Clare's friend knows how and is constantly looking for other ways to navigate between worlds, building with the community a life in which they can exist beyond this system.

Additionally, in both novels, the predatory face of tourism is another strong indicator of how colonial structures remain in place. In *Here Comes the Sun*, apart from the building of the resorts and the displacement of the River Bank dwellers, who are left in a precarious

situation, prostitution is also a prominent factor. It stands out how Margot and Jullete are compelled into turning their bodies into commodities in the face of economic strain. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the focus is also on how foreigners, namely British and American people, see Jamaica as a paradise ready to be consumed, available to the highest bidder, ready to be shaped into whatever they desire. The movie plotline also shows how these people feel entitled to appropriate local culture, turning it into a commercial project.

Furthermore, the notion of the colonality of gender, as defined by Lugones (2007, 2010), was central to this analysis. As seen in the previous chapters, the racialized colonial subjects were not considered a part of humanity during a long period of the colonial process. Therefore, the imposition of the binary men vs. women gender categories on racialized subjects came later on. The enforcement of the categories men and women, apart from the already highly problematic hierarchy of white men being superior to white women, did not provide racialized colonised people with “humanity” but rather it intensified the vilification of any behaviour, tradition and aesthetics different from the norm. As previously discussed, in the novels, the imposition of such norm takes place through physical and psychological violence, violation of the body, pressure from the community and, ultimately, through destruction of subjectivity. Another goal of this dissertation was to see beyond the normative parameters of colonality. The investigative intent was to analyse if the most relevant characters in *Here Comes the Sun* and *No Telephone to Heaven* were examples of literary representations that deviated from Caribbean nation-building projects of respectability. That being the case, my additional goal was to outline why that was so.

As shown in chapter two, Margot, as the lesbian and the prostitute, is very different from the archetypical figures of black women usually found in Caribbean literature. During the moments in which Margot lives out her sexuality connected with lesbian affection, rarely seen images of sensuality of the black Caribbean body emerge. The same happens with Verdene Moore, who feels she will finally be able to live life to the fullest after being loved by Margot. Moreover, the revolutionary affection of the lesbian *continuum* is also present in Margot’s early encounters with Verdene, when she was a child and during the braiding of Thandi’s hair. Conversely, Margot also makes use of the logic of the oppressing forces that control her in order to obtain personal gain. Hence, what Nicole Dennis-Benn does is to create a character who blurs the good vs. bad lines, showing how colonality does operate in her life, but it is not all that there is to her. Even though her social class restrains her geographically, Margot manages to inhabit different places and (dis)locates herself.

In turn, Clare's mobility allows her to dislocate not only mentally but also around different countries. The privilege provided by being light-skinned, having a "good" formal education and economic support from her relatives facilitates her circulation. However, at every arrival her position as a privileged subject shifts according to local realities. Occasionally, she does take advantage of said privileges, but in time, she realises some of the consequences of denying her origins, of staying silent in the face of racist and xenophobic remarks. For her, accepting or ignoring those comments was the same as inflicting (symbolic) violence on herself, and, by extent, against her people. Having felt dislocated most of her life, Clare goes back to Jamaica knowing that her place was there helping decolonise the minds and the kind of knowledge being taught to other Jamaicans. Clare has a hard time connecting with people in the United States and England. Through letters and when in Jamaica, she is able to experience the power of erotic decolonial affection in her relationship with Harry/Harriet and that affection is transformative. Hence, one of the conclusions is that lesbian affection as proposed by Adrienne Rich (1980) and the recuperation and representation of the lesbian body as posited by Dionne Brand (1994) are good strategies for creating literature that is aimed at resisting, contesting and offering alternatives to the normative, local and global.

Compulsory heterosexuality does play a big part in the lives of all the main characters. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare is haunted by the notion that motherhood was an essential part of being a woman. Throughout her journeys, until she returns to Jamaica, she feels inadequate, less of a woman, for not being able to mother a child. On the other hand, in *Here Comes the Sun*, Verdene is treated as a witch and is ostracized from the community. She is also compelled to marry a man as a form of cure. Her college lover, Akua, gets violated - body and soul -, in the process of enforcing the norm. Margot also has a hard time living out her truth because of constraints of compulsory heterosexuality. Additionally, as it also has been discussed, the simple fact of having women characters interacting or having sexual pleasure does not equate to a decolonial depiction of lesbian affection.

Another axis of coloniality that was central to this analysis was the category "race" and how the tropes of "whiteness" and "blackness" operated in the novels. As observed, race is contingent to a location's parameters of racialization, social class stratification and one's place of origin. Whiteness is also a space, which must be racialized as well. Whiteness is not only about the "original" white people (Europeans and their descendants who only married other white Europeans); it is also about those who occupy this position in each location such as non-white pupils from Thandi's school and Miss Novia Scott-Henry in *Here Comes the*

Sun and the family that dismisses the servant's comment in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Both novels underscore how racial categories are strongly connected to economic status in Jamaica.

Moreover, both novels display a politics of representation of blackness that does offer racialized subjects who are not stereotypical. In the two literary works, none of the main characters is entirely good or bad. Additionally, racism is not a mediator in all of their social interactions. In fact, both Michelle Cliff and Nicole Dennis-Benn, as expressed in their respective novels and in some of the interviews quoted in this dissertation, had as one of their primary goals creating black characters that did not fit monolithic archetypical black representations.

Having established that decolonisation of knowledge took place in both novels, the next step was to map how this process unraveled in each book, considering both the fictional universes and the narrative strategies used by the authors. In *Here Comes the Sun*, the narrative as a whole challenges widely accepted assumptions of success, failure, meritocracy and social mobility.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's journeys are all processes of the decolonization of knowledge. The school environment is also an important sight of confrontation of knowledges. If, at first, she is treated as a second-class citizen, cognitively inferior to children born in the United States, in the end of the novel Clare goes back to Jamaica as a schoolteacher. The protagonist's resolve is to share with her students knowledge she had been denied. Through her teaching, Clare mixes the formal Eurocentric content with traditions, (hi)stories and practices she had learned from the local people and through archival research.

Growing up in the in the margins, Harry/Harriet learns from an early age that the world they lived in was not meant for them. The character is the embodiment of non-hegemonic tradition, ancestry and care. Simultaneously, in the novel, the aspects of coloniality become more evident when pointed out by Harry/Harriet. Raped and rejected, Harry/Harriet turns abjection into power and utilises their potency to build new realities. However, they are well aware that there is no possibility of "an other" world without the healing of the wounds of coloniality. So, past, present and future combined, Harry/Harriet is the queer character who defies binaries of race, gender, sexuality, class and who does not wish to be contained by any of the categories offered.

One strategy both Michelle Cliff and Nicole Dennis-Benn used was to write some parts of their novels in Jamaican patois. In Cliff's novel, there is a glossary of Jamaican terms and, sometimes, she discloses the meaning of the expressions within the narrative, as it happens in the passage in which Kitty suggests that she and Boy get a divorce and right at the

beginning of the narrative when the meaning of Ruinate is explained. Conversely, Dennis-Benn does not provide any sort of clarification in Standard English. On one hand, Michelle Cliff seems to have wanted to respect the authenticity of Jamaica, making sure that it would be accessible to readers unfamiliarized with Jamaican patois. On the other hand, in *Here Comes the Sun*, Dennis-Benn adds the patois, respecting the local culture, but she does not want to make it easy to be consumed. The message that comes across is that foreign readers will have to make an effort to access the Jamaican universe, instead of having it broken down to facilitate their understanding. It is important to bear in mind that *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Here Comes the Sun* were launched almost thirty years apart. Although they did it in slightly different ways, both authors put the Jamaican patois, chiefly and oral language, down in print to create universes that intermesh genres and traditions.

Furthermore, most of the characters analysed in this dissertation are within the space of queerness. The decolonial aesthetics in both novels denies the logic of linear continuity and (re)production of the Capitalist colonial/modern system. No baby is born. No couple gets married. It is not that queer subjects are innately lonely or cannot have long-lasting relationships; however, the frames that the colonial/modern system imposes hinder their existence. Even Margot's individual economic success albeit significant, resonates as failure. As Halberstam (2011) proposed, the dark presents itself as a potentially fertile creative space for queer representations. The dark can be dangerous, but is also uncharted territory. The dark can be frightening, but is also protection for those who are denied visibility and belonging by the public eye. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, it is in the dark that the guerrillas plan to raid the movie set and there is potential for change there. However, when they see the lights coming from helicopters, they know they have been betrayed.

In *Here Comes the Sun*, darkness sets the tone. Nicole Dennis-Benn uses the dark aesthetics throughout her literary universe. Similarly to Jamaica Kincaid, as outlined by Halberstam, Dennis-Benn creates a story in which all subaltern subjects are either left wanting or they refuse to swim with the tide. Even when not dealing with sexual dissident characters, the aesthetics of darkness is present. When Thandi and Charles go to the hotel under construction, it is the darkness after the sunset that provides them with safety and allows them to live that moment. Margot's cab rides with Maxi are in the middle of the night, and in those moments he is able to contest Margot's certainty regarding formal school education being Thandi's (and her) salvation. It is in the dark that Margot meets Verdene. It is in the dark that their love evolves, that their bodies come to life. However, in the last paragraph of *Here Comes the Sun*, when Margot's reflection in the pool is described as "dark in the face of the

sun” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 349), she has detached herself from all those she love. In this instance, the dark is not contended by the aesthetics of darkness observed in the passages just discussed. It is in fact a powerful sign of her loneliness.

The role of the sun is ambiguous. To Thandi, it is potentially hazardous as it might hurt her skin if she is exposed to it while having the lightening lotion on. However, the harm is not in the sun, but rather in the treatment. The sun also takes a toll on other dwellers of River Bank as, throughout the novel, there is an everlasting draught. Here, there is also a contrast with the famous “Caribbean sun”, perfect for tourists, hard for the local people who, like Delores, have to be in a market all day and carry their heavy products.

Water is also a fundamental factor in both novels. Jamaica is an island; so, obviously, water surrounds the country. And it has been all around long since before the establishment of the colonial/modern system. Water is the representation of the force, nature and origins of the land. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare goes back to Jamaica on a ship, crossing the ocean, as her European and African ancestors once had. Even though the former were willing to cross it, the latter were forcefully brought. Once back home, together with and encouraged by Harriet, Clare takes a walk along the river in her grandmother’s property. The river was shallower and narrower than she remembered (CLIFF, 1987, p. 172), meaning that the ongoing exploitation of the land had visible consequences. Clare’s memories start surfacing; she begins to remember and reconnect. At the same time, water is ruthless. Clare recollects the stories her mother had told her about the river and its surroundings, of slaves who were buried in the bank, of souls who did not rest.

The draught in River Bank in *Here Comes the Sun* can be read as a consequence of the advancement of neoliberal practices which destroy nature and displaces people in order to satisfy multinationals in the name of profit. Nature is off balance. Margot does not know how to swim, a symbol of how distant she is from her roots. Not only that, she asks Verdene to teach her how to swim. The significance here is that their relationship has the potential to help Margot reconnect with herself.

What is more, the moment when Charles saves Thandi from drowning inside Pregnant Heidi, the ruthless wave that formed near the River Bank shore, is the moment when the girl starts to see things with different eyes. In school, Thandi has been taught to reject her origins; however, it almost costs her life. Pregnant Heidi also brings financial loss to the hotel Margot manages, as tourists disregard its power. The myth surrounding the genesis of the wave, of the slave who refuses to give birth to her master’s child is a queer representation of the negation of productivity and of prolonging the colonial order.

Nevertheless, water does not only appear as a resisting force. The last scene of *Here Comes the Sun* takes place in Margot's luxurious house. Once that heavy rain that comes after months of drought stops, Margot walks to the other side of her *villa*. She spots her fountain with piped ocean water. She remembers having asked the man responsible for installing it if she would have to pay for it, to which he replied that she would have water as long as the ocean lasted. Then, Margot sees her reflection on the pool, and, as abovementioned, this is how the novel ends. The protagonist is surrounded by tamed water; she is far from (her) nature, albeit not completely.

The loneliness Margot feels at the closing of the narrative is comparable with the gloominess Clare felt when she was in Europe. The lack of real human connections and of bonds with their land and origins results in an emptiness that cannot be filled by common Capitalist markers of success and happiness such as money, high-rank jobs, elite education, or property. Whereas Margot sacrifices every emotional connection, she has to achieve material gain and to have more power over others; Clare gives up her privileged position as a graduate student in Europe who was supported by her family in order to be able to go back to her grandmotherland to be closer to her roots and her people. Hence, while Margot's success comes across as failure, Clare's failure is actually an example of queer success.

After having compared both novels from a decolonial perspective, the future of this research is in expanding the number of literary works in order to map if these parameters I have outlined are present in the production of other Jamaican queer authors. Furthermore, bearing in mind one of my initial goals of bridging gaps and learning from one another, I hope to expand this investigation to see how other queer Latin American authors have been "creating dangerously" in order to produce fictional universes and characters who defy normative binaries and produce decolonial aesthetics apart and beyond the colonial matrix.

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