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Teresa Barreto Domingues

Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No telephone to heaven*: a call for resistance

Rio de Janeiro

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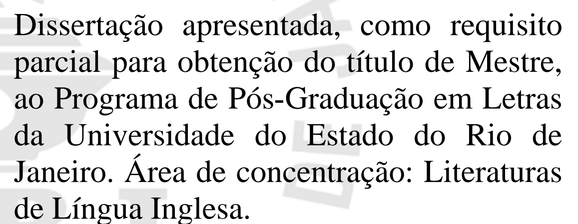

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What life has taught me
I would like to share with
Those who want to learn...

Until the philosophy which hold one race
Superior and another inferior
Is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned
Everywhere is war, me say war

That until there are no longer first class
And second class citizens of any nation
Until the colour of a man's skin
Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes
Me say war

That until the basic human rights are equally
Guaranteed to all, without regard to race
Dis a war

That until that day
The dream of lasting peace, world citizenship
Rule of international morality
Will remain in but a fleeting illusion
To be pursued, but never attained
Now everywhere is war, war

And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes
that hold our brothers in Angola, in Mozambique,
South Africa sub-human bondage
Have been toppled, utterly destroyed
Well, everywhere is war, me say war

War in the east, war in the west
War up north, war down south
War, war, rumours of war

And until that day, the African continent
Will not know peace, we Africans will fight
We find it necessary and we know we shall win
As we are confident in the victory

Of good over evil, good over evil, good over evil
[1]

[1] Lyrics from the song "*War*", adapted from an excerpt of Ethiopian Emperor H.I.M. Haile Selassie's address to the United Nations on October 1963 by *Bob Marley*.

RESUMO

DOMINGUES, Teresa Barreto. *Michelle Cliff's Abeng and No telephone to heaven:* a call to resistance. 2012. 123f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

Escritores/as pós-coloniais têm se engajado em denunciar o doloroso legado da escravidão e do colonialismo, através da recuperação de histórias previamente apropriadas e distorcidas por narrativas mestras. A investigação e a narrativização do passado esquecido de ex-colônias têm sido uma estratégia empregada no sentido de se reconstruir identidades que foram fragmentadas devido às múltiplas opressões sofridas ou testemunhadas por autores. Michelle Cliff é uma romancista, poeta, e ensaísta diaspórica, nascida na Jamaica e que vive nos Estados Unidos. Ela é uma das muitas vozes pós-coloniais comprometidas com uma literatura de resistência que luta pela descolonização cultural e encoraja o sentimento de pertencimento. O objetivo dessa dissertação é analisar os romances de cunho autobiográfico de Cliff, *Abeng* (1984) e *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), que lidam com questões relacionadas às práticas coloniais e pós-coloniais. Os dois romances retratam a saga da protagonista Clare Savage, através da qual Cliff revela o impacto da colonização no Caribe, denuncia as configurações de poder geradas a partir dos imbricamentos entre raça, gênero e classe, e critica a maneira deturpada como a história da Jamaica é transmitida e disseminada através da educação colonial à qual os Jamaicanos são submetidos. A autora também explora os efeitos que as diásporas exercem no processo de construção identitária e o movimento de resgate e recriação de uma história própria por parte dos sujeitos diaspóricos.

Palavras-chave: Literatura caribenha pós-colonial. Descolonização. Diáspora. Raça. Gênero. Classe.

ABSTRACT

Postcolonial writers have been engaged in exposing the painful legacies of slavery and colonialism, through the reclaiming of histories that have been appropriated and distorted by master narratives. The investigation and retelling of the lost past of former colonies has been a strategy used to reconstruct identities fragmented as a result of the multiple oppressions that authors have suffered or witnessed. Michelle Cliff is a diasporic Jamaican-born novelist, poet, and essayist who lives in the United States. She is one of the many postcolonial voices committed to a literature of resistance that struggles for cultural decolonization and encourages the feeling of belonging. The aim of this dissertation is to analyze Cliff's semi-autobiographical novels, *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) that deal with matters related to colonial and post-colonial practices. The two novels portray the saga of the protagonist Clare Savage, through which Cliff reveals the impact of colonization on the Caribbean, exposes the configurations of power deriving from the intertwining of race, class, and gender, and criticizes the misrepresentation of Jamaica's history, which is disseminated through the colonial education Jamaicans have been subjected to. The author also explores the effects diasporas have on the process of identity construction and the movement from diasporic subjects to rescue and recreate a history of their own.

Keywords: Postcolonial Caribbean literature. Decolonization. Diaspora. Race. Gender. Class

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in postcolonial studies had an interesting start. It arose from the close contact I had with the subjects who are represented and discussed in many novels and essays about diaspora long before I had read any text about it. In a work exchange program I did in 2007 where everything that could have gone wrong literally did go wrong, the experience that was supposed to be exclusively work-related gained a whole new dimension. The difficulties I went through being treated as a second class citizen in Chicago allowed me to step outside of my *self* while I learned how to face the ones who are usually referred to as the "others" as an indissoluble part of my reality.

The word "other" echoes in my memory and makes me remember the many Mexicans I worked with, who labored all day, day in and day out, trapped in the boiling kitchens of fancy restaurants in Chicago, cleaning up the leftovers of the people they served, who in turn treated them as the leftovers of a society that sees them as disposable servants. I also remember the immigrants from India with their traditional outfits working in the most exclusive Indian restaurant in town being put on display behind tables through a glass so that the customers could see how the typical *nan* was made, an "entertainment" that caused painful burns and left terrible blisters on their hands. On the other hand, I also had the chance to witness solidarity and bonding whenever there was a party filled with the sounds and smells from a home that became so vivid and that seemed not so far away, after all. I realized how that cold of the windy city could be melted by the sharing of a common language and culture that the immigrants refused to suppress.

It was during that trip that for the first time in my life I felt the violence erupting from the relationship between gender and power, when my Indian boss told me to clean the floor of his restaurant and fired me after I refused to do it and confronted him. The words "you do not talk to me like that, you are a woman!" will never be erased from my mind.

While in Chicago, it was inevitable for me to begin an informal investigation about those immigrants: who they were, where they came from, and what impelled them to leave their country of origin, and in many cases their families, behind. From my acquaintances and impressions about their experiences, I realized how diverse and multifaceted each diaspora was lived. I could perceive something that they all had in common while I listened to the personal stories that differed and converged simultaneously – a certain melancholy whenever they talked about home. That nostalgia, always expressed by a long deep sigh, was invariably

replaced by an assuring and conclusive statement that they were better off in a country where they could have jobs that paid them enough to survive, that provided them with the material comfort that their country could not afford them, and that even enabled them to send money to their families in their native countries. This financial stability versus the emotional instability intrinsic to life in exile is one of the many negotiations at play in diaspora that Michelle Cliff deals with in *No Telephone to Heaven,* one of the novels I chose to work with in my dissertation.

The experience I had in the United States, losing the privileges I had in Brazil, made me see how the power relations epitomized by Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" are reenacted every day in all spheres of society. Oppression and tyranny, be it between employers and low-paid immigrants, husbands and wives, whites and blacks, teachers and students still prevail no matter how many writers and scholars expose it and problematize it.

Although that trip was no walk in the park, it enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the issues that Michelle Cliff deals with in her two novels. Furthermore, it allowed me to relate to many of the characters created by the author, since they have to cope with feelings of displacement, isolation, and dislocation that are not alien to me.

My engagement in diaspora studies, therefore, came from a lived experience that found resonance in a vast range of authors and scholars dedicated to studying and creating works that have been dealing with the social, economic and psychological effects of different diasporas, demystifying the Western representation of colonial and postcolonial subjects, and rewriting a history that was articulated in order to dominate and oppress minorities and colonized peoples.

Michelle Cliff is a Jamaican-born novelist, poet, and essayist, who was educated in Jamaica, the United States and England. When she was born, in 1946, her homeland was still a British colony.

For the past forty years she has been engaged in creating a resistance literature whose main purpose is to denounce the effects of the colonial past of slavery in Jamaica, which was erroneously recorded. In her novels she also problematizes the dangers of the Britified education that Jamaicans like herself received. That education was responsible for the internalization of colonial ideals of race superiority that are still present in Jamaica. Cliff states that:

> Part of my purpose as a writer of Afro-Caribbean – Indian, African, European – experience and heritage and Western experience and education has been to reject speechlessness, a process which has taken years, and to invent my own peculiar speech, with which to describe my own peculiar self, to draw together everything I am and have been (SCHWARTZ, 1993: 595).

Cliff had to learn how to live a life in-between cultures, and when the author talks about what it feels like to be influenced by cultures that are so diverse, we see how she has mixed feelings towards Jamaica, but does not claim to be American, either:

> I feel that I had much more freedom in Jamaica than here – and I felt that when I was in my grandmother's place in Claredon and we had no running water, no electricity, but there was this extraordinary landscape and these long days to wander in it[…] but I hate the classicism that I grew up with. I hate the system of oppressing other people of color[…]Well, it's my nationality, and my family roots go back to slaves and slave owners. I also feel very much American. I feel this is my adopted country, and I care a lot about what happens in here (ADISA, 1994: 275).

The author describes the suffocating codes of behavior present in Jamaica and affirms that for a homosexual, like herself, the United States offers a degree of liberty that she cannot find in Jamaica. By the time the author gave an interview to critic Meryl Schwartz in 1993, the last time she had visited Jamaica had been in 1975, alleging that because of her sexual preference she did not feel that she had a place there.

It wasn't until Cliff was in her late thirties that she began to write. She was inspired to write in response to an article she had read where Jamaica was being misrepresented and she felt that she had something to say about her homeland.

Cliff's first book was *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1981) which is a fragmented text written "halfway between poetry and prose" as she puts it. The identity the author refers to is her black identity that she was trained to reject in her childhood. When critic Judith Raiskin asks her to talk about the writing process of this particular work, the author explains:

> *Claiming an Identity* was important to me to write. It was really a start and it reflects the conditions in which it was written. I was writing it while I had a nine-to-five job, and so it's written in a very jerky form, with a lot of stopping and starting. But I was also trying to reconstruct my life and my experiences with things like racism. It's jerky, almost like snapshots. And as I became more able to reconstruct my childhood and this milieu in which I grew up and was educated, I was able to write something more sustained, which is when I started to write novels (RAISKIN, 1993:71).

Cliff's following book was a collection of poems and essays entitled *The Land of Look Behind* (1985), and the novels *Abeng* (1984), and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), the latest is

set in the late 1970s, when Jamaica was going through a lot of political, social, and violent upheaval (ADISA, 1994, p. 276). More recently the author has published a collection of short fiction, *Bodies of Water* (1990), and her latest novel *Free Enterprise* (1993) about the women who devoted their lives to fight against the slave trade. *Free Enterprise* was inspired by Mary Ellen Pleasant, the African American woman who funded and helped plan the enterprise that came to be known as John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, in Virginia, in 1859. Cliff's most recent collection is called *The Store of a Million Items: Stories* (1998).

In all her novels the author rewrites official history through the rescue of old myths, narratives, or "hidden" documents, where the real history lies, in order to empower the ones who feel overwhelmed by the silence imposed by colonial discourse. Cliff describes that process of amending a lost history in these terms:

> To write as a complete Caribbean woman [....] demands of us retracing the African part of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification [....] It means finding the art forms of our ancestors and speaking in the patois forbidden us (EDMONDSON, 1993, p. 187).

Because Cliff is the daughter of Jamaican landowners and due to her light skin color and social status she has always been aware of the privileges that such traces award to people like her in countries where relationships are dictated by color and class. The issue of color is all-pervasive in her novels, since the pressure to pass as white and how much it could be gained from it is a present matter in her childhood. When she is asked by critics Tacie Dejanikus and Loie Hayes whether she perceived herself as black or white, the author comments:

> It's very complicated. In Jamaica we were whoever we were […] I was whoever my parents told me I was […] Very little is said directly. It's done through intimation or encoded messages. I wasn't told (about being of color) officially until I was 22, but I knew. I repressed the knowledge before then. It's very hard to explain, but in Jamaica it was alright (DEJANIKUS & HAYES, 1981, p. 18).

Today, Cliff resides in the United States and has held academic positions at several colleges including Trinity College and Emory University. She was also a contributor to the Black feminist anthology *Home Girls*. When she talks about the possibility of returning to Jamaica she declares that:

> If I went back seriously, the only proper position for me to take would be as somebody who would be dedicated to extreme political change. And I don't see that degree of change as a possibility in Jamaica […] I don't see myself as a landowner in Jamaica – my family were and are landowners – I gave that up a very long time ago (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 600).

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine Michelle Cliff's two novels *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), the latter being the sequel to the first. In these two narratives Cliff explores the colonial and contemporary history of Jamaica through the multiple experiences of Clare Savage, a protagonist that reveals the difficult process of growing up as a privileged light skinned girl and maturing in an impoverished country, where most inhabitants are black and still suffer from the consequences of a history tainted by slavery. Throughout the novels we see Clare Savage changing from a passive observer of injustices, in *Abeng*, into an active, politically conscious guerrilla member committed to anticolonialist politics in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

Abeng revolves around Clare's life in Jamaica before her father decides that the family should go to the United States in search of better life prospects, when Clare is fourteen years old. Clare, just a child then, is bewildered by the economic discrepancy between black people and white people in Jamaica, by the biased history of her country that she learns from her British teachers at school, and by the pressure she suffers from her father and from society in general to keep whitening the skin color of her family. At a very early stage of her life, Clare starts awakening to the social and economic asymmetries present in her country and the conflicts it generates. She becomes aware of the consequences of her actions whenever they clash with a pervasive code of behavior based on racist beliefs that are not supposed to be disturbed. Clare begins to question the reasons behind the social antagonisms and historical contradictions she witnesses in her country.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, we see Clare as a displaced teenager and adult when she moves to the United States with her family, goes to England to study when she grows older, and then moves back to Jamaica in search of her roots and true identity, around her thirties. While Clare's family is in the United States, we see the different strategies they have to develop in order to survive in a country where they lose the privilege their light skin or class granted them in Jamaica. Cliff shows us the personal battle of Clare and her mother to resist the process of identity fragmentation characteristic of diasporas. Clare's mother, Kitty, for instance, reacts against the invisibility she is subjected to in the United States when she starts writing notes to the customers of the laundromat she works at, denouncing American's racist mentality. As for Clare, she rejects the possibility of erasing her origins and being assimilated and gradually commits herself politically in order to decolonize not only her mentality but also the minds of Jamaicans.

It is in *No Telephone to Heaven* that Cliff deconstructs the discourse that claims that diversity is integrated and assimilated in countries such as the United States and England, showing that what we see in reality is a tendency to homogenize difference and ghettoize the immigrants who embody the cultural differences that are often felt as intimidating. We realize that immigrants are integrated as long as they do not threaten to take away the jobs of the ones who are part of the mainstream society. Immigrants are labeled as minorities, their differences are stereotyped and a growing sense of inferiority takes place as a result of the discrimination they suffer. That rejection of a diversity that is always seen as alien might lead to a rejection from the immigrants of their own culture and an alienation from their own roots. In many cases, on the contrary, it might trigger a desperate attempt to rescue and transmit the references that are part of their identity in order to keep their culture alive. This movement to ghettoize immigrants and treat them as a subclass is problematized in *No Telephone to Heaven.* Cliff shows us how this marginalization characteristic of life in exile may awaken in the immigrants a need to redefine themselves and reinforce their difference through the maintenance of a collective memory that cannot be forgotten.

Michelle Cliff's narrative is not linear. In *Abeng* her narrator tells us about the trials of the slaves who fought to survive in a system whose greed for profit devastated uncountable lives at a time when Jamaica was a subjugated colony at the mercy of the British empire. She also presents contemporary characters and issues which, likewise, denounce the consequences of that system today. *Abeng*'s narrative reflects the fragmented history of Jamaica, full of gaps and secrets. As critic Wendy Walters points out, "it presents the reader with filaments and segments that do not weave themselves together to resemble a whole or unfractured self or narrative" (WALTERS, 2005, p. 30).

In *No Telephone to Heaven* where Cliff deals with diaspora and constructs a narrative of belonging and identity fragmentation, the narrative does not develop linearly either, and her characters' actions do not follow a chronological order. The stories about the murder of an upper class Jamaican family and of Clare's political engagement are narrated in flashback, for instance.

Most of Cliff's characters were constructed as survivors of social cataclysms represented by slavery and neocolonialism. Through their suffering, Cliff criticizes the dangers behind social disengagement, but she also points to solutions suggesting that it is possible for Caribbean people to reconnect with their African selves and rescue the history of resistance that is hidden from them as a means to reclaim and assert their cultural identity.

That way, Cliff offers hope to those who identify with characters who have to bear the curse of slavery, or the survivors of the everyday jungle that Jamaica has become. Such survivors are represented in *No Telephone to Heaven* by the poor community that lives in the Dungle, a word that not coincidentally resembles dung/ excrement, and is the name of the shantytown where people and garbage are part of the same amorphous mass.

Cliff's narrator is the spokesperson of the commitment to reconstruct history and Jamaica's identity. The narrator is intent on unfolding the secrets of slavery through Clare's questionings of the social problems that are so evident in her country of origin – addressed in both novels. Clare's engagement to reclaim Jamaica's lost heritage and change society becomes evident in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Thus, readers learn about Jamaica's untold history of exploitation and neo-colonial control and become aware of issues that are problematized throughout the two novels. In *Abeng*, the most significant topics that Cliff deals with are: the social and racial inequalities created by colonialism, the repressed history of resistance of the slaves, and the perpetuation of a neo-colonial discourse that is transmitted by the ones in power and reproduced by society. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff deals with topics related to diaspora, such as: the challenge of adaptation of immigrants into a new country, the difficulty in dealing with identities that become split, and the protagonist's political awakening.

I chose to write my dissertation contemplating the topics mentioned above and approaching the two novels as postmodern autobiographical *Bildungsroman* since they reflect the author's own life experience and also due to Michelle Cliff's choice to focus her narrative on the moral and psychological development of Clare Savage. When Clare moves away from Jamaica and eventually returns as a mature woman in an attempt to first explore and learn about her country of origin, and then apply her knowledge to instruct her people and be useful to society, she is reenacting a journey that is very representative of the author's own journey and of the classic *bildungsroman,* but Cliff's use of these two genres is nothing but conventional.

I have tried to organize my dissertation organically, following the order of the subjects as they appear first in *Abeng*, then in *No Telephone to Heaven*, therefore, the result was the following:

The first chapter "Autobiographical Narratives and *Bildungsroman*" was divided into two sections. In the section entitled "Michelle Cliff and Autobiographical Narratives" I investigate how autobiographical narratives have been used by postcolonial writers such as

Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, and Edwidge Danticat, among others, in order to offer an authentic reading of colonial histories that are filtered through the author's own experiences. In this chapter I also point out how the literary genre autobiography in its strict sense cannot be applied to Cliff's novels, since the author asserts that her work has autobiographical references, but could never be labeled as autobiographical *per se*. In her novels, Cliff blends fiction and personal history in a relationship that is dictated by a constant negotiation between the personal and subjective experiences that she feels impelled to narrate. Through this autobiographical exercise, Cliff is able to rework and reinvent her own past in fiction, which can be a liberating strategy to deal with traumas, fears and hopes. When she resorts to her own memories to write about a personal history that is also collective, she offers us a counter-narrative that expresses the views of many voices that were silenced by hegemonic master narratives. The main critics I have used were Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who wrote about Cliff's choice to write autobiographically, Françoise Lionnet, who wrote extensively about Cliff's novels, critics Judith Raiskin, Meryl F. Schwartz, and Opal Palmer Adisa and their insightful interviews with Michelle Cliff, among other critics.

The section "Clare and the New *Bildungsroman*" deals with the protagonist Clare Savage as a contemporary heroine since her trajectory presents similarities to that of heroes portrayed in the traditional *bildungsroman*. In order to offer a better understanding of that approximation, I give an overview of the genre pointing to some of the changes it has suffered throughout history until it was finally appropriated and subverted by postcolonial writers. This subversion was a necessary requisite without which the genre would not have been able to handle a postcolonial reality that presents new challenges, and demands new heroes and heroines. In that sense, when Clare returns to Jamaica and joins a guerrilla, she deviates from the naïve view of accommodation into society prescribed by the genre. The novel offers an open end that is much more in accordance with the fluidity and precariousness of our contemporary world. The work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson was again crucial for the development of this chapter, along with the studies of Marianne Hirsh, and Giovanna Summerfield and Lisa Downward, who have developed comprehensive studies about the history of the *Bildungsroman.*

A chapter about history could not be omitted from this work, since one of the main issues in Cliff's novels is the urgency to re-appropriate and re-write the history of Jamaica, a history that was passed on and imposed by the colonizers who exploited Jamaica and its people. Before I dealt with the issue of the reconstruction of history, I included information

about Jamaica and its development, providing a brief chronological outline of the official history of the country. In order to restore the faith and pride of the Jamaicans in their own history and in themselves, Cliff rescues the inspiring saga of resistance of the Maroons, the name given to fugitive slaves. In that chapter I also give a brief view of how scholars have been dealing with the complex relationship between history and literature emphasizing that today such distinction is being blurred by postcolonial writers who use and abuse the official history in order to bring to light the oppression suffered in colonies and reinforce the potential for resistance of the colonized who fought for their freedom. Critic Françoise Lionnet, states that:

> Contemporary Caribean writers address and reject the Hegelian view of history as a single hierarchical and linear process that would run its unique – European – course, bypassing the Caribean as it did Africa. But this intolerable absence in the realm of self-conscious representations can in fact allow the postcolonial writer to invent and re-create a sense of continuity and community rooted in this absent temporal landscape (LIONNET, 1992, p. 336).

In this section, I chose to adopt the work of critics who analyze the split between history and literature, such as Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon. In order to write about the history of Jamaica, I selected Homi Bhabha, who shows the strategies the slaves used to resist domination, Stuart Hall and Catherine Hall, who underscore the importance of examining history, Myriam Chancy, who analyze Cliff's novels, Paul Gilroy, and Jan Rogozínski, who published a book about the history of the Caribbean, among others others.

The following chapter entitled "Diasporic Fragmentations" is related to the journey of the Savages in *No Telephone to Heaven*. It deals mostly with the immigrant's life, erratic by nature and marked by an endless process of becoming, and their longing for a home whose definition is a charade. This condition of in-betweeness is characterized by a constant anxiety that comes from the endless attempts to articulate an identity in-between cultures, languages, and races. The experiences that the Savages go through prove that life in diaspora demands the development of survival techniques that help them resist being erased by a mainstream society that faces difference as a threat to an ideal social hegemony. Cliff shows us how that rejection and discrimination might trigger in immigrants the sense that their existence depends on someone else's legitimation, a particularly frustrating feeling. On the other hand, she tells the stories of personal revolutions against the process of silencing that immigrants undergo. Here the work of critics Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, who study migrations, was

extremely helpful. I also used Stuart Hall's various texts on Diaspora, Avtar Brah, James Clifford, and Carole Boyce Davies, among others.

In *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven,* there are many characters who teach Clare and the readers about the impact that racism has on their lives, so I wrote a chapter entitled "The Stigma of Race and Color" that has a section that deals with the significance of the friendship that Clare develops with a friend called Zoe in *Abeng*. Zoe is a girl whose skin color and social condition place her below the protagonist in the racist and classicist context of Jamaica. Despite their differences, they are able to bond and Clare learns from that relationship the lessons about inequality, misery and compassion that are not taught at the school she attends. Zoe becomes a crucial piece for Clare's psychological growth. The other section is dedicated to Christopher and his saga of misery and violence in *No Telephone to Heaven.* In this section I show how Christopher gradually becomes a murderer due to his inability to cope with the series of traumas he undergoes. I chose to write about these two characters due to their symbolic weight since their personal stories denounce the postcolonial practices that still massacre the population of Jamaica and the ones who were victimized by colonial mentality. In order to discuss topics related to race and ethnicity and the construction of the "other," I chose to use the work of Toni Morrison, Myriam Chancy, Frantz Fanon, Bill Ashcroft, and others.

Besides being able to approach Cliff's novels on a personal level, I could recognize in Brazil a lot of collective issues and practices that Cliff problematizes. When Cliff reveals how the history of slavery in Jamaica left an inheritance of racial discrimination and economic and social inequalities, I realize the many similarities between that history and our own, which was a real eye-opener for me. As I read *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, but specially *Abeng* which shows in detail the practices and traumas of slavery, Brazilian soap operas such as "Sinhá Moça" (1986), or "Escrava Isaura" (2004), that stereotyped the slaves as helpless before the cruelty of their white masters, come to my mind. I remember the plots of such soap operas that reinforced the idea that the slaves did not have an active role in the abolition of slavery, which was often portrayed as a generous act of compassion from a benevolent white princess (Princess Isabel). This misconception that slaves offered little resistance to being enslaved was also supported by many history books that I used during my school years. We cannot deny that those soap operas had a crucial role in acknowledging slavery as an important component of our national identity, but they failed to raise awareness about how racism is connected to that past since they naturalized the power relations between masters

and slaves and showed the reality of the slaves mostly from the point of view of the slave owners.

Although revisiting that history is a controversial issue, since many people in the black community believe that it only brings pain and humiliation, besides not helping young black people in the process of building their self-esteem, I do believe that traumas need to be told and reworked, and the history about slavery is essentially traumatic. As critic Leigh Gilmore states in her book about trauma and testimony: “trauma, it is claimed, does not exist until it can be articulated and heard by a sympathetic listener” (GILMORE, 2001, p. 6).

1 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES AND BILDUNGSROMAN

1.1 Michelle Cliff and Autobiographical Narratives

Many critics deal with Michelle Cliff's novels as autobiographical narratives since they contain traces of the author's own experiences reflected on her protagonist Clare.

Although Cliff does not appreciate it when her fiction is read simply as autobiography, arguing that this kind of classification "dilutes and undermines the politics of the narrative, reducing the collective to the individual" (CLIFF, 2008, p. 58), in interviews given by the author she reveals how much she drew from her own life to create her characters and the experiences they go through. She also underscores that the main theme that permeates her two novels about a protagonist who cannot come into herself until she knows her history, was born out of her personal quest (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 606).

When critic Opal Palmer Adisa asks Cliff if *Abeng* chronicles her own life, the answer to the question is the following:

> It's not autobiographical *per se*, but I wanted to show somebody like me growing up partly in Jamaica (except I wanted Clare to have her own life there) – how much of the past was kept from me, from such a character, how much she did not know[…] this was my attempt to reconstruct my own history[…]what had been deconstructed (ADISA, 1994, p. 276).

What Cliff does, in a strategy characteristic of the historiographic metafiction, is to install and subvert the genre autobiography, since she "disrupts the autobiographical imperative at the same time that she affirms autobiographical memory as the grounds for a critique of experience" (SMITH & WATSON, 2001, p. 59). Furthermore, the experiences Cliff resorts to do not belong to her, alone. She rescues narrated memories, changing this remembering into a collective and political action, instead of a narcissistic contemplation of the individual. According to critic Belinda Edmondson: "She attempts to construct narratives that map the history of black, white, and mulatto Jamaica, mixing genres of narrative - historical, autobiographical, myth – to achieve a dialectical representation of the West Indian experience" (EDMONDSON, 1993, p. 182).

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write about the choice Cliff makes not to write autobiography, avoiding the "I", but to write autobiographically:

> Cliff herself has noted the autobiographical content of her first two novels. But what does it mean for Cliff to write autobiographically? In resisting the autobiographical "I" Cliff resists

> one of the most consequential trace marks of Europeanization on the colonial subject (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 57).

Postcolonial critics have been debating about to what extent books by the so-called postcolonial writers can be considered autobiographical narratives. Smith and Watson point out that *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* exemplify a trend of female postcolonial writers who write coming-of-age novels using first-or-third-person narratives “to both displace and engage personal experience.” Critic Françoise Lionnet, among others, has also read the two novels autobiographically acknowledging the “permeable boundary of life writing and the novel” (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 130).

That autobiographical practice that has been adopted by many post-colonial authors, often engaged in denouncing exploitation and misery in their home countries, has its own agenda: unlike the traditional autobiography whose purpose was usually to celebrate the individual and narrate his accomplishments and defeats, they are committed to a higher purpose. In most post-colonial writings:

> The individual necessarily defines him- or herself with regard to a community, or an ethnic group and their autobiographical mythologies of empowerment are usually mediated by a determined effort to revise and rewrite official, recorded history (LIONNET, 1992, p. 321).

We have access to many personal stories told by Cliff in the interview she gave to critic Judith Raiskin in 1993, which are echoed in some episodes in the life of her protagonist Clare. When Cliff is asked about her social class background while growing up, she identifies herself as belonging to the upper middle class. Although Clare’s social status is below that of her author’s, her light skin and her family name place her above her actual class. In addition, Cliff, just like her character Clare, had a strong bonding with her grandmother who lived in the countryside. The author mentions her real grandmother’s house, and how benevolent she was towards poor people:

> She took care of people and she was looked up to in the neighborhood. And coincidentally she had the most land and she had the lightest skin. And that was very stratified. She was (she is, she’s still alive) what one would call a “good woman.” She’s a hundred and two. She always fed anybody who came to her house. She never turned anybody away. And she adopted a lot of children and raised them and educated them and that kind of thing. But there were certain limits. There were certain people who could not come beyond the veranda (RAISKIN, 1993, p. 61).

In *Abeng* when the narrator describes Miss Mattie, we see how the author borrowed from her own grandmother the elements and traits employed in the fashioning of Clare's grandmother.

> Miss Mattie was known all around St. Elizabeth for her goodness. In her life she had taken in the children of other women as her own grew, and Kitty's memories included her mother's adoptions, who came into the house and shared her pallet, and whom she took with her to Mr. Powell's school and looked after them. Miss Mattie shared her home with homeless children and shared her family's food with people who had nothing but the enamel cups and bowls – their "utensils" – they held up at her back window at meals time. She filled their utensils with yam, cassava, ackee – even chicken, if there was any extra (CLIFF, 1995, p. 137).

In *Abeng*, Cliff also pays tribute to her Jamaican friend Zoe, making her and Clare best friends, despite their differences in class and color. Cliff talks about her relationship with Zoe and how painful it is for her to realize that her friend who stayed in Jamaica is doomed to live a life of suffering due to her social immobility: "I will always be marked by the fate of people like Zoe […], who were my friends and whom I loved and whom I saw damaged and deeply hurt" (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 606).

Furthermore, Clare Savage, just like Michelle Cliff, is a light-skinned Jamaican who has to learn how to negotiate among three different locations and their singularities as she becomes the conflation of the three cultures she experiences: the Jamaican, the American and the British. The same way the author identifies herself as Jamaican and demonstrates great knowledge about her country's history and practices, Clare has the need to develop a strong sense of belonging and being rooted in Jamaica. Furthermore, Clare and the author feel connected to the country people, the smells, tastes, and colors of the island. Clare identifies with her mother's benevolence towards the needy country people and, although she is aware that she belongs to a privileged family, she is constantly willing to treat the ones around her on equal terms. Both Cliff's and Clare's childhood memories are woven from the ingredients Jamaica provides. When the narrator insists on instructing the readers about the racial prejudice that is rooted in the island's history of slavery we can assume that behind that urge, there is the need of the author to purge the oppression she felt and witnessed. It is through Clare's rebellious spirit that the author exorcises the colonized education that she received on the island. Cliff talks about how she felt silenced as a child while she passively received the repressive education that taught her the first lessons of her life on racism and discrimination:

> When I was growing up in Jamaica it was still a colony, and the teachers I had at Saint Andrews were, for the most part, white women or light-skinned Jamaican women who

> believed in white supremacy and English supremacy – the Empire. The Jamaicans were somehow to feel ashamed of Jamaica, and the English were horrendously superior. You felt inadequate. You were taught to worship something you could never really be a part of, and you were taught to be grateful to these people. But I always hated this. It was hard not to hate them (ADISA, 1994, p. 277).

In the passage below we can see that the teachers in Jamaica received teaching manuals carefully elaborated by a department of the colonial office in London, a department in charge of organizing the state education of the children in the crown colonies. The content of the literature classes was poems by Tennyson, Keats, and Wordsworth. Clare and so many other children had to memorize the "Daffodils" without feeling any identification with it, since the flower was as foreign as the poem to them. The narrator comments: "Probably there were a million children who could recite 'Daffodils,' and a million who had never actually seen the flower, only the drawing, and so did not know why the poet had been stunned" (CLIFF, 1984, p. 85).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, as Clare moves to the United States, the act of living becomes a daily struggle to survive in a country that is used to discriminating against those who belong to different ethnicities. Clare needs to deal with the typical feeling of dislocation inherent to the immigrant's condition. In the United States and England she goes through a series of losses that will contribute to her growing isolation and fragmentation. When she is a teenager, she loses her mother and sister in the United States when they go back to Jamaica and she is left behind with her father. Clare is also abandoned by her lover in Europe later on in her life, when he has a mental breakdown. All those losses and the discomfort she feels for not belonging in any of those places make her want to stop this cycle of abandonment and loneliness to look for a meaning in her life, which is what leads her back to the beginning, the origin of her journey: Jamaica. That journey can be seen as a reenactment of the author's wanderings and her diasporic existence.

The similarities between Michelle Cliff's journey and Clare's are not coincidental. Although the author does not openly reveal many details of her private experience as a diasporic Jamaican woman, we can assume that she used the cultural and social background that she extracted from her life in Jamaica, the United States and England as source material to elaborate her two novels that take place on the island and in the two countries afore mentioned. Cliff writes with such intimacy not only about the smells, colors, and traditions of the island, but also about the misery of the Jamaican slums and the prejudice of the American and English people, that her accounts reveal her origins and whereabouts. She also shows a deep understanding concerning the mentality of immigrant communities and the social

dynamics related to their relationship with the citizens from the host countries they move to. All these encounters dictated by race, color, economic and gender differences are present in her characters who suffer from the segregation so explicit in the metropolises, as well as on the island Cliff and her character Clare lived in.

Michelle Cliff mentions that when she moved to England to study she was looking for the kind of intellectual validation that she was taught to believe could only be achieved abroad. She was still under the effect of the colonized education she had received in Jamaica, which praised England and worshipped its canonic writers and their erudition. The author declares:

> The subject I chose was the Italian Renaissance and 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 (RAISKIN, 1993, p. 62).

In *No Telephone To Heaven* Clare goes through the same process as her author's, distancing herself from the reality of Jamaica. While Clare is away in England, she decides to study the classics, the Renaissance period. Many years later, when she is inquired by one of the members of the guerrilla she is about to join why she had chosen that course of studies, she says: "Because it did not concern me […] I was looking for something to take me out of myself […] it worked, for a while" (CLIFF, 1996, p.194). Cliff emphasizes that:

> The period that I was writing about in *No Telephone to Heaven* corresponds to the time in my life when I was studying the Italian Renaissance. So that's somewhat autobiographical […] But the novel isn't completely autobiographical because I'm more of a survivor than she is. But I killed her off before I came out! (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 606).

It is interesting to see, though, how Clare is able to move away from this initial alienation that characterizes her studies about the ancient civilizations to a deep engagement in a movement that is actively trying to change the state of things in Jamaica. Cliff, likewise, mentions how her own awareness about the complexities inherent to racial politics took place when she was away and had contact with racial issues outside Jamaica, the same way it happens to Clare:

> It's not until Clare moves to the United States that she begins to really deal with antiblack oppression. I think that's what happened to me. The Birmingham bombing, for example, was a huge event in my life […] and I started to get more and more involved in racial politics here; it was the period of the civil rights movement (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 603).

After her return to Jamaica, Clare assumes the role of a mentor in the school where she teaches. She has a higher purpose which is to use education as a fierce tool to empower her students. She wants to change them into subjects that are able to think and write their own history. While Clare is trying to change the colonial mentality of her students in the fictional realm, her author is, in a parallel movement, trying to educate her readers and hoping to promote changes in society. That correspondence corroborates the suspicion that Clare can, indeed, be seen as the alter ego of the author.

The author admits the importance of her own withdrawal from Jamaica as a crucial episode that functioned as a starting point to her self-investigation and her critical awakening about the social and political practices in Jamaica, identifying in Clare's journey her own experience. She states: "To go abroad and look back. Well, I think that's almost autobiography. Because that was my own experience" (RAISKIN,1993, p.68).

When analyzing Cliff's perception of what it felt like to be a child of her social position in that colonized environment, Myriam Chancy writes about the author's memories and how they were marked by silence and manipulation:

> Safety is promised the colonized child in the form of passing. Cliff writes: "Passing demands quiet. And from that quiet – silence." And: "Passing demands you keep that knowledge to yourself." Refusing to pass demands the rupture of imposed silence and the sharing of knowledge across wide fields of isolation among those who have survived the colonization of the childhoods (CHANCY, 1997, p. 137).

We can realize from the quote above how much the author's own childhood memories influenced her in the construction of Clare's sense of being an outcast and the lessons she learned from that feeling.

It seems that it is through Clare and the elaboration of her emotions in relation to her displacement, that Michelle Cliff negotiates her own relationship to various locations she can chose or reject as home. In "The Postcolonial as Post-Enlightenment: Michelle Cliff and the Genealogies of History" Wendy Walters writes about the process of locating and defining home in writing, which is often present in the works of postcolonial writers, and its contribution to the understanding of the diasporic process:

> My purpose is not to illuminate an imaginary construct, a fixed finality of selfhood that an author may achieve in and through narrative, because few performances end so simply. Rather, I explore the discursive strategies these authors adopt and the literary performances they enact, studying the ways their texts represent a space of negotiation with a place called "home" (WALTERS, 1999, p. ix).

Walters also talks about how the articulation of diaspora identity in writing is more than a literary performance. The lives of those authors are indeliblymarked by a journey, whether it be a voluntary or an involuntary one, that is worked out in their writings and that determines their future associations, preferences, and allegiances in life. Those journeys provide them with the raw material they will resort to in order to construct a writing that can be easily compared to a political act committed to denouncing the exploitation of their country of origin by colonial forces. They are also engaged in exposing the harms caused by the lack of a national identity and the lack of a sense of belonging which is felt by the ones who are still oppressed in many former colonies as well as in the former empires. Writings originated from Diasporic journeys also reveal the discriminatory gaze of the ones who host immigrants and undermine their willingness to feel at home every time they are referred to as 'aliens', or 'immigrants'. Those writers show us how the use of derogatory and essentialist terms erase cultural differences and perpetuate a process that is characterized by an endless deferral of rights, recognition, and acceptance of immigrants.

A common trait in postcolonial authors, as I discuss in the chapter about history, is that most of the time, because they share a common background of colonial exploitation, they are interested in the rewriting of the history of their own country, a history that has been devalued and altered to fit colonial interests. When that is the case, they highlight the struggle of post-colonial subjects, like themselves, to mend ruptured identities, and to chronicle the history of resistance and fight against the oppressor. In the interview given to Judith Raiskin, Michelle Cliff declares: "Most of my work has to do with revising: revising the written record, what passes as the official version of history, and inserting those lives that have been left out" (RAISKIN, 1993, p. 71).

When she writes about *Abeng*, Françoise Lionett comments how Cliff's writing helps her recover her 'self' as she recovers history:

> *Abeng* discloses far more about the author than does the poetry, while engaging the reader in a dialogue that confronts the fictions of self-representation. It would seem that, for Cliff, the third person is a self-protective device that creates sufficient distance, and thus helps her deal with the burden of history (LIONETT, 1992, p. 324).

The author's distrust of official history, which impels her to create a narrator who questions and recreates it, is an issue that she feels dearly. Cliff exposes the inaccuracy of the historical facts that are passed on to the generations of Jamaicans who learn a history that is contaminated by colonial and neocolonial ideologies.

Myriam Chancy, a writer and critic who was born in Haiti and migrated to Canada, studies female Afro Caribbean writers and elaborates her own experiences as she attempts to live a life of in-between (between races, cultures, languages, and nations), "with the knowledge that existing in this way is counter to the norms established for survival in a mainstream society, where power is determined primarily by sex and race" (CHANCY, 1997, p. xi). She emphasizes the importance of Cliff's persistence in rescuing the voices that were erased from official history, acknowledging how much of that 'conquered' history has been lost for good.

Writers who come from former colonies have to face the challenge of overcoming the intellectual colonization they were part of, and, at the same time come to terms with it, learning how to take advantage of the ideologies imposed upon them and critically appropriate, rework and transform them. In that process there is often an attempt to rescue forgotten myths and traditions and articulate histories that were omitted according to the European criteria of selecting and transmitting the historical facts they judged to be relevant.

This process of narrating their colonized histories and what they know best is an intricate one. When Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson talk about autobiographical subjects they mention how the teller of his or her own history becomes, in the act of narration, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation (SMITH & WATSON, 2001, p. 1). The writing of life and its complexity is explained as a truly tricky process that comprehends concepts such as 'memory', 'experience', 'identity', and 'agency', which help us understand the autobiographical process of identity construction (SMITH & WATSON, 2001, p. 22).

According to the critics, when we think of 'memory', we need to keep in mind that the act of remembering is closely connected to a reinterpretation of the past in the present, which creates a meaning of the past in the act of remembering. Since our memories are filtered by our subjectivities, the facts that we narrate are always subject to new perspectives that change over time as we grow older and mature. The critics also remind us that remembering has a politics. Collective memories of a glorious national past, for instance, might be induced or rescued in order for a particular regime to defend their home country or imbue its subjects with national pride in order to create an excluding society where immigrants are not tolerated. These memories can also be used by colonialist countries in order to perpetuate a sense of inferiority in their colonized subjects that will keep the population of their colonies

dependent. In *Abeng*, the narrator denounces how the students are brainwashed at Clare's school when the teachers constantly revive and praise England's splendid and heroic past.

> She knew that there had been Maroons, and that many of them still existed in the towns of the Cockpit Country. But she learned that these towns had been a gift from England in compensation for slavery. Slaves mixed with pirates. Revolution with reward. And a sense of history was lost in romance. This history was slight compared to the history of empire (CLIFF, 1984, p. 30).

In the passage above we can see the manipulation of memories and how this artifice is able to replace true facts with a distorted notion of reality. These learned notions end up being shared by a whole community since they are disseminated by schools, which are institutions that supposedly carry and transmit the wisdom and history of the world and, traditionally, should not be questioned by children.

Smith and Watson also mention that another element of memory is materiality. Writers are always sensitive to the memories evoked by the senses - smell, taste, touch, sight and sound – which awaken particular feelings in the narrator. In *Abeng* the novel opens with a scene that describes the profusion of colors and smells offered by the landscape when we see the dazzling effect that the mangoes have on the Island and its population.

> Green and spotted Black mangoes dotted the ground at bus stops, schoolyards, country stores – these were only to be gathered, not sold. The fruit was all over and each variety was onto itself – with its own taste, its own distinction of shade and highlight, its own occasion and use. In the yards around town and on hills in the country, spots of yellow, pink, red, orange, black and green appeared between the almost blue elongated leaves of the fat and laden trees – and created a confusion underneath (CLIFF, 1996: 3).

We understand how much the senses of the islanders are affected by these elements and their role in the process of remembering home when the characters are away and their memories are activated by those senses.

The realistic account of the misery seen in the shantytowns in Jamaica, the experience of learning a history of resistance that was appropriated and deformed by imperialistic mentality, the segregation suffered by immigrants in host countries, the consciousness of racial and gender discrimination, are all interwoven in the fabric of the author's memory which articulates them in her narration.

Cliff also talks about the intricate and mysterious process of remembering and its relationship with her writing. She mentions how some of her memories were dug out through her writing, when she reveals a traumatic incident of her childhood when her parents went

through her bureau while she was away with her aunt at the country home, found her diary and broke it open. After they read it, they drove to the country house and read the diary out loud in front of Cliff and all her relatives. Cliff calls that the silencing event of her life, since she could not write again until she was thirty something, almost twenty years later. One of the secrets she kept in that diary was the love she felt for another girl from school. The other girl was taken to a boarding school and they were never allowed to see each other again after her parent's intrusion.

> It's all very fragmented in my mind right now, but I'm remembering more and more. I can remember her name, I can remember what she looked like. Just like this relationship between two girls, the murder in *No Telephone to Heaven* actually happened to a family I knew, but I had forgotten it. I had blocked it out of my mind until I wrote the chapter, and then it all came back that this had actually happened (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 604).

Trauma is another ingredient we must take into account when studying life narratives. In her book *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, critic Leigh Gilmore examines the contradiction existent in the relationship between trauma and language. Gilmore asserts that:

> Crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Indeed, the relationship between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as a category. Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails, in the face of trauma[…] (GILMORE, 2001, p. 6).

At the same time that there is an almost impossibility for trauma to be articulated in language, language is considered a resource that should be explored in order to heal traumas. In that process of narrating trauma, what was just negation before starts to exist as it is told and heard. The unconscious language through which trauma is manifested (nightmares, flashbacks, emotional flooding), is replaced, then, by a conscious language in a healing process.

Gilmore also investigates how trauma perpetuates harm done in the past and asks a crucial question for the understanding of "the relation between the wounds, and the extent to the power of trauma […]: where does harm done in past end?" She points out the power of trauma to outlast the duration of its infliction, and gives as an example slavery that no longer exists in the United States, but, nevertheless, the wound it represents has not healed yet (GILMORE, 2001, p. 27).

An interesting case that Gilmore comments is that of writer Rigoberta Menchú, who wrote an autobiography in which she narrates the traumas lived by poor Guatemalans. The author was accused of lying by anthropologist David Stoll who alleged that her book was filled with inaccuracies and misrepresentations. That accusation raised a lot of controversy when her defenders criticized Stoll for discrediting the writer for her effort in raising international awareness of the suffering of the Guatemalan Indians, of whom she is one and she represents. Although Menchú was defending a great cause, she was vulnerable to the charges she suffered.

In her analysis of the case, Gilmore concludes that: "Knowing about violence done to others allows her to imagine herself as the one to whom violence is done, and in which hearing about violence makes her into a witness who then represents herself as having seen the violence" (GILMORE, 2001, p. 4). That event reveals the multiple possibilities inherent to autobiographies and suggests that an experience of trauma that was not lived by its narrator should not be invalidated simply because it is being told as a lived experience. Collective trauma can be represented by someone that did not suffer from it directly, but is able to relate to it.

In that same perspective, we may theorize that Cliff's characters can be seen as the embodiment of the author's own experiences and of collective traumas that the author felt had to be externalized.

For instance, we may speculate that Bobby, Clare's boyfriend in *No Telephone To Heaven,* and his failed attempt to lead a normal life after taking part in a war, is the result of the author's own feeling of aversion to an experience that she did not have herself but she felt strongly about, as we see through her antiwar engagement.

> I really wanted to go to a demonstration in New York after the Birmingham bombings, but my father and mother didn't want me to go. […] but I got much more involved in civil rights activities in college and went to marches on Washington against the war in Vietnam. It had a good effect on me (ADISA, 1994, p. 277).

Cliff might have found in Bobby's inability to heal, a means to talk about a part of her memory that relates to the traumas she heard from accounts about slavery in Jamaica, or war in Vietnam. Trauma, indeed, is closely connected to memory and the need to write about experiences that are private but collective at the same time. Smith and Watson reinforce that need when they write about the healing that writing enables.

> Some narrators engage traumatic remembering around a world-historical event, such as the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, or the New York World Trade Center attacks on 9/11. Other narrations shift attention to effects in everyday life of inequality and suffering. They tell stories of self, family, or community that illuminate the legacies of larger historical formations, such as processes of racialization, which emerged out of and secured specific conditions of oppression, colonialism, and neocolonialism (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 29).

Michelle Cliff tells Judith Raiskin how shocking it was for her to find out the facts about the Holocaust when she read Anne Frank's diary and how it affected her: "I felt with Anne Frank. Then when I started to read about the Holocaust, which I hadn't even known about (I was only about twelve years old when this was going on), I pictured everything I read as happening to her" (RAISKIN, 1993, p. 68).

'Experience' is another concept used in life writing narratives. The experiences mentioned by the narrator in both novels are transformed into counter-narratives that are supposed to denounce processes of racialization and exploitation and be used as a legacy to fight oppression. Because we know that Cliff is from Jamaica, migrated to the US and lived in England, just like her protagonist Clare, we tend to believe in the diasporic experiences of Clare as emanating from the author's own experiences. Just like Clare, Michelle Cliff is also politically engaged in order to expose and change the postcolonial mentality and its practices present not only in Jamaica but also in former metropolises. Nevertheless, readers should not expect one-to-one correspondences between Cliff's experiences and those of Clare, a fictional character.

'Identity', is also an element that critics Smith and Watson mention in the process of life writing. Cliff's troubled identity is problematized in her two novels through the encounters that her protagonist has with Jamaicans who are darker than her and as a result of their skin color, are also less privileged. Clare's identity is also called into question through the contact she has with non-Jamaicans who perceive her family as non-white and relate to them with that assumption. Cliff talks about how displaced her family felt when living in the U.S. and we can realize that race is an all-pervasive issue in their social relations:

> First of all, we never assimilated into America at all. Most of the time my mother was employed by the British government and my father by various businesses, but they only socialized with Jamaicans. And whenever they had to socialize with Americans there was huge tension in the house. They never fit in, and I think one of the reasons they were very uncomfortable was because of racism. Even though both of them are very light-skinned and could pass easily, they were never comfortable with that kind of thing at all, and they always felt that white Americans were very sick (ADISA, 1994, p. 275).

When Clare's family moves to the United States, they experience the other side of the coin when it comes to their social rank based on skin color. There, they become the ones who are discriminated against, since they are darker than most Americans. Those experiences show how fragile, fluid, and inconsistent categories such as race are. Clare and her family are expected to adapt to new social rules and parameters, and to conform to the expectations of the ones around them. This buoyant aspect of diasporic lives, which is constantly reshaping identities, is what makes this very concept subject to contestation. The questioning of fixed identities is actually a trend in postcolonial autobiographical narratives: "Life writers incorporate and reproduce different models of identity in their narrative as ways to represent themselves to the readers (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 39).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Kitty, Clare's mother, refuses to perform the identity assigned to her by a society that believes that as a foreigner, she is fit only for insignificant jobs. The more the people in charge expect her to be servile, the more daring and proud she is. Nonetheless, sometimes she is caught off guard and is unable to react. When Kitty goes to a bank to apply for a position for receptionist, the manager who is interviewing her, upon his realization that she is Jamaican, offers her husband a job in the executive washroom of the bank. She walks away proudly but later on keeps reliving the incident in her head and blaming herself for not saying anything in response to his humiliating offer:

> The whole business might have seemed a small thing. Should she have expected better? And she had kept her dignity. It was he whose stupidity was made plain. Then why did she feel in the wrong? Why had she maintained silence, calling it dignity, through all the other interviews in which her musical voice, her golden skin, had become the center of conversation and the reason for refusal? Coward! (CLIFF, 1996, p. 77).

Kitty's refusal to submit to a forced identification is a statement she makes to preserve the identity she does not want to kill, the one that will give her strength to endure the difficulties and trials that the immigrant life she is trapped to will present. Her choice proves how identities are constantly being negotiated, being adopted or rejected by subjects according to their necessities. There are always several models of multiple identities available. In adopting one or the other we are constructing our subjectivities. Kitty, then, resists the identity of the dislocated and outsider immigrant and reclaims her Jamaican identity, going back to the island and becoming a self-defining individual. The same process happens to Clare who also dismisses the coercive pressure she suffers to declare her identity as black or white, Jamaican or non-Jamaican, and also ends up going to Jamaica after realizing that in the process of identification she had to play an active role, not a passive one.

Clare's marginal status both in the United States as well as in England, causes an overwhelming discomfort on her, which impels Clare to have a critical awareness about the places she lives in and the eagerness people have to define her as inferior, exilic, and alien.

Another important concept discussed by the critics that is relevant for the analysis of Cliff's novels is 'agency.' The work of Louis Althusser has been used by theorists of agency to investigate the contradictions of the Enlightenment notion of human agency. Althuser talks about the subject as being dominated by ideology. In the eighteenth century ideology was used in order to maintain a small number of Priests or despots that claimed to be obeying God while they manipulated reality, exploited the people, and enslaved their minds. These complex relationships raise questions and tentative answers such as: "why do men need this imaginary transposition of their real conditions of existence? In order to "represent to themselves" their real condition of existence? Another thesis to explain that need is offered by Feuerbach when he says that "men make themselves an alienated (= imaginary) representation of their conditions of existence because these conditions of existence are themselves alienating" (ALTHUSER, 1998, p. 294). All men are subject to and dominated by the ideological State apparatuses and their practices, each of them representing the realization of an ideology (religious, ethical, legal, political, aesthetically, etc…), so in that sense, individuals are changed into subjects who are subjected to institutional discourses and practices, therefore the notions of "agency" and "free will" are nothing more than ideologies created in order to keep subjects under control. What we believe to be natural, then, would be in fact an effect of ideology.

To recognize how unknowingly compromised to different ideologies an author is when she claims to be exercising her agency writing an autobiography is an interesting realization since readers, who are also involved in the construction of meanings when they are engaged in a certain reading, must question their role as subjects and how that practice "hails" them, using Althusser's own term, transforming them into receivers of ideologies. In the passage below we have an explanation of that process offered by its theorist:

> […] it is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects (a tautological proposition), i.e. that the author and the reader of these lines both live "spontaneously" or "naturally" in ideology in the sense in which I have said that "man is an ideological animal by nature" (ALTHUSSER, 1998, p. 299).

Michelle Cliff is brilliant in using all the elements mentioned: 'memory', 'experience', 'identity', and 'agency', to write in a way that dialogues with autobiographical narratives and

fiction using a strategy that is able to permeate both. Cliff's writing technique reveals the inconsistency of rigid notions related to the definition of genres. Her use of autobiography suggests that it is relevant for readers to open their minds to new modes of writing which are able to deal with new modes of living that no longer fit fixed representations. When Cliff talks about the inadequacy of fixed genres to write about the diversity of diasporic experiences or the traumas of people who have suffered from discrimination or have been colonized, she asserts that:

> The most exciting writing that's going on right now is being done, for the most part, by people of color or Third World peoples, however you want to put it. We're able to be freer, more experimental because we're not faithful to Western forms as much as white, Western writers are. We have different sense of time and space, and we have more access to a dream life […] The idea of literature in most white, Western European circles is as a discipline, and it's something that you're trained for, something that you fit yourself into as an artist […] I think we are much more undisciplined, and therefore we have more access to our imaginations (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 618).

Cliff argues that we must use the tools of the oppressor or the colonizer in order to free ourselves from domination. That project includes the use of languages, styles, knowledge, and histories in order to undermine the language and style of the oppressors (NIXON, 2009, p. 351).

1.2 Clare and the New Bildungsroman

It has become usual for many postcolonial writers to elect as their protagonist a hero or heroine that will go through a journey of discovery responsible for his/her maturation and development. This apprenticeship, in a postcolonial context, has expanded to include social awareness about the exploitation of former colonies. The experiences of their protagonists will denounce, in the case of *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven,* the heroine's lack of identification with the colonial education she received, the political apathy that is all-pervasive in Jamaica, and the post-colonial practices that continue to undermine the development of the island. Writer's refusal to comply with capitalism and its unequal practices encourages the elaboration of a new perspective on life through the reinvention of *bildungsroman*, a genre that was originally used to portray the cultivation and transformation of a male protagonist whose end would invariably be about integration into society. In Cliff's novels, the heroine's apprenticeship is about revealing resistance behind oppression, hope

behind fear, and reaction behind injustice. The common denominator between Cliff's novels and *bildungsroman* is the symbolic figure of the hero, who is a heroine in her novels, whose journey becomes a message of learning and hope that has the potential to reverberate in a postcolonial reality that still oppresses.

The similarities and intersections between autobiography and *bildungsroman* have been studied by critics such as Linda H. Peterson. In the book *Autobiography Harriet Martineau*, Peterson, its editor, comments on the genre showing us that autobiographies are not fixed and may acquire different forms. It is an inclusive genre and it can easily embrace the popular *bildungsroman*:

> Autobiography is hybrid in form and engages multiple genres of life writing: the *bildungsroman*, or account of a young person's educational and intellectual development; the spiritual autobiography, or account of the religious beliefs and (de)conversion; a disabilities memoir, or testimony to overcoming physical handicaps and illness; and the professional artist's life, a nineteenth century genre increasingly important with the rise of the man and woman of letters (PETERSON, 2007, p. 8).

In the chapter "Autobiography as *Bildungsroman*" Peterson asserts that the concept of the *bildung* (intellectual, moral, and spiritual development) underlies the narrative of the book *Autobiography Harriet Martineau*. Although the word itself does not figure in it, Harriet Martineau's autobiography narrates her intellectual development as a child and young adult, and the progress of her studies and education according to the Unitarian philosophy. The narrative is set in the nineteenth century, a time when the mind's cultivation was mostly restricted to boys from upper class families.

Although critics agree that there is a dialogue between autobiographies and *Bildungsroman*, some consider the *bildungsroman* more comprehensive because, since it is symbolic, it is able to reach its readers the same way myths did. Critics Giovanna Summerfield and Lisa Downward offer an opposing view to that presented by Linda H. Peterson. When they compare autobiography to *bildungsroman*, we can have a clear notion of the main differences between the two:

> The *Bildungsroman* has a universality, which the autobiography does not, in that, as it follows a representative youth, this individual becomes type and his experiences become symbols. Thus, in autobiography the author and the protagonist have the same points of view while in the *Bildungsroman* the author creates an ideal, which allows for symbolic representation (SUMMERFIELD ; DOWNWARD, 2010, p. 1).

Taking into consideration the points of contact between the two genres we may suggest that Cliff's writing style can be classified according to what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call an autobiographical use of the bildungsroman when they state that:

> In autobiographical uses of the *bildungsroman* (or novel of development) we observe the persistence of the form and its adaptation to new kinds of stories […] this narrative of education remains a favorite way of narrating one's coming of age as a developmental story of forming consciousness (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 128).

In order to understand the transformations and adaptations that the genre suffered to accommodate current social issues we are going to have a brief chronological view of how the genre has been changing throughout the centuries.

In *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman* Summerfield and Downward observe how the concept of *bildung* (formation) changed significantly in the course of the eighteenth century. They point out the original meaning of the concept:

> *Bildung* originally referred to both the external form, or appearance of an individual (Gestalt), and to the process of giving form (Gestaltung).[…] medieval mystics and eighteenth-century Pietists conceived of Bildung as God's active transformation of the passive Christian (SUMMERFIELD ; DOWNWARD, 2010, p. 2).

The original idea of man as the fallen individual "deformed through Original Sin", in search for a "redemptive transformation" was replaced by a more humanistic concept in the last decades of the eighteenth century, where "individuals gradually developed their own innate potential through interaction with their environment." The development of an innate genetic potential was a result of the influence that a particular geographical and cultural setting had on him. The complexity of defining the concept *bildung*, therefore, is due to the combination of multiple influences in its origins, which contributed to its hybridity:

> As we can see, the concept of *Bildung* is highly nuanced, and at times contradictory from its inception, as it is defined as both religious, and secular and encompasses both the passivity and activity of humans in their development. On the one hand, *Bildung* entails the submission of human beings to the influence of God or the outside world on their growth. On the other hand, *Bildung* requires the shaping of the world through human beings' willful imposition of innate potential on it (SUMMERFIELD ; DOWNWARD, 2010, p. 12).

The designation *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre was used by critic Karl Morgenstern only in 1819 during a lecture at the university of Dorpat. The goal of the genre, he stated, was to portray the formation of the hero and in doing so, also foster the formation of the readers. Later on, Philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey applied the term in his work (1867-1870)

adding that "the typical *Bildungsroman* traces the progress of a young person toward self-understanding as well as a sense of social responsibility" (SUMMERFIELD ; DOWNWARD, 2010, p. 1).

In *Towards the Antibildungsroman: Saul Bellow and the Problem of the Genre,* literary critic Justyna Kociatkiewicz, who also discusses the concept of *bildung* in her book, cites theorist Susan Suleiman's definition of the literary genre *Bildungsroman*, referring to its traditional conception that congregates both influences of the eighteenth-century German humanism and the bourgeois ideology. She asserts that:

> We may define a story of apprenticeship (of *Bildung*) as two parallel transformations undergone by the protagonist: first a transformation from ignorance (of self) to knowledge (of self); second, a transformation from passivity to action. The hero goes forth into the world to find (knowledge of) himself, and attains such knowledge through a series of "adventures" (actions) that function both as "proofs" and as tests (SULEIMAN *apud* KOCIATKIEWICZ, 2008, p. 7).

Suzanne Hader who works with the definition of *Bildungsroman* offered by Marianne Hirsh in *The Novel of Formation as Genre* (1979), reinforces the social aspect of the development of the individual, pointing out that the growth takes place within a defined social order, which will trigger this search for meaningful existence.

According to the original model of the genre, the last phase of the journey of self-discovery and moral growth, as the protagonist reaches adulthood, would be a gradual and harmonious compliance with society. In that sense, society would offer that possibility for integration as a closure to the protagonist's search, and eventually, the protagonist would manifest the spirit and values of the social order and find, then, his place in society (HADER, 1996).[1]

Critic Marc Redfield also emphasizes that aspect of a serene accommodation of the hero into an organic social order characteristic of the classic definition of the genre. He confirms that the *bildungsroman* narrates "the acculturation of a self – the integration of a particular "I" into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of the humanity" (REDFIELD, 1996, p. 38).

In *The German Bildungsroman for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at Clarification*, Jeffrey Sammons offers a summary of the progression of the German *bildungsroman*:

> The German Bildungsroman emerges in the late eighteenth century, flourishes briefly in the age of Goethe and Romanticism, goes largely underground in the nineteenth century except

[1] Source: http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/hader1.html

> for a handful of scattered examples […] and then re-emerges in the modernist neo-Romantic revival in our own century (SAMMONS, 1991, p. 32).

In the twentieth century the genre suffered harsh criticism. The integration into society it promoted began to be seen as a loss of individuality, and the ideals of freedom, morality, progress, and *bildung* it proposed began to be faced by some philosophers like Hegel as ideological constructions. Because these ideals could not be fully achieved in reality, they were considered illusionary, empty, and degenerate.

> Focusing on the result of any formation, Hegel saw it as a necessary subjugation of the individual ambition to the external requirements: *Bildung* is not a development of personality but a moulding of it into a specific pattern approved by the social forces ruling the world and ensuring the perfect non-individuality of its members (KOCIATKIEWICZ, 2008, p. 9).

Nevertheless, the genre's popularity continued as adaptations dictated by social changes were assimilated into it. Critic Franco Moretti suggests that what kept the genre so vivid throughout the years was its ability to incorporate various narrative forms that took place at the turn of the eighteenth century. Moretti cites the historical novel and epistolary novel, lyric, allegorical, satirical, and 'romantic' novel as examples of the dynamism of the genre in adapting to accommodate the changes reflected on those narratives. He makes an analogy between Darwin's theory of evolution and the evolution of the genre and maintains that the more the *bildungsroman* remained bound to a rigid, original structure, the more difficult it would be for it to survive. Therefore, the triumph of the genre depended on its ability to be flexible and compromise (MORETTI, 2000, p. 10).

Theorist Gregory Castle, emphasizes how the genre was also able to keep up with modernity, asserting that the *bildungsroman* is "emblematic of certain tensions and contradictions within modernism, thus it is an exemplary genre for the representation of subjectivity, subject formation, and the relationship of the subject to modern social formations" (CASTLE *apud* SUMMERFIELD & DOWNWARD, 2010, p. 175).

In *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman*, critic Ellen Mc. Williams offers an overview of how female writers gradually appropriated the *Bildungsroman*, a genre that was fashioned to portray the development of male characters, and used it to give visibility to women's accomplishments and expectations in the predominantly patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. The English tradition of the genre can be traced back to the Victorian period when "the novels are most compatible with the *Bildungsroman*'s preoccupation with middle class progress, aspirations, and frustrations." Charles Dickens and his interest in

individual experience and the interior, emotional life of the individual, is mentioned as one of the greatest disseminators of the genre. Williams gives us many examples of literary models of female development which were crucial to the evolution of the genre in English, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Contrary to the heroes of the male bildungsroman, who were free to explore the world, the heroines of the female bildungsroman were bound to the social pressures and restraints imposed by their gender. As Williams puts it: "in such novels, to some degree, female potential and aspirations are foiled by ambivalent endings" (Mc. WILLIAMS, 2009, p.12).

Jayne Eyre (1847), written by Charlotte Brontë, symbolizes the apotheosis of the female development in the nineteenth century since Jane is the most emblematic character that was able to fulfill the self-realization and independence that for so many years was a male privilege in literature. *Jane Eyre* has become a canonic text, especially in feminism, due to the character's struggle to free herself from patriarchal oppression and domination through the achievement of confidence and self-knowledge.

The Awakening (1899) by Kate Chopin is also given as an iconic example of female insistence on becoming self-defining women. Chopin's heroine Edna Pontellier, abandons her husband and children after indulging in an affair. Once she realizes the impossibility of living an independent life as an artist, she swims far out into the ocean and drowns. Her drowning is not an act of desperation, but rather an act of rebellion, liberation and defiance. Edna would rather lose her life than lose her new found self. Her choosing the ocean is not a coincidence. She is drawn to it exactly because that was where she had for the first time felt the flavor of insubordination and freedom.

Kate Chopin's novel followed a moment in England the 1880's and the 1890's when "all laws that governed sexual identity and behavior seemed to be breaking down" (Showalter: 1990, p.3). In England women's oppression became a theme in many famous plays and novels by authors such as Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw, and what the Victorians called "The Woman Question" which involved "discussions and arguments about the nature and role of woman"2, was very much in vogue. In addition to that, there were some pro-women legislative acts being passed, which helped women establish their political status, such as "The Married Women's Property Act"3 (1882), granting married women the same right as unmarried women over property, so they would not lose their lands to their husbands after marriage, and "The Guardianship of Infants Act" (1886), which

[2] Source: http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/topic_2/welcome.htm.
[3] Source: http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Wproperty.htm.

undermined the father's right to custody of his children on behalf of the mother. Although women in England did not get to vote until 1918, when they finally conquered the right to suffrage, they had been struggling for it since 1840's through petitions.

A crucial group emerged at the end of the 19th century and the term "New Woman" was created to define and represent the ideals and beliefs of those women who were fighting to end inequality between the two genders. It is important to point out here that the novel *The Awakening* was written at a time in history when a group of women was critically questioning for the first time the role assigned to them by men. They began to face the limitations of their sex not as a natural biological condition, weakness of character, or lack of intellect, but as a socially constructed role, and they started to elaborate their feelings towards what had always been taken for granted: men's dominance over their lives, their needs and their desires.

These women, after so many years of repression and silence were now in quest of their own identity which had so far been defined by the opposite sex. There was a new voice in the air, that of the "New Woman", who felt that women should be treated on equal grounds in a society ruled by men, and while most women submitted themselves to strict codes of behavior, the "New Women" were beginning to realize their possibilities outside marriage.

Virginia Woolf, who championed women's need for independence, and wrote about gender relations and class hierarchy is also cited for her importance in the development of the female *Bildungsroman* in the twentieth century due to the writer's refusal to follow the social and writing standards of her time.

In the twentieth century female *Bildungsroman* gave visibility to women's political agency and played a central role in the empowerment of women. Critic Ellen Morgan comments:

> […] Thus the female *Bildungsroman* appears to be becoming the most salient form for literature influenced by neo-feminism. The novel of apprenticeship is admirably suited to express the emergence of women from cultural conditioning into struggle with institutional forces, their progress toward the goal of full personhood, and the effort to restructure their lives and society according to their own vision of meaning and right living (MORGAN, *apud*, WILLIAMS, 2009, p. 19).

That progression of the genre shows a great deal of adaptability. Such volatile nature makes it possible for postmodern novels such as *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* to be approached as *Bildungsroman* due to Michelle Cliff's choice to focus her narrative on the moral and psychological development of a single character, Clare Savage. Cliff instructs her readers as her protagonist goes through this process of identity construction through learning.

Abeng chronicles the life of Clare as a child as she learns how to reconcile and negotiate her mixed heritage in Jamaica. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare leaves Jamaica with her parents who are trying to start a new life in the United States, a country her father believes would offer them better opportunities. Clare eventually returns to Jamaica as a mature woman in an attempt to first explore and learn about her country of origin through the investigation of its history, and then apply her knowledge to teach her people, and be useful to society. In the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's quest for the suppressed history of Jamaica leads her to commit to anticolonialist politics.

Departure is a prerequisite of the *Bildungsroman*, and although in *Abeng* Clare's outset is involuntary when she leaves with her parents to the United States, that withdrawal from her references and subsequent contact with a new culture she feels alienated from, will trigger a quest for a better understanding of life and its purpose. That quest is one of the elements prescribed by the genre.

The loss of someone dear triggering the urge to go through a pilgrimage that will end up leading to a journey of self-discovery is also a classic ingredient associated with the genre: "To spur the hero or heroine on to their journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early stage away from the home or family setting" (HADER, 1996).

In *Abeng*, Clare is forbidden to return to her grandmother's house after accidentally killing a bull, and is sent to live with a relative for not acknowledging the limits of her gender and being so daring. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare is overwhelmed by the loss of her mother, who is convinced that her older and whiter daughter will have more chances to succeed in the United States than in Jamaica. When Clare loses her mother, she is deprived of the only member of her family who insisted on keeping their Caribbean identity alive. When Kitty leaves, Clare loses not only that source of identity but also the sense of stability and security that the feminine presence of a mother bestows. Clare is too young to understand the complexity of her mother's decision, which is motivated by a mortifying feeling of dislocation, since Kitty could never feel any attachment or identification with the United States. Thus, Clare silently endures that experience with the resilience of a moth caught in a bottle: trapped, and alone. This sense of abandonment will make Clare keep questioning reality, society and all its prescribed norms and foundational institutions such as: "united families", "stable homes", "fixed identities", and so on.

Another significant loss also takes place in *No Telephone to Heaven* when Clare, as a young woman, is abandoned by her partner Bobby, a former war combatant, when they are in

Europe. His mental health starts to deteriorate and he can no longer tolerate the painful reminiscences of his experience in war. Not being able to face and to talk about his trauma is what makes Bobby leave. With Bobby, Clare has the confirmation of what she had been suspecting since her unsettling classes at her Jamaican school in *Abeng* – some wounds can never be healed unless we learn the true facts behind them without any lies or subterfuges. Clare's teachers, just like Bobby, wanted to erase the past. In the history classes they taught, they deliberately mitigated the blame of England over the suffering of the slaves that had been taken to Jamaica.

Bobby's escape resembles the denial that leads a whole community to suffer from the ignorance of not knowing about their own past, which is the case of the black people in Jamaica and their lack of knowledge about their own history, a state of denial that is criticized by the narrator in both novels.

Being left by Bobby is one more factor that impels Clare towards her quest for the many truths that were buried in Jamaica. After that episode with Bobby, Clare finally makes up her mind to return to her home country and embark on her far postponed journey back.

All the painful experiences that lead to Clare's distrust of society are part of her growth and expected to be found in the *Bildungsroman*: "The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order" (HADER, 1996).

Abeng and *No Telephone to Heaven* are narratives of education and apprenticeship and although Clare's journey embodies so many elements related to the genre, we cannot consider either novel as a typical *Bildungsroman*. In *No Telephone to Heaven* the heroine does not reconcile with society either when she is in the U.S., in England, or when she returns to Jamaica. She never accepts society's values and standards and instead of being integrated, Clare rebels against the injustices she is exposed to and decides to fight for the outcasts.

When Clare goes back to Jamaica in *No Telephone to Heaven*, during her roaming through the island, she feels the need to research the history that had been hidden from her. Clare gets reacquainted with the real people and their accounts of the myths and traditions, rituals and folklore. She also delves into libraries to rediscover the historical events of Jamaica in order to elaborate an authentic and critical judgment of her country's past. For about two years she teaches children in a secondary school about the lost history they need to know in order to be able to restore their pride in Jamaica and in its people.

She rescues that history completely imbued with a sense of civic duty that had been unknown to her. That feeling is what will lead her to move from theory into practice and join a guerrilla group. In the following quotation, Clare unravels to her interviewer from the guerrilla movement how she cultivated her learning:

> I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people…leafed through the archives downtown…spent time at the university library…one thing leads to another…. I have studied the petroglyphs hidden in the bush…listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart. I have seen the flock of white birds fly out at sunset from Nanny-town…duppies, the old people say.
> Duppies?
> Ghosts; the spirits of Maroons.
> What else…what other sources?
> Stories of Anansi…Oshun…Shàngó…I have walked the cane…poked through the ruins…rusted machines marked Glasgow…standing as they were left (CLIFF, 1996, p.193).

Cliff's novels subvert the classic *bildungsroman* which "narrates the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network larger than the family or the religious community" (SMITH, 2001, p. 120). Clare's process of apprenticeship, 'education in life', instead of integrating her and leading her to accept bourgeois modes of behavior, encourages her to review society's values, practices, and history.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's attempt to rescue her own history through the investigation of her country's hidden traditions and practices, as a strategy to mend her fractured identity and become a self-defining woman, clearly describes a trajectory that fits the genre as it has been used in contemporary literature dealing with post-colonial issues. In *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson theorize about how the tense relationship between metropole and post colony is being represented through this adaptation of the *bildungsroman*:

> Contemporary postcolonial writers in particular are employing the *bildungsroman* form to cast their coming-of-age stories as encounters with powerful mentors at the cultural crossroads of metropole and (post) colony, where conflicting concepts of education and social value collide (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 128).

Critic Maria Helena Lima elucidates why the genre has become so popular among postcolonial writers who have been or felt displaced from their countries of origin.

> Caribbean writers "at home" and in the diaspora have used the *bildungsroman* form to represent their quest for personal and national identity, to explore precisely the complexities and contradictions of growing up in a region where (neo-) colonial relationships exacerbate an already oppressive patriarchal situation (LIMA, 2002, p. 858).

It would be quite paradoxical to fit into the traditional genre of accommodation of the individual into society, a postcolonial reality where people still feel subjugated to neocolonial forces. When the learning process of the protagonist culminates in the discovery of a history of endless oppression and silencing, we can hardly imagine a heroic figure being joyfully integrated into an immoral society. The natural course of the protagonist would be to reject the values that run totally contrary to the ones of equality, justice, and honor that classic heroes were supposed to acquire in their quests for self-knowledge, as Lima asserts when she states:

> The genre's traditional goal of accommodation to the existing society, of ending the novel with a character's "precise stand and assessment of himself and his place in society" seems even less possible in the Caribbean context, where a history of foreign domination, slavery, imperialism, and neocolonialism parallels a not always evident heritage of revolt, resistance and struggle to assert cultural and intellectual freedom (LIMA, 2002, p. 859).

Indeed, Michelle Cliff's choice to create a character who is so insistent on reviewing and subverting society's parameters and norms would not be compatible with the old fashioned *bildungsroman* of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Therefore, it is not surprising that the genre had to suffer necessary adaptations in order to conform to the contemporary journey so familiar to post-colonial subjects. Instead of accepting society's practices, the hero/heroine questions them. This combination between *Bildungsroman* and post-colonial narratives is a suitable match, since the old journeys told in the genre are still taking place but in a new diasporic scenario full of challenges that need to be approached under the lenses of a completely diverse and unsteady social reality, as Smith and Watson support:

> Contemporary post-colonial writers employing the form typically reshape the story of education as one of becoming alienated subjects of double legacies in ways that interrogate the form's ideology of development, self-determination, and incorporation of citizens into the new nation. (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 129)

According to this contemporary appropriation and rewriting of the *bildungsroman*, which is used by Michelle Cliff in her novels, the true lesson for the protagonist takes place when the self-development characteristic of the genre becomes a collective development, when the character is able to change apathy into awareness, ignorance into knowledge and passivity into action. In that sense, Clare is useful to society as a revolutionary engaged in exposing its flaws, when she tries to educate the Jamaican people in order to awaken in them the necessary revolt that should be the spark of a revolution.

Clare's tragic end deviates from the precepts of the *Bildungsroman* but its symbolic value survives, and its message becomes a collective learning about our search for identity. Clare's death, although premature, can be seen positively, since she achieves wholeness as she is burned into the ground of her homeland, as if she had come full-circle. In addition, what Cliff wanted to attain through that ending is very close to the idea of instructing readers. Cliff emphasizes that her goal is to inspire her readers to continue Clare's project of promoting changes in society. Cliff agrees with Meryl Schwartz' interpretation of Clare's death when the critic declares: "What I like to do with it is to argue that the ending leaves readers with a sense of incompletion that may motivate them to continue the struggle in which Clare was engaged (SCHWARTZ, 199, p. 602).

It is interesting to note that although Cliff's life trajectory encompasses the typical displacement that produces the longing for a lost home characteristic of diasporic subjects, the author chose to adopt in her novels through the reshaping of the autobiography and the *Bildungsroman* a narrative that criticizes Jamaica, focusing on the country's racial, political and social issues.

2 A TAINTED HISTORY

2.1 Jamaica's History

Jamaica is the third largest Caribbean island and its discovery by Christopher Columbus dates back to 1494. The island was first inhabited by Arawak natives who were decimated when the Spanish settled in 1509. Between 1534 and 1872 the capital was Spanish Town. In 1655 Jamaica was invaded and conquered by the English, but the Spanish did not cease to claim the island until 1670.

By the time Jamaica was colonized by the British in the seventeenth century, its indigenous peoples had already been decimated by the Spanish. The island was populated, then, by white settlers who were attracted by the possibility of becoming wealthy through the cultivation of sugarcane, and enslaved Africans.

Catherine Hall, writing about the colonization of Jamaica explains:

> In the Caribbean almost all the indigenous population was destroyed in the first wave of colonization. Consequently almost everyone who lives there has come from somewhere else, whether through slavery, the enforced movement of peoples from Africa, the semi-enforced movement represented by indentured labor from one part of the British Empire to another, or by persecution, as in the case of Portuguese Jews. Then there were the colonizers – the British, the Spanish, the French, the Dutch, who stayed and became the white creole presence. But the stamp of historical violence and rupture is central to any Caribbean narrative (HALL, C., 1996: 68).

Jamaica became a base of operations by privateers (a private person or ship authorized by a government to attack foreign shipping during wartime). The cultivation of sugar cane and coffee by African slaves that were taken to the island through the Atlantic slave trade made Jamaica one of the most valuable colonies in the world for more than 150 years. Until the early nineteenth century Africans were captured, kidnapped and forced into slavery to work on plantations when sugarcane became the most important export of the island. During the eighteenth century there were a number of slave conspiracies which gained Jamaica the reputation for having the highest instances of slave uprisings of any Caribbean island. The escaped slaves were known as Maroons. They established independent communities in the interior of Jamaica. There were attempts from the British Crown to suppress their communities, especially in the 1730s and 1790s when, during the Second Maroon War the colonial government was able to expel a Maroon community from the island. In 1831, during the Christmas holiday, a large scale revolt, known as the Baptist War broke. Samuel Sharp

was its leader, and the revolt was meant to be a peaceful strike, but after ten days the militia of the plantocracy was able to suppress it. In 1834 slavery was abolished but the poor conditions in which the slaves lived did not change much. Until 1838 the slaves were still submitted to their former owners through what was called the Apprenticeship System. On October 1865 Paul Bogle (1820 – 1865), a Jamaican Baptist deacon who is a national hero in Jamaica, lead the Morant Bay rebellion which was brutally repressed by white officials and militia.[4]

Right after Morant Bay, Jamaica became a crown colony in 1866. In 1872 Kingston became the capital. By the late 19th century the sugar crop was not such a promising business anymore and the colony had to find a substitute, beginning to grow bananas.

In 1907 an earthquake struck Kingston and caused incredible damage. The city burned for four days as a result of fires that sprung up.

In the early 20th century, Jamaicans worked on banana plantations in Central America and Cuba, and in the construction of the Panama Canal.

In the 1930s protests against inequalities among Jamaican workers were very common on the island. They could no longer accept the fact that two-thirds of the land belonged to 900, mostly white, families while one million Jamaicans had no property.

At that time Marcus Garvey, an emblematic Jamaican leader, founded political movements in order to advance a Pan-African philosophy known as Garveyism. He gave countless speeches about the importance of the return of the African Diaspora to their ancestral lands. In their book entitled *The Story of the Jamaican People*, historians Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett state that: “Garvey emphasized the centrality of Africa, not of Europe, of blackness, not of whiteness, of affirming an African identity, as essential steps to power, and in the first instance, to self-determination” (SHERLOCK ; BENNETT, 1998, p. 18).

Historian Rupert Lewis comments on how the myth of racial superiority that Garvey felt so threatening made Jamaicans averse to their own past:

> Colonial ideological policy consistently debased Africa as well as peoples and things African. The future, the colonizer claimed, belonged to Europe. Hence colonial subjects were made to identify progress with the ideals of their master. In the process of the formation of Jamaica as a nation the negation of Africa and blackness has been constant. And so has the resistance to it of black people (LEWIS, 1987, p. 230).

[4] Source: http://www.britannica.com

Sherlock and Bennett assert that Jamaica was terribly affected by the Great Depression and its consequences were felt when in the spring of 1938 sugar and dock workers rose in revolt. At that time an organized labor movement and a competitive party system emerged. Two major political parties were founded: People's National Party (PNP), and its main rival, Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), which was created five years later. In 1944 Jamaica held its first election under universal adult suffrage. Jamaica became independent in 1962 with Alexander Bustamante, from the Jamaica Labor Party, as its first prime minister. Nevertheless, independence failed to bring equality and justice to all formerly colonized subjects, as critic Helen Scott points out:

> Political independence did not fundamentally transform social relations and structures, but rather installed national bourgeoisies whose task was to manage capitalism, while the world's superpowers developed new systems to maintain their influence over strategically significant regions (SCOTT, 2006, p. 9).

In his book *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and Carib to the Present*, historian Jan Rogozínski explains the political situation in Jamaica in the twentieth century, pointing out that the government was basically under either the PNP or the JLP's dominance initially. Norman Manley was the first PNP prime minister in 1972. He had socialist inclinations and improved Jamaica's relations with Cuba. He established housing, health, and education programs for the poor and increased taxes on foreign mining corporations (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p. 205).

Marcus Garvey, Alexander Bustamante, and Norman Manley are considered the founders of the nation: Garvey's stress on creating an identity through the rescue of an African heritage was a liberating voice that awakened Jamaicans to the importance of an affirmation of racial identity and pride. In one of his speeches he declared:

> My opponents say I am against white and fair-skinned people. This is not so. I am against the class system here which keeps the poor man down, and the poor mostly black people. It is only natural therefore that their interest should be nearest and dearest to my heart […] Let us all work together as fellow-Jamaicans and ring in the changes for a new Jamaica (GARVEY *apud* SHERLOCK ; BENNETT, 1998, p. 362).

Garvey's main goal was to deconstruct the colonial mentality that prevailed in Jamaica ever since slavery times and teach Jamaicans the importance of a strong national identity for the construction of a fair community.

Bustamante's political action was invaluable for the progress of Jamaican's rights. He formed the Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union in 1934 and started meeting with the mass and protesting against low wages and working-class poverty. To *The Daily Gleaner*'s criticism of the demonstrations he replied: "Hungry men and women and children have a right to call attention to their condition and to ask of people fulfillment of promises made to them so long as they do so without using violence" (BUSTAMANTE *apud* SHERLOCK ; BENNETT, 1998, p. 362).

Norman Manley supported Garvey's insistence on racial consciousness and on African identity. Furthermore, he used that discourse and the incipient hope and confidence installed by Garvey to trigger a sense of national unity that was missing in the Jamaican population. Manley stated that: "No amount of economic good will make our people a real unity. All efforts will be wasted unless the masses are steadily taken along the path in which they will feel more and more that this place is their home, that it is their destiny" (MANLEY *apud* SHERLOCK ; BENNETT, 1998, p. 362).

In the seventies, instead of staying behind and trying to work to build up the country, a great number of middle class Jamaicans left the country because of Manley's socialist government, as Michelle Cliff comments: "They took their money and went to Miami. My family didn't leave, but many, many people we know left" (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p.612).

When Manley's party declined in 1980, Edward Seaga, who criticized Manley's flirtations with socialism, took office and began to privatize the national companies and dialogue with the USA. The campaign between the two men was marked by widespread urban violence and the loss of hundreds of Jamaican lives.

As a result of nearly 25 percent unemployment, high crime rates, social inequalities and high inflation, Jamaica continued to be an unsettling place in the 1990s, when armed groups fought street battles. These groups that represented the political parties abandoned politics and affiliated themselves with drug traffickers. The gangs replaced the government in many parts of the country, offering the population the basic needs that were not provided by the government, since the social services had been cut in a desperate attempt from the government to rescue the crumbling economy. According to Rogozinski, these gangs 'tax' local businesses in return for protecting them, punishing those who refuse to pay, and they provide a rudimentary welfare safety net by helping locals with school fees, lunch money, and employment (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p.207).

Manley returned to power in 1989, and his party remained in office until 1998, but he was forced to resign in 1992 due to health complications, when he was succeeded by Percival Patterson as leader of the PNP.

Jamaica today is sold to American and European tourists as an ideal vacation spot. Sherlock and Bennett criticize the brochures sold to tourists which exemplify how the country is marketed despite the serious poverty and social problems that are prevalent on the island:

> In virtually every brochure, visions of sex and romance complete the picture of an enticing natural paradise. Couples embrace as the sun sets, or they walk barefoot and hand-in-hand down a pristine beach […] It seems a truism that these fantasies are far from the reality of life for islanders, who are not as mindlessly carefree as the brochures suggest. Yet island leaders have chosen to pin their economic plans on tourism, and these images succeed in bringing in more and more tourists (SHERLOCK ; BENNETT, 1998, p. 230).

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, neo-colonialist practices still keep Jamaica and other Caribbean countries in a position of dependence of foreign capital. In *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization: Fictions of Independence*, critic Helen Scott points out that:

> Neoliberal globalization has economic and geopolitical motivations (strategic positioning vis-à-vis other powers; control over profits from oil refining, mineral extraction, offshore manufacturing, tourism, cheap labor); takes economic, political, and cultural forms; and is ultimately backed by the threat or reality of military force (SCOTT, 2006, p. 2).

2.2 The Reworking of History

In the introduction to *Tropes for the Past*, Kuisma Korhonen talks about the debate on the relationship between history and literature promoted by critic Hayden White who is accused by many professional historians of being responsible for "undermining the scientific nature of historical research and turning it into mere literature" (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 11). Korhonen affirms that the distinction between the two fields has not always been that sharp. He points out that in the beginning there was history or literature, just tales, and mythic narratives of the legendary past which kept the past events alive in the popular imaginary. Then came writing, written documents, and the construction of what we call history. The oral tradition was replaced by written stories, which belonged to two different categories: those of "history" that dealt with real events, and those of "poetry" that dealt with possible events (real, mythical or invented events) (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 9).

In his essay about historical discourse and literary writing, Hayden White explains how the relationship between historical writing and literary writing was unproblematic before the nineteenth century. Since Aristotle the general approach was that although both history and imaginative writing were rhetorical arts, they dealt with different things: the real world and the possible respectively. It was only after the nineteenth century that the concept of history was reformulated and the historical inquiry inaugurated, while literature "developed techniques of writing that undermined the authority of history's favored realistic or plain style of writing (WHITE, 2006, p. 25).

> History is one of the "others" of literature inasmuch as literature is understood to be identifiable with fiction. Because history wishes to make true statements about the real world, not an imaginary or illusory world. Secondly, history is literature's other inasmuch as literature is understood to be identifiable with figuration, figurative language, and metaphor, rather than with literal speech, unambiguous assertion, and free or poetic (rather than bound) utterance (WHITE, 2006, p. 25).

In the modern period literature starts to be considered history's complement rather than its other. But unlike their historian counterparts, the modernists realized the importance of language as an integral part of the real world and how wasteful it would be to treat it as a "transparent instrument for representing it". With that in mind, they created a "new conception of realistic representation" which would enable readers to have a creative re-reading even of the "formerly transparent historical document" (WHITE, 2006, p. 26). White theorizes that: "The great modernists (from Flaubert, Baudelaire, Dickens and Shelley down through Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Pound, Eliot, Stein, and so on) were as interested in representing a real instead of a fictional world quite as much as any modern historian" (WHITE, 2006, p. 25).

White is fascinated by the process in which history is constructed through the reading of documents that will determine what happened in some part of the past. He is interested, mainly, in "how figurative language can be said to refer to extra-textual phenomena and what kind of information about the world such language provides us with" (WHITE, 2006, p. 26). He comes to an interesting conclusion, asserting that since historical discourse refers to events in a real world, although they are no longer perceivable, they have to be constructed as possible objects of a possible perception rather than treated as real objects of real perceptions (WHITE, 2006, p. 30). That theory allows us to consider the possibility of a representation of past events that indulges in its recreation without the commitment to faithfully retelling it. We can still consider them wonderful sources of history, but a history that was filtered through the imagination of the ones who appropriated it.

Scholar Markku Lehtimäki is also puzzled by that process of narrating past events and theorizes about the impossibility for mysterious modern events of the twentieth century, such as the assassination of President Kennedy or the first moon flight, to be represented through conventional forms of storytelling. The conventional categories and techniques are no longer suitable to explain those events. According to the critic, the new modes of representation required by specific *modernist* events are representative of Hayden White's thesis that:

> Narrative discourse is not a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes but a significant mode that endows those events and processes with plot, coherence, and meaning […] the form and the content of textual representation become almost indistinguishable from each other, so that "cultural modernism has to be seen as both a reflection of and a response to this new actuality (WHITE *apud* LEHTIMÄKI, 2006, p. 135).

White also stresses "the importance of new, self-reflexive, and experimental ways of historical representation, both in verbal and visual form", and points out how literary modernism is influenced by the developments in the visual media in the twentieth century. His thesis about "making history meaningful through literary shaping and emplotting comes close to Linda Hucheon's argumentation that: "the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (HUTCHEON *apud LEHTIMÄKI*, 2006, p.135). Hucheon does not propose a refuge from truth, but instead an "acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs."

In postmodernism history starts to be scrutinized and seen as a potential weapon used to manipulate and dominate masses: historian Hobsbawm voices his worries when it comes to the dangers that lie in the fabrication of history when he states:

> The past is an essential element, perhaps *the* essential element in these ideologies. If there is no suitable past, it can always be invented […] I used to think that the profession of history, unlike that of, say, nuclear physics, could at least do no harm. Now I know it can. Our studies can turn into bomb factories. This state of affairs affects us in two ways. We have a responsibility to historical facts in general, and for criticizing the politico-ideological abuse of history in particular (HOBSBAWM *apud* HALL, C. 1996, p. 65).

Catherine Hall discusses the importance of examining history, and the narratives of the past if we want to know how we were produced as modern subjects, if we want to discover how our identities were constructed through the internalization of historical memories. She emphasizes that "the passions of identity politics may drive us to ask new questions of old and new sources, fiction may give us necessary tools, the construction of new myths may be part of our work" (HALL, C. 1996, p. 66).

The critic also reminds us how convenient it is for many Europeans to just let go of their brutal colonial past instead of facing the uncomfortable memories related to slavery. She points out that both colonized and colonizers are linked through their histories, and these histories have to be remembered since they justify the presence of so many immigrants that are seen as intruders by native Europeans. Catherine Hall points out that immigrants need to remind the former empires of their awkward history and together with their children and their children's children, "act as a perpetual reminder of the ways in which the once metropolis is intimately connected to its 'peripheries'" (HALL, C. 1996, p. 67).

In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hucheon writes about how unsettling it is for historians, used to dealing with origins and ends, unity, totalization, logic and reason, representation and truth, and the notions of causality, temporal homogeneity, linearity, continuity, etc… to see the postmodern appropriation and reworking of history (HUCHEON, 2000:87). She remarks that the shift in the way writers and artists began to deal with history represented a new mode of seeing and interpreting reality. The critic suggests that: "There seems to be a new desire to think historically, and to think historically these days is to think critically and contextually (HUTCHEON, 2000, p. 88).

Hutcheon also theorizes about the artificial division between literature and history, stating that before this separation these two branches of learning were seen as a means to learn from the interpretation of experiences and observable reality. Today, what postmodern theory is trying to challenge is the separation that came later on, affirming how they are complementary instead of excluding. The postmodern writers focus on the similarities between the two modes of writing and approach them as "linguistic constructs highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure" (HUCHEON, 2000, p. 105).

The critic proposes that we look at both history and fiction as discourses. She challenges the distinction between the writing of history, characterized by objectivity, neutrality, impersonality and transparency of representation, and fiction, asserting that in postmodern writing the tendency is to break the barrier between both. In order to do so, writers appropriate the history of the victors and rework it through historiographic metafictions (HUCHEON, 2000: 92).

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity (HUCHEON, 2000, p. 93).

Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall who was born in Jamaica and migrated to England, where he has lived all his adult life, has written extensively about Caribbean identity and about the need to review the history of the islands from the perspective of the colonized.

In *Thinking the Diaspora: Home Thoughts from Abroad*, Stuart Hall suggests that it is crucial for theoreticians involved in diaspora studies to think about how Caribbean nations are imagined these days (HALL, 1998, p. 2). Since the identity of a nation is largely defined by the way it is imagined and represented through discourse, its history should be constantly reviewed. In this context, the colonial history of the Caribbean is being reclaimed by writers and artists who feel that the many voices of the oppressed people that were not heard need to be expressed so that the western construction of a history that depicted them as dominated and voiceless can be deconstructed and reformulated.

Hall emphasizes the importance of the reworking of Africa in the Caribbean imaginary in the twentieth century, citing the Rastafarian movement as an example of a current that drew on many lost sources from the past, approximating biblical references to the reality of the Jamaican people:

> The 'Babylon' of which it spoke, where its people were still 'suffering,' was not in Egypt but in Kingston […] Rastafarianism played a critical role in the modern movement that made Jamaica and other Caribbean societies, for the first time, and irrecoverably, 'black'. In a further translation, this strange doctrine and discourse 'saved' the young black souls of second generation Caribbean migrants in British cities in the 1960s and 1970s, and gave them pride and self-understanding. In Franz Fanon's terms, it decolonized minds (HALL, 1998, p. 15).

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall problematizes the process of creating an identity from the heterogeneity characteristic of the Caribbean which is a site that congregates the cultural heritages of Africa, Europe, and America, where *Présence Africaine* is the "site of the repressed"; *Présence Européene* is the "site of colonialist, hegemonic construction of knowledges"; and *Présence Américaine* is the "New World" "site of cultural confrontation, possibility for creolization and points of new becomings" (HALL, 2003, p. 233).

Hall states that one of the ways of thinking about cultural identity involves a "shared history" and reflects historical experiences common to all Caribbean people. That "shared history" is being rediscovered and rewritten through a process that "is not grounded in the archeology, but in the retelling of the past" (HALL, 2003, p. 234).

In "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" Hall maintains the idea that it is crucial to retell the past. He affirms that since the past is already written on us, we need to

return to it in order to conduct cultural politics. Nonetheless, we cannot deal with the past as a rigid source and sole bearer of our identities. On the contrary, the past is always susceptible to being retold, rediscovered, and reinvented. In short, he defends that the past has to be narrativized. The oral testimonies of the ones who were never considered by historians as history-makers need to be rescued, but with the awareness that their histories are stories, positionings, and narratives to be read, and do not represent the truth (HALL, 1997, p. 58).

In "Nationalism and the Development of Identity in Postcolonial Fiction," critic Constance Richards also shows how legitimate the process of reconstructing history is when she mentions the Black Arts Movement in the US which aimed at valuing African culture and history through the diffusion of their richness in order to rehabilitate the black people's lost sense of pride:

> Culture flows between Jamaica and the US created a continuity that has, in part, shaped the imaginary of artists like Cliff and Marshall. The Black Arts Movement, the cultural arm of the Black struggle in the US in the 1960s and 70s, for example, often employed ancestral African as well as contemporary African-American images and expressions to instill racial pride and to legitimate African American cultural identity (RICHARDS, 2005, p. 21).

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, critic Paul Gilroy, on the other hand, calls attention to a potentially dangerous movement dedicated to making the African descendent forget about slavery and the history of aggression of the sugarcane plantations, and focus instead on the far distant African past full of stories of triumphs. Gilroy reminds us of the dangers that lie in trying to replace one history by the other. He believes that:

> When the emphasis shifts towards the elements of invariant tradition that heroically survive slavery, any desire to remember slavery itself becomes something of an obstacle […] Blacks are urged, if not to forget the slave experience, which appears as an aberration from the story of greatness told in African history, then to replace it at the centre of our thinking with a mystical and ruthlessly positive notion of Africa that is indifferent to intraracial variation and is frozen at the point where blacks boarded the ships that would carry them into the woes and horrors of the middle passage (GILROY, 1993, p. 189).

The aim of postcolonial writers is to destabilize, and displace the old coherence, stability and continuity of history broadcasted by historiography, to offer a new writing that contemplates their personal experiences of a history that becomes essentially fragmented, and critical. In re-thinking the Empire, they undermine the monopoly of the biased master narratives of the West that dominated the representation of Caribbean societies.

Catherine Hall proposes that: "one way of re-thinking the Empire in a post-colonial frame might be to focus on the inter-connections between the histories of the 'metropolis' and 'peripheries' and refuse the simple binary of colonizer and colonized"(HALL, C., 1996, p. 70).

Postcolonial novels also show us that a systematized representation of the past is no more valid than a subjective assessment of historical events, and that it is possible, as well as constructive, to bring together the literary and the historiographical in an attempt to legitimate the voice of the formerly excluded participants of history and restore their cultural identity through the recreation of their lost past.

In her book *If I Could Write This in Fire*, where Michelle Cliff reflects on place and displacement, the author writes about the manipulation and imposition of a history that only represents the colonist's viewpoint. She fights against the glorification and celebration of a history of pillages, violence, and appropriation of foreign lands, especially when it is repeated in discourses reproduced by the ones who should contest and rewrite it:

> Their bloody kings and their bloody queens. Their bloody peers. Their bloody generals. Admirals. Explorers. Livingstone. Hillary. Kitchener. All the bwanas. And all their beaters, port-ers, sherpas. Who found the source of the Nile. Victoria Falls. The top of the mountains. Their so-called discoveries reek of untruth. How many dark people died so they could misname the physical features in their blasted gazetteer. A statistic we shall never know. Dr. Livingstone, I presume you are here to rape our land and enslave our people (CLIFF, 2008, p. 20).

In narrating a forgotten history of struggle Cliff contributes to the construction of a contemporary literary politics of resistance that can be used as a tool to not only review old assurances about racist concepts but also to inspire us to see the artificiality of the inequalities we have learned to face as normal.

This movement to reassess history in an attempt to give a voice to the subaltern is present in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. Clare's journey of self-discovery is triggered by her investigation of the history of Jamaica. It is in *Abeng* that the history of slavery is displayed through the voice of the narrator, who is intent in unraveling the island's obscure past. In *No Telephone to Heaven* we also have access to history when Clare relates to some historical characters that suffered from the process of colonization of which she is also a victim. In *Postcolonialism & Autobiography*, critic Carmen Birkle comments that in *No Telephone To Heaven* Cliff uses colonized historical figures such as Pocahontas to awaken in Clare a more critical and engaged relationship with her own past and the history of Jamaica. On the collective level, Pocahontas represents the fate of the Native Americans, which

reminds Clare of the fate of her dominated people in Jamaica. On the personal level, Pocahontas is imagined as an individual and a woman and symbolizes all the female voices that were silenced through the male-dominated narratives (BIRKLE, 1998, p. 63). Birkle states that:

> For Cliff, literature is an important vehicle for the expression of history because it can take up seemingly minor events of the past and turn them into lively and meaningful stories of the present, thus connecting past and present of a given civilization and opening up more space for both the historical and fictional narratives. Using this postmodern technique, she thereby transgresses the strict genre boundaries between fact and fiction, and shows that history (or, more precisely historiography), and literature are not two separate fields but two essential concepts of representation that influence each other (BIRKLE, 1998, p. 63).

The history that is in question in *Abeng* is the hidden history of the slave trade in Jamaica that was not fully examined by historiography. Cliff investigates the complexity of creating an identity from a past that is clouded by colonial discourses that were voiced to dominate and keep the Caribbean subjected to the wrath of the colonizers. In order to achieve this;

> She rewrites white creole history of privilege and collaboration to integrate it with the unwritten black and Amerindian histories of suffering and resistance; her texts attempt to dismantle no-tions of "official" history and the relation of that history to myth, myth to "real life," and "real life" to fiction by conflating Jamaican legends and myths with ancient and contemporary histories, autobiographical anecdotes and among all of these, inter-twining Clare Savage's personal journey (EDMONDSON, 1993, p. 185).

In *Abeng*, Michelle Cliff refuses to romanticize Jamaica and its past; on the contrary, she is dedicated to portraying Jamaica by displaying its bright and dark side. The author takes into consideration the social and economic burden left by slavery and its influence on the country's politics. She also acknowledges the racial tension that results from the constant classification of Jamaicans based on their color, and the perpetuation of patterns of behavior through the repetition and acceptance of certain ungrounded "truths" that are taught and passed on via the so called "official history". Cliff attempts to decolonize the minds of the ones who were subjugated by colonialism, offering them a new perspective of their own history. Critic Myriam Chancy, who studies Afro Caribbean women writers, talks about the importance of rescuing history to construct an identity:

> In the writings by Afro-Caribbean women in the United States, and particularly in Cliff's work, recognition and acceptance of diversity along these lines in addition to retrieving buried histories (especially female) of resistance in the Caribbean (and elsewhere) become the

> cornerstones for establishing a new process of decolonization and revolution (CHANCY, 1997, p. 160).

Through Clare Savage and her experiences which are always mediated by social, economic, and racial differences, we realize how color stratification and a rigid class system contribute to the complex process of identity formation of the island and of Clare, who can be interpreted as a microcosm of Jamaica, since she incorporates all its antithesis, being the result of two different classes, colors, and pasts. As critic Wendy Walters puts it: "Cliff's work consistently traces out the genealogies of slavery, the complicated connections between the multiple national identities at play in Jamaican politics, and the intersections in the lives of individuals occupying multiple class, race, and national social locations" (WALTERS, 2005, p. 28).

By rescuing and retelling the injustices and violence committed against the Jamaican slaves, Michelle Cliff is able to reveal the origin of a pattern of abusive behavior towards the black population, which is embedded in most of the white inhabitants of the island, who are unable to see and treat the descendants of the slaves as equal.

As we read *Abeng* and learn about the history of slavery in Jamaica, we become aware that the prospects of the slaves who were doomed to work in the cane plantations for their white masters is not very different from the destiny of their descendants. Because there are no jobs available for those people, they are forced to keep working in the houses of the same white families who enslaved their forefathers, perpetuating, then, a history of violence, inequality and hopelessness. The suffering of the black people seems to be a curse, since they are constantly struggling to get out of a *status quo* that appears to be a fixed reality that offers no possibility of any real change. It is in that scenario presented in *Abeng*, that we encounter descriptions of shantytowns, where the poor black population lives, and that can be seen as an extension of the precarious cots that the slaves used to inhabit. In the following passage we can have an idea of what the houses where the slaves used to live were like, and realize that not much has changed when we compare them to the houses in the shantytowns where people live under similar conditions in contemporary Jamaica:

> Little more than huts, really, twenty to twenty-five feet long and twelve feet wide, made of wattle and plaster, with dirt floors and palm-thatched roofs. Inside, the ceiling was low – usually brushing the forehead – so the inhabitants, if they were any height at all, had to walk stooped forward. As they stooped to hoe; stooped to stir. There were no windows in any of these huts – light in each came from a candle, made with the fat rendered from farm animals (CLIFF, 1995, p. 26).

In the author's enterprise to retell history through the appropriation of historical events, Cliff establishes an interesting dialogue between two equally tragic misfortunes concerning ethnic and race discrimination when Clare, at one point, becomes unsettled by reading about the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War. She is restlessly devoted to understanding the reasons behind the holocaust as she comes across the book *Anne Frank's Diary* (1947). After her investigation about the condemnation of the Jews and a sequence of illogical explanations about the event, such as, as her father puts it: "…They brought it on themselves. They should have kept quiet; you can't antagonize someone like Hitler" (CLIFF, 1995, p.73), Clare starts to learn about the effects of discrimination. She makes an analogy between the death camps in Germany and the shantytowns in Jamaica. While her father wants to assure her that such a thing would never happen in Jamaica and would never happen again, as Clare reads a book written by a survivor of Auschwitz, she cannot help but notice the similarities between the smokestacks from the death camps in Germany and the barracks in the shantytowns in Jamaica. The guards and the mud of the death camp compose a landscape that is all too familiar for Clare. In spite of what her father says, Clare realizes that Auschwitz is not remote at all; on the contrary, it is very vivid and close to her. In the following passage we can notice this moment of epiphany, when Clare is able to recognize a tragedy in progress so close to her.

> She was a twelve-year-old light-skinned Jamaican, all she knew of the bounds of human misery were the alms houses she saw from the road and the shantytowns her father took great pains to avoid. And while she limited the Holocaust to Europe in her mind, her mind cast its environment in places that she knew on sight (CLIFF, 1995, p. 76).

The bitter lesson that Clare learns about the prejudiced world she lives in is that "just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one" (CLIFF, 1995, p.77).

Clare's comparison between the diasporas of the Black and the Jewish people is not coincidental. There is a vast literature that approaches them as historical events with many correspondences when it comes to the adversities both groups had to undergo and how those traumas shaped their process of identity formation. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy emphasizes the similarities we can find between the Jewish and the Black ordeals in their diasporic condition, pointing out how one influenced the other. Gilroy also mentions how the heroic figure of Moses proved especially resonant for slaves and their descendants (GILROY, 1993, p. 207). He argues that exchanges between Blacks and Jews are important for the future

of Black Atlantic cultural politics as well as for its history, since both have a shared past of racial persecution, oppression, escape, and suffering. In addition, both had to deal with the challenge of rescuing the lost memory of a dispersed people. In a way, the trauma that the Jewish people had to go through, as a dispersed diasporic people, or during the Holocaust, caused similar shocks to those experienced by black people being sent from Africa to Jamaica and being discriminated against through the centuries. The anxiety originated from the feeling of being an outcast is still present today in Jamaica, where for lack of money to support their families or afford a house, which could represent some minimum stability for them, black people feel displaced in their own home country.

The connection between the Black people and the Jewish people is also evident in the passage below which illustrates how the black people who were taken to Jamaica and the Jews who were expelled from their homeland and then persecuted in different historical moments, were both the victims of a violent and forced diasporic process. The term "diaspora", very popular in black studies was actually borrowed from Jewish thought, as Gilroy elucidates:

> The term diaspora comes into the vocabulary of black studies and the practice of pan-Africanist politics from Jewish thought. It is used in the Bible but begins to acquire something like its looser contemporary usage during the late nineteenth century – the period which saw the birth of modern Zionism and of the forms of black nationalist thought which share many of its aspirations and some of its rhetoric (GILROY, 199, p. 205).

Just like the Jews were ghettoized during the Second World War, today in Jamaica the darker a person's skin color, the more ghettoized he/she is condemned to be. The ghettoes of Jamaica, or shantytowns, are the places where the darker and poorer part of the population lives, perpetually lacking the necessary means to survive. In those places they become invisible and are forgotten as long as they keep quiet and remain being part of the mass that is used as cheap labor by the ones who enjoy a more prominent economic situation.

Besides rescuing historical tragedies such as the holocaust to make us realize how history is repeating itself, Cliff also appropriates the history of insurgent slaves in *Abeng* and changes the focus of that history to emphasize their strength and portray them as heroes instead of defeated victims. Although the author is committed to exposing the bruises of the slave trade, her main goal is to underscore the subversive acts of the slaves who resisted and fought against the oppressive system to which they were bound.

Critic Françoise Lionnet writes about how history and fiction dialogue in *Abeng* when Cliff uses the knowledge she has of history and the way it is transmitted through historiography in order to create a counter-history that inspires her writing style:

> Because she wants to claim the cultural heritage of the maroons who survived in large numbers in Jamaica, Cliff uses a narrative *fragmentation* that is but mimesis of another form of cultural and economic dispersion and segmentation. In order to survive in the high mountain regions of the island, the maroons would cultivate small plots of land that were alternatively cleared out and left fallow because they were always on the move so as to avoid being captured by their former masters. Whereas the totalizing discourse of colonial historiography would appear to correspond to the economy of large, self-sustaining plantations, the small "portions" of texts, episodes and plots in Cliff's narrative would rather seem to reapportion and reassign authority and agency to a different set of elusive actors, always on the move, and present on both the public and the private stages of history (LIONNET, 1992, p. 335).

The narrator of *Abeng* teaches us about the many rebellions that were characteristic of the slave community by retelling the history of the Maroons, a group of fugitive slaves who fought for their freedom back in 1733, plotting in the bushes against the plantation owners.

The first Maroons were slaves who had been taken to Jamaica by Spanish colonizers and refused to submit to the English crown. Historians Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, who have extensively studied the history of Jamaica, explain the Spanish origin of the word: "The word 'maroon' is from the Spanish *Cimarron*, the name originally given to domestic cattle that had taken to the hills in Hispaniola. It was given also to Indians who had escaped from the lowlands and by the 1530s it referred also to African runaways (SHERLOCK ; BENNET, 1998, p. 16).

At the time of the English invasion, in 1655, about 300 slaves helped Don Cristóbal Arnaldo de Isasi, a Spanish colonizer, to defend the island against the English invaders, which seems to indicate that they were treated fairly by Isasi. The maroon phenomenon came about when the island was captured by the English and many former Spanish slaves were obstinate about holding on to their newly acquires freedom (SHERLOCK & BENNET, 1998, p. 75).

These slaves founded Nanny Town, a refuge for fugitives who joined their army to resist slavery:

> On the British islands, Maroon communities prospered only on Jamaica, which is heavily wooded, mountainous, and covered with broken limestone caves and "cockpits." A smaller Windward group (Nanny Town) formed soon after the British conquest in 1655. When the British took Jamaica, the Spanish colonists freed their slaves, some of whom fled to the mountains. These Maroons ultimately settled on the northern slopes of the Blue Mountains, which rise to 7,000 feet. There they built their main camp, Nanny Town, on the brink of a 9000-foot drop above the junction of two branches of the Río Grande (ROGOZÍNSKI, 2000, p. 156).

Cliff retrieves the rebellious soul of the black people's ancestors who refused to be dominated and transforms their agency in a legacy of a struggle that cannot be forgotten. She borrows from history the central character of the slave uprisings who is, surprisingly, an old black woman called Nanny, a kind of sorceress who ends up being killed by a *quashee* – a slave faithful to the white planters – at the height of the War of the Maroons. In a fragment of *Abeng*, the narrator explains: "Nanny, who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless, was from the empire of the Ashanti, and carried the secrets of her magic into slavery. She prepared amulets and oaths for her armies" (CLIFF, 1995, p. 14).

Nanny had joined the fugitive slaves along with her five brothers. She advised her army and healed them with the knowledge she had from ancient magic. According to history, she was accountable for the liberation of at least eight hundred slaves. Critic Kaisa Ilmonen, who wrote an article about counter-narratives and the act of rethinking the past and rewriting the history in *Abeng*, talks about the symbolism behind Nanny:

> Nanny, the leader of the Windward Maroons and the great war-heroine, is the central symbol in *Abeng*. The flashes of Nanny's figure are part of the fragmented storytelling in the novel. Nanny represents the forgotten female role in fighting the colonizer, but she also stands for ethnic Caribbean mythology, which is essentially female in Cliff's novel (ILMONEN, 2002, p. 118).

The narrator in *Abeng* is cautious to inform us that Nanny is not a product of imagination, and that there are documents proving that she is not fiction, which shows us the commitment of the author to renovate old historical notions: "Nanny was the magician of this revolution […] There is absolutely no doubt that she actually existed. And the ruins of her Nanny town remain difficult to reach" (CLIFF, 1995, p. 14).

Nanny Town had an autonomous dynamics; the rebels cultivated the land and kept herds of cattle in order to guarantee their subsistence, but their organization followed a bellicose logistics which embodied the rebellious and defying spirit of its members: "Described as 'active, hardy and brave', as 'masters of guerilla warfare' and as 'a troublesome wild people,' the Maroons were fiercely proud of their freedom and of their quasi-independent relationship with the government of British Jamaica" (GRANT, 2002, p. 17).

The main purpose of the rebels was to preserve their independence, but there were also incursions to free slaves who lived under the yoke and tyranny of the owners of the sugar plantations. The Maroons developed a trading system which counted on intermediaries who assisted them in exchanging the food they produced for weapons and fabric for clothes.

Besides attacking and burning entire plantations as a means to obtain more guns and food, the Maroons turned the slaves rescued into true warriors. Nanny Town was finally destroyed in 1734, after enduring a number of assaults promoted by the British Crown whose great aspiration was to extinguish the Maroons (ROGOZÍNSKI, 2000, p. 158).

Nanny joined her brother but, unlike him, she kept faithful to her ideals and beliefs and refused to negotiate with the enemies and betray her people's freedom. The rebellious spirit of Nanny is an inspiration for Clare when she starts to think about strategies of subversion to get out of her political alienation when she goes back to Jamaica in *No Telephone To Heaven.*

The Maroons War (1795-1796) was a remarkable historical fact in Jamaica. Historians affirm that some of the insurgent groups had served the interests of the plantation owners, capturing fugitive slaves and allying to the white men in order to fight against the power of the English Crown, which became more and more present on the island. Nevertheless, they still constituted a powerful collective voice that refused to be silenced. They were undoubtedly a symbol of resistance against the domination of the plantation owners and of struggle for justice and freedom. Their constant revolts were brave reactions that were gradually forgotten and omitted by the History written and transmitted by the ones who, for centuries freely exploited the slave workforce. By rescuing a symbolic warrior character and retelling the glories of a group of rebellious slaves, Cliff attempts to restore the pride and self-esteem of the black population through the accounts of how the fugitive slaves organized themselves to conspire and rebel against their oppressors.

Throughout *Abeng* we have contact with not only the history of the Maroons but also the hideous slave trade and its perversity. The history of Jamaica is unfolded before our eyes. The first event that denounces the traffic of slaves and its consequences is narrated in the beginning of the novel when we come across an episode in which, in 1958, in Kingston, while a hole is being dug next to a church, some workers find a coffin of huge proportions, made of lead and welded shut. There is also a brass plate affixed to the coffin with an inscription containing the information that in it there are the remains of a hundred plague victims, part of a shipload of slaves from the Gold Coast, who had contracted the plague from the rats on the vessel which had taken them to Jamaica: "Many others would have died onboard and their bodies dropped in the sea along the Middle Passage – the route across the Atlantic from Africa – or the Windward Passage – the route from the Atlantic to the islands of the Caribbean sea (CLIFF, 1995, p. 7).

This short account constitutes proof of the inhuman conditions in which the Africans were transported, like beasts, in the most possible precarious way, serving to a trade that was introduced in Jamaica back in 1509. According to data collected by Robin Blackburn, we can have a clear idea of the catastrophic dimension of the slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries:

> More than one million and a half captives died during the "middle passage" between Africa and the New World; a huge, although unknown number died before embarking; and once in the New World, between one tenth and one fifth of the slaves died within a year. The ones who survived had their lives drastically organized in a way that made it possible to extract from them the most possible, in terms of work (BLACKBURN, 2003, p. 15).

We learn that in the eighteenth century the number of slaves in Jamaica was ten times bigger than the number of white men. This imbalance represented a constant threat to the scarce white population. In this context, the control and disarticulation of the Maroons became a top priority for the English Crown. After the introduction of the superior quality of the sugar produced in Jamaica and consumed all over Europe, the island prospered becoming the most profitable of all the British colonies denominated "West Indies", and a strategic possession for England's enrichment (GRANT, 2002, p.19).

One of the most astonishing facts about that period of time in Jamaica is the disproportional mortality rate between the slaves who labored in the sugar plantations. In 1690 there could be found forty thousand slaves in Jamaica. Between 1690 and 1820, eight hundred thousand were imported; but in 1820, there were only three hundred and forty thousand (GRANT, 2002, p.19).

In the following quotation it is clear that, despite the superior number of slaves compared to the number of white people, escaping was something almost impossible to accomplish due to the constant surveillance the slaves were submitted to and their fear of the cruel punishments applied to the ones who dared to escape.

> Savage punishment invariably followed all slave rebellions, whether large or small. The planters slaughtered many slaves during the initial stages of fighting. Colonial courts killed rebel leaders through slow tortures – by progressive mutilation, slow burning, breaking on the wheel, or starvation in cages. They then dismembered the bodies of the dead slaves, leaving their severed heads to rot in public places (ROGOZÍNSKI, 2000, p. 164).

Nevertheless, the slaves did not give up and kept their struggle for freedom, by either confronting the orders their received through disobedience or resorting to violence, despite the

constant fright. According to the accounts of slave owners, the slaves refused to work consistently, regularly and efficiently. They also dragged their feet and worked slowly, pretended to be sick, and ran away to the woods. Despite almost inevitable recapture and savage flogging, most plantations always had one or more slaves absent without permission (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p. 155).

Disobedience and attempts to flee were not the only artifices used by slaves as a form of protest.

> Theft by slaves also was a fact of life for planters. Many slaves stole food because they were hungry, but others stole as a form of aggression against their owners. Slaves might deliberately sabotage their owner's property by damaging machinery, setting fire to cane fields, or wounding and poisoning animals. A few slaves even attacked whites, although slave codes punished such assaults with painful forms of death. More careful slaves sought to kill a particularly hated owner or overseer by using poison (ROGOZÍNSKI, 2000, p. 155).

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha comments on the brave and desperate acts of resistance performed by slaves, mainly the female ones, who got to the point of practicing infanticide as a means of claiming their children for themselves. The critic refers to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's accounts of forms of slave resistance in *Within the Plantation Household*, showing how common the practices of suicide, self-mutilation, murder and infanticide were among women who resorted to these drastic measures as a tool of self-definition (BHABHA, 1998, p. 942).

> Unlike acts of confrontation against the master or the overseer which were resolved within the household context, infanticide was recognized as an act against the system and at least acknowledged the slave woman's legal standing in the public sphere. Infanticide was seen to be an act against the master's property - against his surplus profits[…] that led some of the more desperate to feel that, by killing an infant they loved, they would be in some way reclaiming it as their own (BHABHA, 1998, p. 942).

In *Abeng,* Cliff exposes a traumatic experience that was rampant in the plantations: sexual violence against the slaves. The author approaches that issue by portraying the forced relationship that the landowner Justice imposes upon Inez, an eighteen-year-old black girl who had not gone through the humiliating ritual of having her body exposed or her teeth examined in a slave auction. She could not be considered a slave, officially, since she had been born from an Indian mother and her father was a Maroon who kept a small farm. Nonetheless, she falls prey to Justice when he finds her in his court waiting for her trial for having stolen a riffle and ammunition from a plantation, in order to help the maroons. Her

punishment was to have her hands maimed, but Justice intervenes and takes her home with the sole purpose of raping her over and over. Inez gets pregnant, but following the tradition of her people she has an abortion, since they believed that a child conceived from the rape of a white man, would be born without a soul. The narrator explains that: “A baby, Inez’s people believed, was sacred, but a baby conceived in buckra rape would have no soul – with this Mma Ali agreed (CLIFF, 1993, p. 35).

In this episode a key character that assists Inez and teaches her how to heal her soul is Mma Alli, the Amazonian slave, another symbol of resistance, like Nanny. She also kept the healing secrets of her people alive and practiced rituals that were evoked to aid the slaves in their hardest times in the plantations. Mma Alli was a spiritual guide especially for the female slaves, teaching them how to preserve and please their bodies, despite the constant brutality of the frequent rapes characteristic of life in the plantations. “Mma Alli is the embodiment of the power of the erotic […] She transmits African folk traditions as part of her identity as a woman who ‘had never lain with a man.’ She teaches other Black women imprisoned on the plantations to ‘keep their bodies as their own’ (CHANCY, 1997, p. 145).

If we draw a parallel between the Jamaican and the Brazilian societies, we realize that the abuse of black women was prevalent in all slave societies. In her book *O Negro Como Arlequim,* Brazilian historian and literary critic Flora Sussekind points out how the place the female slaves occupied in the patriarchal slave society was well defined in popular sayings such as: “Whites for marrying, Blacks for working, Mulatas for fornicating” (SUSSEKIND, 1982, p. 31).

Myriam Chancy writes about Stella Dadzie’s essay “Searching for the Invisible Woman: Slavery and Resistance in Jamaica,” where Dadzie investigates the role of black women in resisting enslavement and about the severe punishments they had to endure in the plantations. Dadzie also points out how suicide, infanticide, and abortions were strategies of rebellion through the use of ancient African knowledge:

> Enslaved African women were mistreated as cruelly as were men: in either case, labor and punishment for rebellion were enforced without regard for sex difference. Women were whipped as were men, were made to suffer miscarriages because of physical punishments, and executed. Dadzie writes of a notation by a Reverend Henry Coor, in his memoirs, no doubt, of “witnessing the nailing of a house-wench’s ear to a tree for having broken a plate (CHANCY, 1997, p. 182).

Carole Boyce Davies also underscores the indifference and severity that black women had to deal with in the slave society and how the accounts of their experiences of violence and

rape were either misinterpreted or distrusted by historiography. She asserts that no one listened to a black woman when she said that she was in pain, and reminds us that they had no rights. Although in all of the black female slave narratives, the history of sexual harassment of black women by both white and black men has been written, "the reality is that the history of black women's experience under oppression was constructed as a lie, even in the face of evidence like a blue-eyed baby who looked just like its master […] their bodies were for the taking (DAVIES, 1995, p. 5).

The period that followed the abolition, when the slaves were literally left at the mercy of their former masters, is also narrated in *Abeng*.

> So slavery-in-fact was abolished, and the freedom which followed on abolition turned into veiled slavery, the model of the rest of the western world […] Their enslavement had become an inconvenience – and now it was removed. All the forces which worked to keep these people slaves now worked to keep them poor. And poor most of them remained (CLIFF, 1995, p. 28).

The narrator shows us how the end of slavery in Jamaica was only possible because the English Crown found in the production of soap, a most profitable business. One soap manufacturer in Manchester, England, hung a sign in his shop window that said: "BUY OUR PALM OIL SOAP AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY. Clear to the point – the perfect Victorian marriage of economy and altruism" (CLIFF, 1955, p. 27).

While the plantation owners received financial compensation for each freed slave, the slaves did not receive any money or land to cultivate after so many years of brutal exploitation. There was no plan to integrate the former slaves into society. The slaves were illiterate, and if it depended on society they would remain that way, which would certainly decrease their chances to make a living. After the abolition the destiny of the slaves was doomed by the lack of political interest in continuing the movement to free them. The former slaves had no food, shelter, or means to survive. They were exposed to great misery and distress. Although emancipation gave them the right to choose where and when they wished to work, without education and training many were compelled to remain on the plantations. "It was not sufficient to be legally free from slavery; they had to be free from unjust bonds, free to lead normal, healthy lives of their own choosing (SHERLOCK, 1998, p. 235).

In Cliff's novel, the reader also realizes that the situation of the children of the freed slaves did not change much when compared to the deplorable work conditions their parents had had to endure as slaves. Miss Mattie, Clare's grandmother, struggles to forget her painful childhood: she had no choice but to work in the plantations.

> The slaves were freed by the Crown in 1834, and Miss Mattie was not born until 1892, but she knew the kind of slavery which had followed on emancipation. She was sent out by her mother to cut cane when she was ten years old, and worked beside other children and some adults in British-owned fields at a wage never to surpass threepence per day, in a day of twelve hours, in a week of six days (CLIFF, 1995, p. 141).

Myriam Chancy compares the situation of the black people following the abolition of slavery with their condition today, underscoring the current discourse that exposes the unchanging racist colonial practices:

> Even after Britain's abolition of slavery in 1834, slavery continued in various forms in Britain and its former colonies: women of color occupy the same jobs they held before emancipation as the world's caretakers: Black people are still shouting slogans for liberation: "Let my people go" transformed into "We are here because you were there" (CHANCY, 1997, p. 141).

Besides bringing to light the insurgence of the slaves against the subservience to which they were forced to comply, in entitling her book *Abeng*, Michelle Cliff invokes an instrument that was used by both the slaves and their overseers, but with contrary purposes.

The definition of the word *Abeng* is given in the beginning of the novel as extra-textual material, which prepares the readers for the mood of the narrative that emphasizes the potential for resistance of the slaves: "*Abeng* is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the canefields in the West Indies. The *abeng* had another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another" (CLIFF, 1995, p.1).

The 'Abeng', then, incorporates the tension present between the two classes and their irreconcilable interests. Wendy Walters points out that: "In fact the abeng of the title is an instrument of both oppression and resistance as it is used by slaveholders to call the slaves to the canefields and by Maroon armies to pass messages to one another" (WALTERS, 2005, p. 40).

In the novel we are made aware of the damage caused by the slave system implemented in Jamaica, on two different levels. If we take into consideration the social level, it transformed Jamaica into a racist, unequal, and classicist nation. When we think of the psychological level, the descendent of the slaves, who are the bearers of the history of oppression experienced by their ancestors, have to deal with the painful process of building a black identity in a country that used the colonial discourse erected upon the belief in racial difference, to enslave their people.

In his essay "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", Homi Bhabha theorizes about the manipulation of discourse in order to subjugate peoples. Such discourse is adopted in order to twist the image and self-image of the colonized in a way that makes them vulnerable to domination, as Homi Bhabha asserts:

> The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. […] Therefore, despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible (BHABHA, 1999, p. 295).

The history of resilience and defiance of the slaves that is told by the narrator of *Abeng* is not the one that is taught at Clare's school. Nevertheless, Clare is able to see the consequences of slavery when she spends her vacation with her grandmother and has closer contact with the descendants of the slaves and her own darker side of the family. As she grows up and meets the ones who are willing to share with her the inconvenient truth that Jamaica's history has become, she has access to the embarrassing secrets of her land. In the following passage, Clare's aunt, Mrs. Winifred, tells Clare about the slaves who were thrown away from the ship that was transporting them, so that the insurance money could be collected:

> "Do you know about the ship called the *Zong* ? " She paused only briefly, not waiting for an answer. "The *Zong* was a slave ship and the captain spilled the living bodies of Africans over the side, saying that they were infected. They were not infected. The captain collected insurance money for their souls. That is the kind of thing that went on here day after day (CLIFF, 1984, p. 165).

The narrator of *Abeng* assumes a didactic tone and takes on the role of a professor whose mission is to teach readers – whether they are Jamaicans or not – the lost history that was buried along with the bones of the slaves that were found next to the churchyard in the beginning of *Abeng*. Such critical reconstruction of history reveals the distorted perception of historical facts that characters who are either representative of power or subjugated by it have. The narrator is constantly interpreting, reviewing, and retelling the past of Jamaica calling our attention to the land's brutal exploitation of slave labor. On the other hand, Clare's tutors, in their blind devotion to the British Crown, are always ready to reinforce and legitimate the official history of Jamaica that focuses on the development that colonization brought to the island, instead of adopting a critical point of view. Whenever they are questioned about the more sensitive topics, Clare's teachers eagerly justify the violent practices employed by the

British Empire in the colonies by praising its accomplishments and grandeur, forgetting to point out that none of the riches the British gained from Jamaica stayed on the island. Critic Myriam Chancy states that:

> Clare's knowledge of her history remains clouded by the Britified education she receives at St. Catherine's School for Girls, where she learns little about the island's indigenous and slave history because it has been replaced with the apparently well intentioned history of the British Empire (CHANCY, 1997, p. 146).

It is exactly that artificial selection of historical facts that favors one version over the other, made by the ones who have the credentials to pass it on, that Cliff's novels are committed to disarticulating. The narrator rescues the accounts of abuse and cruelty which should not, under any circumstances, be replaced in our collective imaginary by a remote glorious past that does not correspond to the brutal treatment given to the Africans in their traumatic diasporic experience of being displaced from their original land. Neglecting that history would be a denial of not only true past events but also of the social and economic consequences that are faced every day by millions of victims of that system.

Paul Gilroy argues that in retelling the histories that focus on the experiences of death, loss, exile, and journeys, it is possible to reconstruct a common history and social memory, which are crucial for the reconstruction of black identity.

Being aware of the importance of revisiting and revising the history of Jamaica, the narrator of *Abeng* is constantly bringing to the surface the indignant past of violent practices in order to expose and criticize the alienation of the Jamaican population towards their own history. The sentence "they did not know" is constantly repeated throughout the narrative:

> They did not know that some slaves worked with their faces locked in masks of tin, so they would not eat the sugar cane as they cut. Or that there were few white women on the island during slavery, and so the grandmothers of these people sitting in a church on a Sunday evening during mango season, had been violated again and again by the very men who whipped them. The rape of Black women would have existed with or without the presence of white women, of course, but in Jamaica there was no pretense of civility – all was in the open (CLIFF, 1995, p. 19).

Writing about the novel, Myriam Chancy makes a connection between the bodies of slaves that were found buried and the ongoing erasure of the history of colonialism in Jamaica:

> The coffered remains of enslaved Africans imagined by Cliff in Abeng are dumped into the sea after their startling exhumation and become fossilized, forgotten, and "insignificant."

> Clare’s father makes no such connection. He speaks of the Caribbean rising from the sea, […] and passes on his word of make-believe to Clare, who, at twelve, does not yet question his erasure of the history of colonialism and of Jamaican revolts […] (CHANCY, 1997, p. 144).

Clare’s father, who can be seen as a spokesman for the official history, shows that he has learned his lesson well. Critic Kaisa Ilmonen asserts that Boy is the “bearer of the hegemonic version of history. His reading of history is Eurocentric and colonial, like the history taught in school” (ILMONEN, 2002, p. 116). It is interesting to note that the choice of his name, “Boy,” is another indication of colonial presence.

In Clare’s history class, the students are taught that their ancestors were pagan and that slavery was already a common practice in Africa, as if the Europeans had just appropriated an African tradition of putting each other in chains. The narrator states: “They were given the impression that the whites who brought them here from the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast were only copying a West African custom. As though the whites had not named the Slave Coast themselves” (CLIFF, 1995, p.18).

In the following quotation we have access to a small fragment that reveals the real situation of the slaves who were captured by rival tribes in Africa, which proves that a comparison between the slave system practiced in Africa and the one performed by the colonizers is completely incongruent. Justifying one practice by another would be irresponsible and inaccurate.

> The congregation did not know that African slaves in Africa had been primarily household servants. They were not seasoned. They were not worked in canefields. The system of labor was not industrialized. There was in fact no comparison between the two states of servitude: that practiced by the tribal societies of West Africa and that organized by the Royal African Company of London, chartered by the Crown (CLIFF, 1995, p. 18).

In her book *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, Bell Hooks quotes Paulo Freire’s views on the importance of defining oneself as an active subject in order to fight alienation and resist manipulation:

> We talked about the way in which every liberatory struggle initiated by groups of people who have been seen as objects begins with a revolutionary process wherein they assert that they are subjects. It is this process that Paulo Freire stresses: ‘we cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become subjects.’ Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story (FREIRE *apud* HOOKS, 1989, p. 43).

By offering a rewriting of the history that is considered to be the legitimate one, Cliff incites her readers to have a critical approach to the history of Jamaica and oppose any discourse that stereotypes the slaves and their descendants as passive, inferior, and politically

disengaged. Cliff's writings can be read and interpreted as cultural weapons used to contest and expose exploitation, discrimination, and colonial practices that are still taking place through the racial discourses that are adopted by politicians, teachers, and citizens not only of former colonies but also of nations that are hosting a great number of immigrants coming from the countries they once exploited. This writing of a counterhegemonic history is a project that congregates many Caribbean writers who find in literature a means to awaken in their countrymen the pride of their origins that is constantly being weakened by prejudiced and ignorant historic notions and biased discourses. Cliff's process of construction of a postcolonial identity through the retelling of a colonial past that excluded from their history the suffering of the colonized Jamaicans is a concern that is shared by a number of writers today. That tendency indicates that new approaches to historiography can be an effective means of reclaiming an identity through the deconstruction of the oppressive discourse established by the official colonial Western history. When Cliff offers the counter-narratives of resistance embedded in the struggle of the slaves, their myths and folklore, she is healing the souls of the Jamaican people. In a way she becomes a contemporary sorceress in a movement that resembles the traditional healing rituals performed by Nanny, the female healer in *Abeng*.

3 DIASPORIC FRAGMENTATIONS

3.1 Diasporic Savages

The etymology of the Greek word diaspora, which is a combination of the term *diasperien,* from *-dia*, "across", and *-sperien,* "to sow or scatter seeds", elucidates its meaning. Diaspora refers to the dispersal or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland. It has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile. It first appeared in the Hebrew scriptures to describe the Jews living in exile from the homeland of Palestine. According to scholars Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur's defininition: "Diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries" (BRAZIEL ; MANNUR, 2003, p. 1). The Black African diaspora that began in the sixteenth century with the slave trade, dispersed Africans from different locations into the "New World", which referred to North and South America, the Caribbean and everywhere slave force was in demand. Diasporas therefore can be voluntary or involuntary.

In the early twenty-first century, the theorization of diaspora has been concerned with not only mass migration movements but also "the multiple waves of political refugees seeking asylum, and the reconfiguration of nation states" (BRAZIEL ; MANNUR, 2003, p. 3).

Diasporas are one of the most common and debated contemporary phenomena of the twenty first century. They cause a huge social, economic, and political impact on the societies involved in that process and the issues related to them have been analyzed in academic journals devoted to ethnic, national and (trans)national matters. Diasporas originate complex nets of communities that come mainly from the former European colonies that were exploited by imperial powers, and then were left without any resources to cope with the competitive global markets of our days.

The importance of studying diasporas lies in the fact that these movements are reshaping and discrediting fixed concepts such as national and individual identities, which have been undisturbedly dwelling in our collective imaginary for so long. The migration of people from former colonies into the countries that once oppressed them is producing true cultural revolutions. The immigrants arrive bringing with them new dialects, scents, foods, perspectives of the world, and versions of history.

Although diasporas represent painful journeys, since they displace materially and psychologically their protagonists, they also give those subjects a chance to improve their lives and create liberating work to voice histories of traumas and losses, which is the case of writers engaged in denouncing the effects of experiences triggered by diasporas.

Critics Jana Evans and Anita Mannur mention the relevance of diaspora studies and its contribution to the creation of a more tolerant and equal world composed by established generations of diasporic populations and future generations descending wholly, or in part, from immigrants. The questions they raise are paramount for us to understand the negotiations, adaptations, tensions and conflicts resulting from the interaction between different races, ethnicities, or colors that are taking place on a regular basis everywhere there is a diasporic presence. They also emphasize how crucial it is to investigate how the immigrants will process the memories they carry of their homelands, with all their ambivalence; how they will relate to the cultural heritage of their parents; if they will accept or reject aspects of their home country culture; and the types of alliances they will establish. In short, it is relevant "to not only theorize how identities are constructed and consolidated, but also to analyze how these diasporic identities are practiced, lived, and experienced" (EVANS ; MANNUR, 2003, p. 9).

There are countless scholars in various fields, from literature, sociology, and anthropology, to film studies, queer theory, and ethnic studies, dealing with diasporas these days. Each contributes with his/her insightful view to diaspora studies. Some have personal diasporic experiences that approximate them to their object of study, which is the case of Stuart Hall who was born in Jamaica but has been living and working in England since the 1950s. Hall is one of the founders of British Cultural Studies and is considered one of England's leading cultural theorists. Other theorists, like Carole Boyce Davies, write about diasporas using a more feminist approach. She shows a great concern in describing and understanding the impact those diaporas have on women's lives and identities.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora,* critic Avtar Brah investigates some of the problems faced by the ones who are impelled to leave their country of origin. She cites economic inequalities within and between regions, expanding mobility of capital, people's desire to pursue opportunities that might improve their life chances, political strife, wars, and famine as some of the factors that remain at the heart of the impetus behind migrations (BRAH, 1996, p.178).

Wendy Walters, who examines the possibility of feeling at home in diaspora, adds that "the reasons that many black writers have left their home have everything to do with the material experiences, as well as the cultural memories, of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary racism (WALTERS, 2005, p. XV).

In categorizing Diasporas, anthropologist James Clifford, rescues professor William Safran's defining model used to classify the diasporic experience and points out that the main features of diaspora are "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 305). Nevertheless, Clifford points out that not all these features may be part of a given diaspora experience.

Stuart Hall, who considers the complete assimilation of the diasporic subject in the new culture a fantasy, suggests that the diasporic subjects who have been dislocated from their country of origin have no illusion of returning to the past (HALL, 1992, p. 310).

In his studies about Diasporas, Clifford acknowledges the potential for resistance and reaction against the dissolution of cultural diversity that diasporas promote. He analyses diasporic cultures being produced by regimes of political domination and economic inequality, and emphasizes how these violent processes of displacement nurture a strong sense of community and cultures of resistance that create counter-discourses that oppose homogenizing tendencies. Clifford also debates two notions of diaspora conceptions: one by Kobena Mercer, and another by Paul Gilroy. According to Clifford, Mercer offers a more anti-essentialist version of diaspora. He defines it as a site of multiple displacements and re-articulations of identity, without privilege to race, cultural tradition, class, gender, or sexuality, whereas Gilroy's genealogy of British "blackness" continues to privilege an "African" origin (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 319).

Clifford points out that although there are different approaches when the term diaspora comes into play; each one of them represents a particular historical moment in cultural politics and they are not finally resolvable. In his criticism, he is able to highlight what they lack. Clifford talks about how the suppression of the female experience was a common practice in the accounts of the diasporic journeys. He is the first critic to address the gendered aspect of contemporary diasporas. He also problematizes Gilroy's insistence on placing the Afro-Caribbean diaspora at the center of his study when Gilroy traces the origins of the *black Britain*, offering a representation of the Black diaspora that is circumscribed to a specific historical experience and social formation. He does not include the black South America and

the hybrid Hispanic/black cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America in his projection when writing from a North/Atlantic/European location. In addition:

> The specific experiences of plantation slavery, emancipation, South-North mobility, urbanization, and race/ethnic relations have a regional, and indeed a "national," focus that cannot be subsumed by an Atlanticist map/history of crossings. While the roots and routes of African American cultures clearly intersect with the Caribbean, they have been historically shaped into distinct patterns of struggle and marks of authenticity (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 320).

James Clifford also mentions the impetus of the diasporic subjects to reconcile the different references received from their host country with the influences or memories received either directly from their home country or from their parents or grandparents if they are not the first generation of the diaspora. He shows how important it is to consciously struggle for the maintenance of their original source of identity and dialogue with the culture of the host country. These negotiations would help them feel more integrated in the country they live. When a lost sense of belonging is rescued, the difficulties and sometimes shame, characteristic of the immigrant who is perceived as part of an overpowered minority, can be changed into cultural pride and self-respect.

> And the black diaspora culture currently being articulated in postcolonial Britain is concerned to struggle for different ways to be "British" – ways to stay and be different, to be British and something else complexly related to Africa and the Americas, to shared histories of enslavement, racist subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance, and political rebellion (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 308).

Diasporas are simultaneously collective and individual, and terms such as "Caribbean diaspora" are criticized for not particularizing the unique experience lived by the immigrants from the different countries that compose the Caribbean and for erasing the cultural differences and idiosyncrasies characteristic of each nation. Scholar Jana Braziel who studies diasporas and Caribbean politics comments:

> Caribbean diaspora, as an organizing rubric, not only obscures nationality, class, race, gender, sexuality, and political economy as striating diasporas and diasporic communities, but it also smacks of naiveté given several undeniable facts: there is not one Caribbean diaspora, but many; one cannot properly speak of the Caribbean diaspora but must necessarily talk about the Haitian, the Dominican, the Cuban […] and so forth (BRAZIEL, 2006, p. 154).

Stuart Hall is well known for his analysis of the Caribbean diaspora. He elaborates his theory from a perspective that conceives the Caribbean as the conflation of "multiple presences and absences that are constitutive of cultural identities." One of the traits of that complex region constituted by diasporas since its birth is the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that frame Caribbeans as one people. That analogous genesis unites them and gives them a sense of bonding. Hall affirms: This "oneness," underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of "Caribbeanness," of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light" (HALL, 2003, p. 234). He argues that Caribbean identities are defined through continuity and discontinuity with the past, represented by slavery. The Africans came from different countries, tribal communities, villages, languages and Gods, but the diaspora united them. When slavery ended, indentured labor from Asia inaugurated a new wave of immigration, adding more cultural and racial diversity to the already existent heterogeneity of which the Europeans who owned the plantations were also part. Caribbean history has been defined by diasporas. The ones of the past and the ones of the present (HALL, 2003, p. 237).

Ruel Johnson, the youngest winner of the Guyana Prize for literature elucidates that the first African diaspora was due to the globalized nature of the sugar trade which took to the Caribbean slaves and indentured laborers with identities that were located somewhere else. Today, "the Caribbeans have been leaving their homelands, some in search of El Dorado of metropolitan wealth, some for higher learning, some for the sheer adventure of it". He points out that the differences between the two include the connection to home:

> While our ancestors suffered from a profound cultural loss because of the strictures of plantation life and the very real distance away from home, the Caribbean Diaspora of today have not only the benefit of social freedom, but also that of a world made virtually smaller by the advent of advanced communications technologies, the Internet in particular. [5]

He also emphasizes that the Caribbean people of today are leaving as one; therefore, there is a more cohesive sense of identity, whereas their ancestors had gone to the Caribbean from many diasporas. He also points out that another significant difference between the two diasporas is the level of education of the ones who are leaving the Caribbean. While the migrants who are leaving the Caribbean today are ambitious and savvy, the original

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[5] Source: http://www.caricom.org/jsp/projects/uwicaricomproject/caribbean_diaspora.jsp

immigrants to the Caribbean were the dispossessed of their home countries, and unskilled laborers that had to work grinding, manual jobs.

The observations that the writer makes suggest the singularities of each diaspora. Avtar Brah also points out how crucial it is to understand that each empirical diaspora must be analyzed in its historical specificity, and that the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. On the contrary, it is materialized through the everyday life, in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively (BRAH, 1996, p.183).

In her discussion about the rewriting of home and exile in western feminist discourse, Caren Kaplan discusses diasporas through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's use of the term "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization". Those concepts are applied to characterize the process of displacement of identities, persons and meanings in a postmodern system where we are constantly being swept away by frenetic cultural and social changes resulting from diasporas. The concept was created in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), and it may mean to take the control and order away from a land or place (territory) that is already established. When English peasants were banished from common lands by the Enclosure Acts (1709-1869), to benefit private landlords, for instance, they suffered that process of deterritorialization. They use the term "deterritorialization" "to locate this moment of alienation and exile in language and literature." That feeling of non-belongingness produces the urge to recreate, and subvert notions of value, canon, genre, etc… in writing (KAPLAN, 1987, p. 188). When talking specifically about the experience that women have with that process of deterritorialization, she reminds us that since women have always received a male perspective of the world, reading and writing "in the interstices of masculine culture", that experience is quite familiar for them. This marginality occupied by women gave them a particular way of seeing reality and experimenting with new forms of language (KAPLAN, 1987, p. 187).

After this displacement from your culture and race, which takes place in diasporic movements, in order to undo what has been done, regain your identity and reclaim your culture there has to be a process of reterritorialization. Reterritorialization usually follows when the symbols and rituals that have been erased and destroyed are replaced. One of the strategies to achieve that is through the domain of the language of the oppressor. Through story-telling and imagination we are able to fill in the gaps that composed fragmented identities and rebuild a new and powerful identity. When we come to terms with our own past

and acknowledge and create our own history we gain a historical consciousness, a voice to redefine our identities.

3.2 A way in Diaspora

The concept of Home, which is present in postcolonial studies as well as in the two novels chosen for my project, is a crucial one for the study and understanding of diasporic subjects. Philosopher Roger Scruton discusses how paramount it is for any individual to be able to identify with some greater arrangement which he/she recognizes instinctively as Home in order for him/her to function autonomously (HALL, 1992, p. 612). Without that source of identification, the individual will experience a feeling of fragmentation and loss of a stable sense of self. That instability is responsible for feelings of anxiety, disintegration, and calamity, which in many cases lead to depression, alienation, and self-depreciation.

Assuming that it is not possible to think about modern societies without considering the influence of diasporic movements and how identities are being defined and influenced by the immigrant's sense of Home, this is a topic worth of investigation.

When we think about the contemporary diasporas, the referent Home plays a crucial role in the negotiations that take place in the process of adopting and accepting a new country, whether it is a permanent or a temporary one. In that diasporic context, Home becomes a fundamental piece of an extremely intricate process of identity construction. Critic Carole Boyce Davies, who does a great deal of research on disasporic black women, underscores that the perspective of what one considers Home changes once the immigrant moves away from the referent that has been once a fixed and safe source of identity.

> Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it (DAVIES, 1994, p. 113).

Avtar Brah comments about the relationship that the diasporic subject establishes with the idea of Home, and its importance in the definition of his/her identity. She declares that:

> Contrary to general belief, not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return. Moreover, the multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporian

> subjectivity is 'rootless'. Processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars par excellence of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process (BRAH, 1996, p.197).

Avtar Brah shows us that the loss of a fixed Home in diasporas and the ability to adjust to a new scenario that diasporic subjects demonstrate, offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins. It would be too simplistic to believe that all diasporic community leaves their home country believing or hoping that they will one day be able to return. Immigrants make adaptations and elect new Homes as they feel at home. Nonetheless, feeling at home is always subjected to being accepted or not by "natives."

Although the diasporic process is collective, it is composed by multiple subjectivities; therefore, the relationship established with Home is equally heterogeneous. As a result, it is not possible to make any assumptions about the accuracy of that experience. We can only observe the different tendencies involving the affinities developed between diasporic subjects and their Homes and come to provisional conclusions.

The feeling of homelessness can be manifested in different levels; there is psychic and physical homelessness and either can happen as a tragic result of the capitalist, post-modern condition that displaces people from all over the world not leaving to them many choices but to abandon their homes to look for a better life condition abroad.

One of the kinds of homelessness that we see in *Abeng* is described by Carole Boyce Davies as a result of the exploitation that took place in Jamaica when the English empire took possession of their lands, disfigured its landscape, imposed their language, culture and religion, and once they left, the dispossessed were forced to live in ghettoes or shantytowns.

When Stuart Hall talks about the transitory and fragmented condition of the postmodern subject, composed from a dialogue between references taken from different intertwining cultures that influence each other, he emphasizes how, in this shifting scenario, the search for a fixed identity or a fixed home would be fruitless and illusory. Hall proposes that instead of making a choice between returning to his roots or erasing the traces of a foreign culture through the process of homogenization, in his quest for an authentic identity, the subject should make a constant translation between cultures, languages, and traditions. In that sense in the moment he accepts his condition as being the product of different histories and cultures, he is able to flirt with the notion of belonging to different Homes and no particular Home simultaneously. (HALL, 2005, p.629).

Home, then could embody the confluence of elements constituent of modern identities. It could be seen as a space that is able to assimilate different ethnical ingredients,

becoming a multicultural, hybrid and syncretic place, almost cannibalistic, where the subject could filter and appropriate everything that is beneficial for his process of identity formation and promote a kind of transculturation. When defining transculturation critic Angel Rama comments:

> Entendemos que o vocábulo ‘transculturação’ expressa melhor as diferentes fases do processo de trânsito de uma cultura para outra, porque este não consiste somente em adquirir uma cultura, que é o que em rigor indica o vocábulo anglo-americano ‘aculturação’, mas que o processo implica também, necessariamente a perda ou desarraigamento de uma cultura precedente, o que se poderia dizer uma parcial desaculturação, e, além disso, significa a conseguinte criação de novos fenômenos culturais que poderiam ser denominados ‘neoculturação’ (RAMA *apud* CUNHA 2007, p.259).

The Caribbean has always been the result of the different cultures it hosted and continue to receive immigrants from Africa, Asia and Europe, since ‘Africa’ has been joined by the East Indians and the Chinese. Stuart Hall supports the idea of transculturation promoted by Ortiz when he theorizes that modern diasporas are teaching lessons of transculturation. The critic explains:

> Through transculturation subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant metropolitan culture. It is a process of the ‘contact zone’, a term that invokes “the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures […] whose trajectories now intersect (HALL, 1998, p. 6).

When it comes to the Home of immigrants, that many times promise to preserve a certain culture of origin and protect a family from external influences, we could consider it an adequate and even ideal place to suffer a process of transculturation. This view would move away from the classic notion that defines it as a homogeneous, fixed and intact place. Ella Shohat, defends that: ‘“Hybridity’ and ‘syncretism’ allow negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positionings that result from displacement, immigration, and exile, without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and originary lines” (SHOHAT, 2006, p. 244).

This mutant relationship with Homes that is constantly being reviewed and reformulated is symptomatic of the complexity that its conceptualization represents. In our current globalized world, characterized by frenetic diasporic movements, the notion of a stable home should be constantly revisited, reassessed, and transformed. The idea of Home

evokes in us a peaceful and conciliatory environment, whether as a nation, or as a place that congregates a harmonious and protective family. That idealized Home can be illusory and deceitful, and should be questioned especially in the diasporic context, when the idealization of Home might nurture a fantasy that can change into melancholy in the ones who are far away from that security. Theoretician Rosemary George, comments that:

> Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognized as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing. A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions (GEORGE, 1999, p. 9).

Carine Mardorossian observes that most of the contemporary Caribbean women writers who are producing their novels from the heart of colonial and neocolonial centers, whether it is England or the United States, avoid that fantasy of an untouched Home and do not relate to their country of origin as “home”. On the contrary, those women identify with transcultural experiences. (MARDOROSSIAN, 2005, p. 1).

Although it is mandatory for the survival of the diasporic subject to learn how to reassess home, this is a delicate process that must withstand the eradication of traditions and customs that are crucial elements in not only the process of identity construction of the disporic individual but also in the maintenance of a healthy and respectful dialogue between the different cultural elements that are part of a multicultural society.

> The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home. This sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing. Many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now claiming diasporic origins and affiliations (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 310).

Identities become multiple in the diaspora milieu. Hall describes how many Caribbeans become Caribbean in London, for instance, when being away from home awakens in them the need to recreate and reinforce an identity that was not so vivid in their country of origin. Hall talks about the elements at play in this tricky process of identity construction being away from home: “alongside an associative connection with a particular island ‘home’ there are other centripetal forces; there is the West-Indianness that they share with other West Indian migrants, the similarities with other so-called ethnic minority populations, emergent ‘black British’ identities, etc…” (HALL, 1998, p. 2).The complexities that diasporas pose are not limited to the host country of the immigrants. Many returnees find reconnecting with the

societies of their birth an experience that causes a feeling far from familiarization. “Many miss the cosmopolitan rhythms of life to which they have become acclimatized. Many feel that ‘home’ has changed beyond all recognition”. Hall theorizes about the kind of cultural identity that emanates from diasporas when we think of the Caribbean. He makes us think about the irony of the challenge that is to create unity from diversity. If we think of the paradox that the task to maintain the indivisibility and sameness that the concept of a cultural identity suggests, from the dislocations and fragmentations that diasporas represent, we understand that such process is nothing but simple. Although many Caribbeans nurture the wish to return, which acquires an almost mythical tone of redemption, a return that would be able to “heal all rupture and repair every violent breach, a hope that has become condensed into a sort of foundational myth” (HALL, 1998, p. 4), this return will never be to an unchanged locality.

Michelle Cliff speaks from the marginality that postcolonial writers inhabit. Her diasporic condition, especially because she received the colonized education imposed by England, enables her to have a perspective from the inside and from the outside the margin. As Karen Kaplan comments:

> In *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* Michelle Cliff describes the process of finding a social space to inhabit that will not deny any of the complicated parts of her identity and history. Radically deterritorialized from a Caribbean culture and a race by a family conspiracy of silence and denial, she explores the parameters of identity and the limits of privilege. Separated from her home and family by geography, education, and experience, Cliff articulates the boundaries between exile and belonging (KAPLAN, 1987, p. 195).

In *No Telephone To Heaven*, Boy believes that his family might be able to build a new home abroad in a country that promises the benefits of a thriving economy that is able to accommodate people from all over the world. This fantasy is appealing enough for Boy Savage to leave his tainted past of excessive gambling and drinking in Jamaica behind, a past very similar to Cliff’s father’s, and join the great number of immigrants who move away from the poverty and instability faced in their countries of origin, not realizing yet that those promises are subject to a strict racial code. In the novel, their trip to the U.S, which Clare’s mother faces as an escape from reality, and her father as a sweet adventure, takes place in 1960, when Clare is fourteen, at a time when the South was still heavily segregated, despite advances concerning the Civil Rights movement.

That difference in dealing with what those journeys represent is characteristic of the diasporic process and is present in the dilemmas that the characters from Cliff's novels undergo. Clare's mother nurtures the nostalgia for Jamaica that is typical of the ones who are unable to fit in the new environment and comply with its rules. Clare's father, on the other hand, is determined to make the United States his new home no matter how long it will take or how many concessions he will have to make.

Clare and her parents have to learn how to deal with the pressures of discrimination inflicted upon them as they learn to redefine home, in an endless process of "becoming" that is inherent to the rootless condition of hybrid subjects. For Boy, home becomes "the lived experience of a locality" (BRAH, 1996, p. 192), whereas for Kitty, home becomes a mythic place of desire and eventual return.

In the United States, Kitty visits shops that sell Jamaican products searching for traces of Home. She wants to have contact with the smells, colors, and language she left behind. In the following passage we can see how the brief contact she has with her references in the Jamaican grocery store she usually goes to, is able to temporarily restore her dignity, and reassure her identity which is constantly being undermined in the US.

> Kitty mastered the route by subway and returned with mangoes, yams, cho-cho, saltfish, plantains, callaloo, goat-meat, and Jamaican curry to rub it with. She came home with these things laden in her arms, as if to say, Family, this is for you. In these shops she broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice, even as she brushed the loose dirt off the yam-skin, imagining its origin in the bush, stroked the rough green lips where the cho-cho split, stuck her finger in the sap where the mango had been joined to the tree, remembering how it would burn and raise a sore (CLIFF, 1996, p. 65).

The attachment Kitty has towards her homeland references is constantly urging her to return to Jamaica, and the experiences she goes through as an immigrant are decisive in her resolution to leave her husband and the country that failed to integrate her. The most significant episodes in Kitty's diasporic adventure are her arrival to the United States and the segregation she suffers while working at a laundromat. As soon as the Savages arrive in the United States they are greeted with intolerance and racism. Boy, having a lighter skin color than Kitty's, takes all the necessary precautions to hide his wife whenever they have to check into an inn. Boy is interrogated by a mere employee at their first stop about his origin, his color, his intentions, as if he had no right to be there. The motelkeeper declares: "Now, you wouldn't by any chance be colored folks, would you? Because if you're niggers you can't stay here. You ain't welcome. It ain't legal" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 55).

Those questions are felt with the same weight of a trial and answered with the same seriousness and prudence a convicted waiting for his final judgment would have answered them. Besides that, they are also psychologically assaulted by the racist signs Clare's family encounters alongside the roads they travel sending messages such as: "Racial self-respect is not bigotry", or "You are in Klan country" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 58).

Boy feels the need to identify and present himself as the direct descendent of slave owners not to be taken for a black man, while his wife feels the consequences brought by the stigma of being a black woman in a country more racist than hers.

> Kitty knew damn well why Boy took secondary roads and could not seem to find a bathroom when one was needed, so that they used the countryside more often than not. Why they avoided restaurants and bought their food in general stores. Why he made all the arrangements at the motels and suggested they keep to their rooms. She told him she was no fool. Then he told her it was not so much different in Jamaica, you know. "But at least there is not so much *hate,*" she whispered into the air in front of her face. "There are no signs in Jamaica."
> "Don't be so sure, darlin'," he said quietly.
> Silence between them then. *Home* was different – she would hold to that as long as she lasted. She who was cut from home (CLIFF, 1996, p. 60).

Although Kitty is smart and had had an education in a colonial school, the only job available for her is in an office at a laundromat in Brooklyn. Kitty's boss, an immigrant called Mr. B., had conceived an imaginary character, Mrs. White, who supposedly left notes in the customer's parcels of clothes reminding them how it was a wife's duty to take care of her husband's shirts. Kitty sits between two other black women who refuse to talk to her as she works silently and completely alienated as if she were in an assembly line. Although she occupied a position in society that was diametrically opposite to that of Mr. White's, Kitty, the black Jamaican immigrant, was the one responsible for sticking the dutiful notes between the folds of sheets, impersonating Mrs. White, the white American "angel in the house". Kitty's lack of identification with that character and everything she represented, in addition to the segregation from her equally black co-workers, impel her to subvert those notes turning them into a tool to raise awareness about the American society's intolerance towards foreigners. Kitty takes advantage of her subaltern position minding the white people's clothes and uses the notes as a means to gain agency, and become visible. She refuses to remain oppressed and fights the dominant culture, challenging it with her provoking messages. In one pile of notes, she writes: "We can clean your clothes, but not your heart;" "America is cruel;"

"Consider kindness for a change;" "White people can be black-hearted;" "The life you live will be visited on your children;" "Marcus Garvey was right" (CLIFF, 1996, p.81).

The notes that Kitty writes are an attempt to be heard in a society used to discrediting blacks and women as well as their right or ability to voice their needs and frustrations. Kitty is trying to break the inability of the white oppressors to hear the voice of the black oppressed. Kitty quits, and due to her brave action, she becomes a victim of a system that interprets "agency as anger," in the sense that it misreads the passionate voice of the black women as violent demands, as Carole Boyce Davies elaborates:

> The denial of black women's voices produces that emotional memory and stress which can implode or come out in explosive ways. This in turn produces another construction: that of the 'angry black woman'. Still it must be noted that it is not always anger that one sees in black women who have learned to speak, but passion (DAVIES, 1995, p. 3).

Davies also writes about the importance of words for the promotion of change in society and the production of a kind of knowledge that would ideally create some material response. Unfortunately, more often than not, the voice uttered in writings of black women encounters resistance, cynicism and suspicion by the perpetrators of oppressive power. Through Kitty's action and the reaction of the laundry's customers to it, the author denounces the strategy that Davies refers to as the "systematic attempts to discredit black women as credible representatives of themselves" (DAVIES, 1995, p. 4).

After that experience, Kitty decides to leave the United States, realizing that she could no longer cope with her feeling of loss and isolation in a foreign country that had nothing but low-paid jobs and disdain to offer her.

Saskia Sassen, another critic dedicated to studying diasporas and its repercussions in the immigrant communities, investigates the values of corporate culture and their oppressive power. She mentions the feeling of isolation, like the one Kitty had, that corporate culture awakens in the immigrants who experience a life where they are detached from a whole and seen by corporate society as an amorphous lower class that is supposed to serve them and fulfill their needs.

> Corporate culture collapses differences, some minute, some sharp, among the different sociocultural contexts into one amorphous otherness; an otherness that has no place in the economy; the other who holds the low-wage jobs that are supposedly only marginally attached to the economy. It therewith reproduces the devaluing of those jobs and of those who hold the jobs (SASSEN, 1999, p. 364).

Kitty resists the process of becoming invisible, knowing that she would never be part of that culture, and goes back to Jamaica, the place where feels that she exists and has agency. Boy, on the other hand, becomes even more obstinate to fit in and his eagerness affects his daughter in a very negative way, since his recipe to blend in is through the erasure of their difference:

> Boy takes up golf, Trades in the `52 Plymouth for a `61 Chevy[…] Now he sells televisions in the appliance department of Abraham & Straus […] Through all this – this new life – he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage (CLIFF, 1997, p. 100).

That obsession with erasing all traces of difference which is felt as a pre-requisite by Clare's father in order to be accepted in the American society is symbolized by a product called "Air-Wick" in *No Telephone to Heaven.* The product's role is to remove all odors from the atmosphere. It was used by Kitty whenever her neighbors complained about the smells of garlic, curry, and tomatoes that emanated from her kitchen. That is an interesting metaphor of an American product that was used to suppress the variety brought by different ethnicities. Through that product Cliff denounces the intolerance of a homogenizing society that does not accept what is not familiar to them. The narrator comments on the annihilating effect that using the product produced: "Like sticking a thick white plug into yourself, instead of letting the blood flow onto a folded cotton cloth washed in sweetwater and bleached in the sun" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 65).

Clare's traumas caused by her diasporic experience are told in different phases of her life in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Her family's disintegration is brought about by her mother's refusal to forget Jamaica and adapt to a country that discriminates against her. Another experience that is hard for Clare to digest is when she goes to a high school where she is placed a year behind, another experience that happened to Cliff. Mrs. Taylor, the principal, alleges that in placing Clare a year behind she is only following the school's policy in dealing with foreign students from underdeveloped countries. Although Clare's father insists that the school make an exception, since Clare was proficient in Latin and French, was beginning Greek, had studied algebra and geometry since she was ten, and had read many of the classics, the answer from Mrs. Taylor is simply: "That is all beside the point […] 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).

Clare's humiliation does not stop there. Mrs. Taylor insinuates that Boy is trying to fool her when he answers a form and declares that their race is white. Mrs. Taylor's ignorance becomes even more evident when she uses science to "put them in their place." She legitimizes her racism through her husband's discourse. Mrs. Taylor's husband is a physician and whenever they spend their vacation in Jamaica he observes that Jamaicans are not white, she tells Boy. The principal ends their conversation with the assurance that Boy was defeated, dismissing him with the plain statement that there was no room for lies or place for in-betweens in their system.

An interesting episode connected to Clare's diasporic experience is when the character chooses to go to England to study in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Clare wants to see for herself and have contact with that reality that she was taught to venerate. Visiting the mother-country and the fantasy it represents is part of Clare's process of identity formation because Britain had been forced into her. Now she felt like she had the right to know that part of herself that felt so alien. As soon as Clare arrives in London, she is appalled by the "otherness" that greets her. She could never have imagined the dark women in saris cleaning the toilets at Heathrow, an image that did not correspond with the idea of racial purity that England inspired when her teachers in Jamaica praised whiteness and tried to civilize her.

While Clare is going to school in London there is one episode that is very telling of the way immigrants are seen in the imperialist countries they move to. Clare is at the institute where she studies when she sees through the window a march of the National Front passing by. She hears them shouting "KAFFIRS!", "NIGGERS!", "WOGS!", "PAKIS!", GET OUT!" There was also a banner with black paint saying: "KEEP BRITAIN WHITE!" In response to that aggression a poster appears the next day on a bulletin board outside the cafeteria with the sentence: "WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE." And the narrator comments: "as if there could be a dialogue" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 137). When Clare is talking to her friend Liz about that incident and how it had affected her, how she had felt threatened by their riot, Liz says that she should not bother so much, after all: "you're hardly the sort they were ranting on about" (CLIFF, 1987, p. 139). At that point Clare is faced with all the complexity that her black origin that is masked by her white skin poses. She feels that she should honor her roots and react by saying or doing something about it. On the other hand, she knows that no one will consider her reaction legitimate. It is almost as if she were not allowed to identify with a race that is not inscribed in her skin. Her friend tries to tell Clare that she should not

feel discriminated against, that their racism was not directed towards her, but Clare believes that not feeling excluded is almost an act of betrayal to her history.

While still attending school in England, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare meets a character called Harry/Harriet when she goes to Jamaica on a visit. Harry/Harriet is a kind of transvestite and his/her indefinite gender is fundamental in Clare's process of identity construction. They become close friends and He/She is always reminding Clare about the importance of making choices about our identities. He/She knows about the impossibility of a double life. The character tries to make Clare aware of how the idea of living a split life, in-between two things, is not a choice, but a denial, an awkward escape. Harry/Harriet knows that there will come a time when the brave decision to become a woman or a man will have to be made, the same way that Clare will have to choose where she belongs in order to feel whole and end the everlasting and painful duplicity of her identity. In a dialogue the two have, Clare reveals to Harry/Harriet how she feels close to him/her. She is able to identify with his/her undecided gender, analogous to her 'inbetween' position in society. She is fascinated by the duality he/she represents. Clare confesses that she feels drawn to him/her. The level of identification between the two is so strong that Clare actually says that she feels at home with Harry/Harriet. We can see that bonding when they are having a conversation and Clare declares:

> 'No, I don't find you strange. No stranger… no stranger than I find myself. For we are neither one thing nor the other.'
> 'At the moment, darling, only at the moment.'
> 'What do you mean?'
> 'I mean the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make the choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world.' (CLIFF, 1987, p. 131).

In an interview given to Judith Raiskin, Michelle Cliff confirms how Clare's choice to stay in Jamaica is connected to Harry/Harriet's choice to become a woman. She agrees with Raiskin when the critic says that although neither of them changes his or her physical self, they both choose political identities. Cliff adds that:

> Harry tells Clare she has to make a choice. In this world it's a luxury not to choose. Clare leads a rather aimless existence before she makes that choice because she doesn't even know she has to make a choice or do something. She sort of believes what everybody tells her about the person she is until he comes along and really challenges her (RAISKIN, 1993, p. 64).

Harry-Harriet with his/her undefined gender defies the fixed gender identification that he/she recognizes as an artificial social construct. The character's sexual duality and ambiguity is rejected by society since his/her difference does not submit to the prescribed norms of what is considered to be aesthetically and socially acceptable. In the following quotation we see the uneasiness and discomfort that his/her presence causes when he/she is introduced by the narrator:

> Then Harry-Harriet, boy-girl, Buster's brother-sister, half-brother-sister actually, who was always strange, since childhood, they say, but everyone tolerates him, as if measuring their normalness against his strangeness. He is *only* one, after all, one that nature did not claim (CLIFF, 1996, p. 21).

For Harry/Harriet his/her body is a source of pain and self-knowledge at the same time. Chancy points to the vulnerability that the ones who do not fit are subjected to:

> Aside from the space Harry/Harriet has created for his own existence and Clare's – a world in which difference can be a point of strength rather than of despair – there is no safety to be found in their confirmation of plurality. At a moment's notice, either of them could be rejected or betrayed (CHANCY, 1997, p. 162).

Harry/Harriet's uncertain gender embodies trauma and a liberating strength that impels him/her to fight for freedom. The body is a key element that functions as a weapon that triggers a self-investigation that grows into political engagement and is responsible for Harry-Harriet's ability to relate to the outcasts and renegades of Jamaica.

Cliff observes that she wanted to create Harry/Harriet as the ultimate hero/heroine in order to confront the oppressive homophobic atmosphere that she feels in Jamaica: "The most complete character in *No Telephone to Heaven* is Harry/Harriet. And I did that purposely because Jamaica is such a repellently homophobic society, so I wanted to have a gay hero/heroine" (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p.601).

By the time Clare is thirty-six she goes back to Jamaica again, but this time she carries with her the unbearable need to belong. When she is in her twenties, Jamaica is a lost reference to her. She cannot relate to it and does not identify with its people. She was still ignorant of the wildness of the Maroons, and blind to the suffering of her people, because she did not think of them as her people to begin with. Now, at thirty-six she wants to collect the many fragments that she is composed of and restore her frail identity.

Clare's reconnection with her land is related to her yearning for her mother. The longing for Kitty, a feeling that haunts Clare ever since she is abandoned, is not only a real

need of a maternal presence and reference but also a metaphor of yearning for Caribbean ethnic history, which her mother represents in the novel. She has a need to understand her mother's view of history and her devotion to African tradition and African people (ILMONEN, 2002, p. 120).

> Female identity is bound very tightly to the Mothers' Land, to the matrilineal oral traditions and to the women's heritage. In addition, an Afrocentric mythology and an ethnically Caribbean past are mediated through the female figures. Moreover, this mythological past is essentially female – it is carried by women, it tells stories about their life and its central figures are female heroines, goddesses, obeah-women or grandmothers (ILMONEN, 2002,p. 118).

This feeling of abandonment that lingers within Clare will make her elaborate psychological maneuvers to make that connection with her mother through the land, and finally fulfill that affective gap in the motherland of Jamaica. It is through the land that her mother cherished so much that Clare, in a sense, transfers the love that she wish she had given Kitty, to Jamaica, the land her mother dies in.

Throughout the novel there is a growing sense that Clare is abandoning the civilized first world to follow her primitive instincts and return to Jamaica. The narrator makes an interesting analogy between how Clare feels away from home and how a captured gorilla feels:

> Not feeling much of anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere […] her loss remains hidden – over time a fine thick moss covers her skin. She does not speak of it […] she moves. Emigrated, lone travel, the zoologist would have recorded. Time passes. The longing for tribe surfaces – unmistakable […]She cannot shake it off. She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness […] she belongs in this hills. And she knows this choice is irrevocable and she will never be the same (CLIFF, 1987, p. 91).

Critic Wendy Walters considers Michelle Cliff's approach of the diasporic experience in her novels positive, since the writer uses the trope as a fundamental movement that triggers Clare's investigation of feelings incited by the absence of home. That sense of dislocation will later on engage Clare in a search that will lead to her political maturity, which will be crucial for the demystification of prejudiced cultural assumptions and beliefs that are still alive and being reproduced in society. Walters defends the theory that the lost home of the immigrant should not be interpreted as a lost source of affection and protection, or as an eternal site of return with its promise of healing the wounds caused by the diasporic experience, or, still, as a source of violence and decadence that should be rejected and erased. Homes are complex and

multifaceted; they offer stability and fluctuation, anguish and relief, they can be a shelter and pose threat simultaneously, they can be present and absent, they can offer love and despise, certainties and doubts, they can define one's personality or fragment it. Walters argues, in short, that it is not only possible to be home in diaspora but also that this notion should be adopted as a possible approach that will assuage the homelessness and sense of displacement that haunts immigrants (WALTERS, 1999, p. X).

> By focusing on writing by black authors living in the West, either in exile or expatriation, I seek to unsettle and complicate the typical construction of home and diaspora as binary opposites. That is, in general usage one cannot be at home and in diaspora at the same time. My argument is that the authors in this study create prose writing that performs a home in diaspora, and that these performances have important political and epistemological implications for all of us (WALTERS, 199, p. x).

The journey of the Savages in the United States and the mosaic of possibilities they are faced with when it comes to establishing a relationship with their home give us an insightful perspective of the Jamaican diaspora which is revealed through the painful, yet constructive experiences lived by dislocated subjects in the US. Through their adventure we are able to, as writer Salman Rushdie puts it: "find new angles at which to enter reality" (RUSHDIE, 1991, p.431), since it also raises questions about humanity and politics that are paramount to be explored by studies of postmodern and postcolonial literature. When we listen to the voice of the foreigner, usually silenced by the hegemonic discourses of the dominant culture, we have a chance to be educated through a different perspective about the immigrant struggle to relocate in a new country, and learn about the hardships of lives threatened by marginalization and prejudice.

Michelle Cliff is proof that despite staging painful and traumatic journeys, diasporas can constitute inspiring experiences that nurture authors whose traumas may be exorcised through writing. Cliff is able to create diasporic characters whose life stories are inspiring healing processes that may enormously contribute to the amendment of fragmented identities. Michelle Cliff's readers who have gone through similar experiences of displacement are able to recognize many of their own journeys reflected in the author's novels and relate to them on a personal level. Besides, by demystifying imperialist ideologies engaged in affirming one culture and one race while devaluing the other, the author teaches her readers to have a more active role in the construction of their own knowledge and suspect any given fact about the compromised history of their colonial past which is often fabricated and broadcasted in history books.

4 RACE AND COLOR

4.1 The Stigma of Race and Color

The association between Africanism and rawness, difference, barbarity, madness, silence, degradation, and subservience, is one intensely debated by the acclaimed author Toni Morrison. The author investigates that issue in her book *Playing in the Dark*, where she shows us how important it is to critically examine the portrayal of African characters as dependent and inferior in literature. An important aspect to be taken into account when we think about the role of the authors who approach racial themes is the danger that they be misread, as Morrison points out, when the "imaginative encounter between writers and Africanism" triggers in their uncritical readers a sentiment of national identity based on the belief in a white supremacist ideology that sponsors distorted ideas of racial superiority (MORRISON, 92, p. 51). The words chosen to portray black people or the simple omission of such characters in foundational books illustrate the mechanisms through which white people learned how to define themselves from a perspective which opposes whiteness and blackness, rejecting and distancing themselves from the people who had always been part of their lives, whether it be helping wealthy white families raise their kids, working in plantations, fighting for civil rights, or today, as the president of the nation in the case of the United States. When commenting on how Americans learned to define themselves through an opposition between them and black people and how predatory this is for African Americans, Toni Morrison theorizes that:

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny"(MORRISON, 92, p. 52).

The notion of color as a marker of difference is fundamental in the understanding of this process of rejection and discrimination in the construction of the "other".

Stuart Hall, who is engaged in studying racial issues and the complex color stratification system that takes place in Jamaica, believes that it is extremely dangerous and deceiving to have an essentialist, homogenizing and narrow-minded perspective of such an intricate process which is the construction of race. He mentions that any Jamaican family is able to identify where someone lives, their social class, the family they belong to, by

examining the color of their skin and the quality of their hair. Besides the all-pervasive presence of blackness in the island, he emphasizes that, interestingly, while he was growing up in Jamaica he remembers that the word “black” was never uttered. He talks about the first time he heard the word “black”, being used as a category, in the beginning of the Civil Rights movement and the de-colonization and nationalistic struggles, and highlights the importance of understanding how the category is an artificial device created in a particular historical moment in order to serve a specific political purpose, as the result of the need to legitimize symbolic and ideological pursuits and demands. He states that:

> Black is not a question of pigmentation. The black I am talking about is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category. In our language, at certain historical moments, we have to use the signifier. We have to create an equivalence between how people look and what their histories are. Their histories are in the past, inscribed in their skins. But it is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads (HALL, 1997, p. 53).

Hall reminds us that the immigrants who went to England in the fifties and sixties from different parts of the Caribbean, East Africa, the Asian subcontinent, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, would all identify themselves politically as Blacks in the seventies during the anti-racist struggles as a strategy in order to create a unity that would be able to represent them as a social body and legitimate their demands for equal rights. This approach could be considered quite essentialist, but they knew that if they wanted representation they would have to temporarily erase their cultural and social differences and use the element that could visibly bring them together, which was color (HALL, 1997, p. 55).

Activist and scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., an authority in matters related to race, discredits the concept of race and asserts that: “Race, as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be a fiction. When we speak of ‘the white race’ or ‘the black race,’ ‘the Jewish race’ or ‘the Aryan race,’ we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors” (GATES, 1986, p. 4).

The rejection for the dark color that is visible and preponderant in most Jamaicans is an observable contemporary phenomenon not limited to the island. Today, in Jamaica, there is a real frenzy for whitening creams, many of them are forbidden by the health ministry and sold in the black market, jeopardizing the health of their users. There are hundreds of girls skin bleaching and overusing lightening creams, which are prescribed at low doses to correct uneven pigmentation. Another popular method used to bleach skin is the use of toothpaste, curry, milk powder household bleach, and cornmeal. The girls explain that these products

lighten their complexion, and they are not intimidated by the many warnings coming from the health ministry. In the following quotation taken from a magazine devoted to debating current issues in Jamaica, we are convinced that there is a large segment of the population in Jamaica convinced that being lighter in complexion is socially and economically advantageous. In an interview with a Jamaican doctor we realize the extent of the problem and how there is a tendency to overlook the racial discrimination behind that practice:

> Dr. Persadsingh says that some women don't know why they are doing it. "Some girls feel that with a lighter complexion, their prospects in life would improve. Some are bleaching their faces and when they are asked why, they have no answer. "I have been told that men are responsible for the girls bleaching their faces, as all men only want 'browning' (light skinned women) and do not like black girls. This is rather nonsense of course. Some people even claim that the girls are bleaching now because of slavery and that the white people are to be blamed. Again, what utter nonsense," Dr. Persadsingh scoffed.[6]

In many testimonials given by African-Americans and Jamaicans we can feel a sense of complicity where, although the women who are writing do not agree with the practice of skin- bleaching, there is a consensus that the girls who do it are not to blame since they are simply responding to the pressure that the media puts on them to have lighter skin, implying that they will have more chances to succeed in life, both financially and romantically, if they look whiter. In the article, there is also mention to the different treatment given to women who have darker skin and the ones who have lighter skin in Jamaica, to the point that some families even give the darker girls more work when they are employed. In a very curious interview, a young black girl of twenty-two years old, who was born and raised in the United States and is the daughter of Jamaican parents, believes that the young girls in Jamaica lighten their skin due to their upbringing. She also supports the theory that they do it to please the men who seem to favor the girls who have lighter skin. She mentions slavery as a constituent to the girls' low self-esteem. Her story is very similar to the one of Michelle Cliff's protagonist, Clare Savage, since she also has a younger sister of darker complexion. The magazine's reader writes that her younger sister is dark skinned but they are equally beautiful. Despite that, she admits that her family favors her over her sister due to the difference in their color, pointing out that when her sister was born their grandmother called her a monkey.

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7 Source: http://www.jamaicans.com/articles/primecomments/0902_bleaching.shtml

It is fascinating to investigate how the perception of what is aesthetically beautiful has changed in Jamaica, a country that Hall remembers as celebrating the dark color. When he writes about the beauty contests, we can see the shift that took place in people's mentality since most girls are now trying to become white. Hall comments: When I left Jamaica, there was a beauty contest in which the different shades of women were graded according to different trees, so that there was Miss Mahogany, Miss Walnut, etc… (HALL, 1997, p. 53).

There is no doubt that the bleaching is connected to the black people's lack of pride for their color and their history which is stigmatized by the association people still make between black people and slavery. After so many years of blackness being perceived as a negative marker of difference, it is crucial for the black community to rescue their own history and rewrite it, as Michelle Cliff suggests when she teaches her readers about the secret historical facts of slavery in Jamaica.

In "Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment," Catherine Hall mentions Franz Fanon to show how dependent the colonized subject became on the stereotyped judgment of the colonizer when it comes to the construction of his identity, and how slavery played an important role in that process:

> Fanon has been crucial to our understanding of the internal traumas of identity which are associated with colonization and enslavement. For colonization is never only about the external processes and pressures of exploitation. It is always also about the ways in which colonized subjects internally collude with the objectification of the self-produced by the colonizer (C.HALL, 1996, p. 69).

Critic Belinda Edmondson who wrote an essay on Cliff's novels entitled "Race, Privilege, and The Politics of (Re)Writing History: An Analysis of the Novels of Michelle Cliff," talks about the challenge that white creoles have to face as they are part of two histories that clash. Michelle Cliff, as a white creole, has always traversed between two worlds. Her light skin, at the same time that allows her to pass as white, obscures her black origins, which gives her a double racial identity which is constantly being put to test.

> The white creole occupies an ambiguous space in West Indian society. On the one hand she is the descendant of the colonizer: by virtue of her color she is virtually guaranteed a position of relative power and privilege if so she chooses. Even if she does not choose, the creole is bound to her birthright by her race, since the colonial who does not accept the ideologies and privileges of the colonizer does not – cannot – effectively exist (EDMONDSON, 1993, p. 180).

In an interview given to critic Opal Palmer Adisa, Cliff talks about strategies that must be adopted in order to deconstruct the racial discourse that is at work today. She believes that:

> As far as whites are concerned, they have to educate themselves. They have to really want to change. They have to realize that they are not just damaging black people when they are being racist; they are damaging and diminishing themselves. It's like amputating a piece of yourself to hate another human being for no reason (ADISA, 1994, p. 279).

Because Cliff has always suffered from an inability to claim her race due to her indefinable racial identity, she struggles to demystify that concept in *Abeng*. Critic Françoise Lionnet emphasizes that the discourse of racial superiority based on institutionalized scientific racism is completely discredited in *Abeng*. According to those erroneous beliefs, it was necessary to keep races "pure" and "apart" because of the unfounded fear that interracial breeding would create "subhumans" like the mule, that is infertile. Therefore the human race, more specifically the white race, would be at risk of extinction. In *Abeng*, on the contrary: "images of abundance and fertility are generated by the height of the mango season, and are linked to the idea of variety and diversity. That this diversity is a source of strength is constantly stressed by Cliff" (LIONNET, 1992, p. 338).

4.2 Clare and Zoe: a Color-full Friendship

In *Abeng,* Clare is perceived by the Jamaican society as a privileged young girl due to her skin color, lighter than most islanders', and her social status, since she is a direct descendant of the Savage family, known for their glorious past as plantation owners as well as the brutal treatment applied to the slaves they owned. Clare is the offspring of Boy Savage and Kitty Freeman, whose ancestors come from distinct backgrounds and histories.

The history of their ascendants goes back to a society where slavery was the pillar of an economy based on the violent exploitation of the black slaves that were shipped from Africa to Jamaica and struggled to survive in cane plantations all over the island.

Since the very beginning of the novel, we realize that there is a clear social division and rupture in the population of Jamaica which is based on class and determined by color discrimination. That mentality is responsible for the stratification of the Jamaican society. In *Abeng*, the white families own the land, which is the means for the black people to survive. Without land, the black families are pushed to a peripheral position in society and forced to

work for the white landowners, reenacting the reality of their ancestors, who had no choice but to work for their white masters. Throughout *Abeng*, the narrator compares the distress that the slave generation and the new generation of black people go through. The black women in the novel are doomed to perform menial housework chores in the white people's houses, doing their laundry, mopping, cooking, and taking care of their white babies, while leaving their own to the care of relatives. Some of these women's husbands go to America to work during the harvest, or to England, to work in factories. Those who stay in Jamaica and resist the temptation of drowning their misery in alcohol are employed in households or hotels where they are underpaid.

> The women also served. Cleaned. Mopped. Cooked. Cared for babies lighter than their own. Did other people's laundry. Bought other people's goods in the market at Crossroads and Constant Spring. They too received some cash each week. To their mothers and sisters and aunts they gave some toward the care of their children. They saw those children perhaps once a week… Some had been married, but their husbands had left them for America to pick fruit. Or for the North of England to work in factories. Others had husbands employed in households or hotels in different parts of Kingston (CLIFF, 1995, p. 17).

Cliff shows that the lack of opportunities available for black people in Jamaica leads to the dissolution of homes and families. Because most of the black people end up being "live in" employees, they do not have a fixed address, or a place they can claim to be their home. Living under the stigma of "being one of the family" as the white people refer to the employees who have been working for them and living in their houses for quite some time, is equal to being the one in the family who is subjugated and exploited in exchange for a roof over their heads. The term, then, functions as a pacifier that tries to camouflage the subtle mechanism of exploitation that takes place in the white people's households: "'Like one of the family' meant staying in a small room with one light and a table and a bed – listening to a sound system which piped in Radio Jamaica"(CLIFF, 1995, p. 17).

This lack of a stable home is one more ingredient that originates a shared sense of dislocation and displacement that we can notice in many of the characters in *Abeng*.

Clare's awareness of the subtleties of relationships mediated by color is more evident while she spends her vacation in the countryside of Jamaica with her grandmother, known by the community as Miss Mattie. Clare is introduced to Zoe, a poor girl whose family is allowed to live on Miss Mattie's property. Their friendship is marked by the tension between the two distinct classes they represent. When Cliff talks about their relationship, she elucidates that:

> The separations between Clare and Zoe are really class-based. The class system is founded in race, but Clare would not make a racist assumption about Zoe. That just wouldn't be something she would do. But she would certainly make classist assumptions about Zoe and herself (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 616).

This social hierarchy is clear from the very beginning of their relationship since Clare's grandmother asks Zoe's mother if she can send her daughter to be Clare's playmate, so Clare will have someone to entertain her lonely days in her grandmother's property. Zoe, then, does not choose to be Clare's friend, but instead, is compelled to it by her social condition. Nonetheless, despite the many differences they have, their friendship flourishes and becomes a source of self-discovery for the two girls. It is through Zoe and her acute sense of reality that Clare becomes aware of the social inequalities, the hardships that the needy villagers have to endure, their economic instability, their constant fear of losing their houses, etc.

> The relationship Cliff creates between Zoe and Clare in *Abeng* is telling of her approach to the issue of multiple identity in the Caribbean. In many ways, the relationship is written to 'unravel' the colonization process Clare has undergone at school. Cliff also suggests that their differences may be bridged at the one level of commonality they have that is, their femaleness (CHANCY, 1997, p. 149).

In an event where Clare accidentally shoots and kills her grandmother's best bull, after trying to scare away a passerby who was staring at her naked body in the river, Zoe, who was with Clare during the accident, can only think of the repercussions this will have on her material life. She feels vulnerable and believes that her family will end up being punished for what happened, although none of it had been her fault. In the passage below we can see how the issue of color emerges and immediately comes into play whenever there is a crisis between the two girls. When Clare gets Zoe in trouble, there is a transition in the way Zoe relates to her; before the event Clare was considered a friend by Zoe, after that she immediately becomes a "*buckra* girl."

> In her mind she could see her mother dismantling the thatch and packing up the bed and the cot and their cooking utensils and begging Mas Freddie a ride in LIGHTNING to find another place to live. And it would all be her fault – all because she had gotten too close to a *buckra* gal and had not kept to her distance and her own place (CLIFF, 1995, p. 132).

What may be a game for Clare, might have serious and irreparable consequences for Zoe. The passage above shows how unstable and precarious Zoe's life is, when she feels that

her life is being threatened to the point of fearing that she is about to be expelled along with her whole family from the land they live in, due to an accident caused by Clare. Scholar Myriam Chancy comments that particular episode: “Zoe, dependent on Miss Mattie’s generosity, and her mother a renter on her land, cannot afford to break established cultural codes of behavior. For her, such an involvement would be seen as a form of insubordination rather than the act of courage Clare hopes to perform” (CHANCY, 1997, p. 150).

When acknowledging Zoe’s feelings after the event, Clare starts to raise awareness about the different roles each one of the girls play in their friendship and realizes how their association had always been inevitably marked by color, property, and class. Being the privileged one, Clare had always been to some extent detached and ignorant about these dualities, but she gradually becomes more sensitive and mindful about the many facets of their relationship. Although Zoe had true feelings for Clare and seemed to have a good time with her, she was her friend out of a sense of duty and responsibility that was alien to Clare, whose family never had to depend on other people’s charity to survive. In the passage below, the narrator unveils the girls’ different realities in a world that is negotiated though the ownership of property:

> Property was a word that Zoe had used. Clare’s people owned property and Miss Ruthie and her daughters had to beg a piece from Miss Mattie to live on. But Clare thought that she and Zoe were removed from property as it related to deeds and acreage […] She had no sense of the nuances of ownership – of the unevenness of possession (CLIFF, 1995, p. 121).

Clare learns how to consider and balance the two sides of her actions, and these conflicts and ruptures in their friendship prove to be beneficial for Clare’s awakening to the issues related to the social inequality that is so visible in her country. The world Clare knew was one she felt free to explore, without any boundaries or restraints, but after meeting Zoe, she has contact with all the limitations imposed by poverty. While Clare dreams about studying and founding a school together with Zoe, for her underprivileged friend Clare’s wishes are unattainable. She knows that her family has no means to send her to school, therefore Zoe concludes that education is a benefit granted exclusively to *buckra* girls like Clare. Zoe’s life will be a daily struggle to survive, just like her mother’s. Zoe’s passive acceptance of her condition and destiny is an indicator that there is a shared belief between the population that in Jamaica there is no possibility of social mobility. If you are born poor, it is very likely that you will remain poor. Zoe’s words in the following passage highlight this conformity sustained by a disbelief to attain a better life.

> "[…]Me will be here so all me life. Me will be marketwoman like fe me mama. Me will have fe beg land fe me and fe me pickney to live pon. Wunna will go a England, den maybe America, to university and when we meet later we will be different smaddy. But we is different smaddy now" (CLIFF, 1995, p. 118).

Zoe believes that her destiny is marked by her color, which will always limit her pursuits and accomplishments. In the novel, the color of one's skin determines the jobs they get, how they are treated and the opportunities reserved for them in life. It seems that in Jamaica that particular topic is a national obsession and it permeates every relation established between the island's inhabitants.

The issue of color is also manifested through the character Boy, clare's father, and his clear aspiration to whiten his offspring, so that they will have more chances to succeed in life and he will finally be able to redeem the Savages' race after years of miscegenation. Boy constantly reinforces the idea that Clare should take advantage of her lighter skin and marry a man who will keep whitening their descendent. Clare's family, except for her mother who identifies with the black color, is also constantly praising her light skin and reminding her that it is her duty to keep rescuing their original shade that accidentally suffered a discontinuity due to the unsound contact with some black residue along the way. The fear of deranging and contaminating the fair equilibrium of the Savage's whiteness indicates the neurotic relationship they have with their color. The whole family takes pride in Clare's features and has great expectations about her future.

> On this island of Black and Brown, she had inherited her father's green eyes - which all agreed were her "finest feature." Visibly, she was the family's crowning achievement, combining the best of both sides, and favoring one rather than the other. Much comment was made about her prospects, and how blessed Miss Mattie was to get herself such a granddaughter (CLIFF, 1995, p. 61).

Clare's father, despite having married a darker woman, makes sure to brainwash and manipulate his daughter telling her how disappointing it would be for him to see her waste the chance to whiten the family. In doing so Boy reinforces the racial code of behavior that will ironically undermine his own family once they move to the United States where they will become the victims of the very discrimination he sustains.

> He also implied that if she chose a darker husband, others would know that she was sexually impure and forced to make the best of it. […] Boy taught his eldest daughter that she came from his people – white people, he stressed – and he expected Clare to preserve his green eyes

> and light skin – those things she had been born with. And she had the duty to try to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all – and make the skin, now gold, become pale and subject to visible sunburn. These things she should pursue (CLIFF, 1995, p. 127).

The comments made upon Clare's color and the reason behind this aversion and panic of being dark or being perceived as one, remounts one of the most violent passages in the novel, when Clare's great great-grandfather, Justice, after realizing that the abolition of slavery was inevitable and imminent, could only think of the ultimate tragedy that would follow it: the white race being tainted by blackness.

> The justice was not thinking about his crops or even the future of his properties. His mind was on a "higher" plane – he was concerned about the survival of his race. He was fearful of the mixing which was sure to follow freedom – in which the white seed would be diluted and the race impoverished (CLIFF, 1955, p. 38).

The idea of racial superiority is an element which permeates the narrative and is constantly being broadcast in the voices and actions of characters such as Justice, through discourses that portray slaves as inferior, disobedient and troublesome. Justice represents the European who, despite being imbued with illuminist ideals, is able to argue in favor of slavery appropriating contradictory discourses from emblematic historical characters such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, who could, at the same time, own slaves and attack the cruelty inherent to slavery. Although he was a slaveholder, Benjamin Franklin was posthumously converted by History in the precursor of the abolitionist movement in the United States. When paraphrasing Franklin who wrote the following discourse in 1751, Justice justifies his aversion to the idea of miscegenation: "And while we are [...] scouring our planet, by clearing America of Woods, and so making this Side of our Globe reflect a brighter Light to the Eyes of Inhabitants in Mars and Venus, why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People?" (CLIFF, 1995, p. 38).

Justice, as an exemplary European rationalist, makes sure to support his reason for fearing the mixing of the two races using discourses of the Enlightenment. He clearly sees and treats the black people as the "other", as beasts that threaten the perpetuation of the purity of his superior race. According to Justice, the notion that those people were about to be unleashed was unconceivable: "These people were not equipped to cope with the responsibilities of freedom. These people were Africans. Their parameters of behavior were out of the range of civilized men" (CLIFF, 1996, p. 39).

Justice, who claims to be civilized, is the one who commits the most abominable act of violence against his slaves. Since, according to his rationale they are his property, he believes that he is entitled to do whatever he wishes with them, so he simply burns his slaves alive. Justice believed that:

> They had been brought here for one purpose only – and this was about to be removed […] the dark people existed on another, lower level of being. He believed all this absolutely. And he held that among these people life was cheap, and death did not matter. His conclusion was far from original among his own kind: At that moment these people were his property, and they were therefore his to burn (CLIFF, 1995, p. 40).

In *Abeng*, what we witness is the alleged superiority of the white race being reinforced not only by institutions that were supposed to deconstruct it by teaching their students to question the validity of racial discourses, but also by the families who should, for their own children's sake, undermine those discourses. In the following passage we can see how normal and acceptable it is for the educators from Clare's school to deliberately assume a racist position:

> Light and dark were made much of in that school. It was really nothing new in Jamaica – but, as the rest of the society, it was concealed behind euphemisms of talent, looks, aptitude. Just as Kitty had called Clare's teachers "ladies" when she knew full well that they were damned narrow-minded racists (CLIFF, 1995, p. 100).

In Clare's school, the girls who have lighter skin are clearly favored over the ones of dark skin. Clear examples of intolerance such as the Apartheid in South Africa or the Holocaust are overlooked by the teachers and treated as minor historical accidents that had their own role in reestablishing peace among countries of divergent ideals or teaching the world lessons on actions not to be repeated.

Victoria, the most beautiful and popular girl at Clare's school loses her position when her classmates find out that she was the daughter of a black gardener. Besides that, when a dark girl has an epileptic seizure and drops to the floor of cold stone, cracking her nose and cheekbones, nobody comes to her assistance, except for the equally dark physical education teacher. Right after her seizure, she has to cope with the news that the school decided to suspend her scholarship since according to their judgment she represented a danger to herself.

Clare's lighter shade is seen by most characters as a blessing, but paradoxically it can also be seen as a curse. Her complexion is what attracts all the praise and admiration everyone is ready to show her, but it is also a source of rejection from her own mother, Kitty, who, unable to identify with Clare, relegates her upbringing to the care of Clare's father. In the

passage bellow, we see a possible explanation for Kitty's feelings for her daughter, which were completely color-oriented:

> Perhaps she assumed that a light-skinned child was by common law, or traditional practice the child of the whitest parent. This parent would past this light-skinned daughter on to a white husband, so she would have lighter and lighter babies – this, after all, was how genetics was supposed to work, moving toward the preservation of whiteness and the obliteration of darkness (CLIFF, 1995, p. 129).

The only times we are able to see Kitty having any kind of physical contact with her daughter is when they are in the countryside, in the middle of nature, barefoot, hunting for mangoes and avocado. It is in the bush, away from the social restraints that are more prevalent in the city, that Kitty feels closer to her daughter as if the boundaries related to their difference in color were dissolved in nature. Their relationship becomes more organic and harmonic when they are isolated. Chancy reinforces that idea when she states that: "Kitty's respect for the land, though never spoken, is tentatively relayed to Clare through such journeys; in this way, Clare is taught what books will never teach her: the power the land holds to nourish, cure, and comfort" (CHANCY, 1997, p. 147).

There is a clear opposition in the novel between the rural Jamaica, where the social codes are still present, but are not so strict, and the city, where the privileges and authority of the white people are constantly at work. The poor people from the countryside are the ones who preserve the rituals and festivities of their slave ancestors, so we can feel a stronger sense of community and solidarity that is missing in the city. Nonetheless, the narrator does not idealize them, and shows how prejudiced and intolerant the country people can be when, because of their ignorance, they refuse to rescue a homosexual character that ends up drowning in the ocean. Later on, the whole community rejects and abandons his mother, who becomes insane.

Another character who is the embodiment of prejudice is Clare's aunt, Mrs. Philips, who rejects her own sister for having had an affair with a black man. Mrs. Phillips's sister is Miss Winifred, an emblematic character that should also be taken into consideration when discussing race-related taboos in Jamaica. Clare is sent away to stay with Mrs. Philips as a punishment for having killed her grandmother's bull. Clare's parents believe that Mrs. Phillips, who is a racist, will be able to teach Clare how to become a lady. One day Clare and Mrs. Phillips go to Miss Winifred's house to visit her, but Clare is advised not to talk to her since she is a lunatic who has lost all contact with reality. When we first meet Miss Winifred,

she comes across as a rebel, a free spirit who refused to live according to the social code of behavior imposed by a racist society. She tells Clare that she had fallen in love with a black man and had had a black baby that had been taken away from her by her family. After that incident her mental health started deteriorating and she developed an aversion to water: a particularity of her condition was to believe that all the water in the world would not be able to wash her sin away. She becomes a filthy and stinky woman, but all the layers of dirt that she carries can be interpreted as a symbol that represents the layers of prejudice, racism, and violence embedded in the Jamaican society. Underneath those layers the docile and sad woman that Miss Winifred is, still breathes. She is a victim and a live reminder of the harm that a close-minded and discriminatory society can do to someone who dares to challenge its rules and convictions. We then understand that Miss Winifred had actually been defeated by society and, unable to see another solution for her life, she had taken the blame for violating the moral laws of her social class and internalized the racial discourse she had been taught. She tells Clare: “What I did was wrong, you see. I knew better. I knew that God meant that *coons* and *buckra* people were not meant to mix their blood. It’s not right. Only sadness comes from mixture. You must remember that” (CLIFF, 1995, p. 164).

But Clare, who questions all simplistic and essentialist views and is by now able to criticize such received truths, reacts to Miss Winifred’s beliefs saying that in Jamaica everyone mixes, that even she is mixed. In doing so, Clare, by using her common sense, relativizes what Miss Winifred was forced to consider a great sin. That shows us that going against what is the most natural and obvious progression of events, miscegenation, is exactly what causes pain and distress. Had Miss Winifred fought to keep her baby and taken responsibility for her choices, she would probably not have been in such a deplorable state.

The strategy that Michelle Cliff chooses to close her novel, with Clare’s first menstruation when she is thirteen years old, symbolizes a clear passage from childhood into adolescence. At the end of *Abeng*, we know that when Clare grows up she might either rebel against the system, defying and rejecting all the fabricated discourse she had contact with throughout her childhood, or conform to the rules she was taught to follow and become a lady, which is what is expected from her. That episode is also a moment of political and sexual awakening as critic Meryl Schwartz asserts: “In *Abeng* Clare’s political awakening is tied into her sexual awakening and her awareness of gender discrimination; she first menstruates at the same time she first acquires some knowledge of Jamaica’s history” (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 602).

At the end of *Abeng* we suspect that Clare's diversified and fragmented learning will probably give her a more acute and critical perspective of life and the issues related to class, social and color difference. Her process of identity construction is likely to be a more complex one since she will have to learn how to negotiate and come to terms with all the dualities that were part of her upbringing, as she moves to the United States, a country where difference is not easily integrated and stereotypical constructions are constantly at work. The dualities, such as: black and white, colonized and colonizer, slave owner and slave, that are inherent to Clare, will either be erased or resist and become a healthy source of identity for Clare.

In "Imagined Communities" Benedict Anderson notes how this passage from childhood to adolescence is crucial in the process of identity construction and how that process is connected to the selections that our memories make and the narratives we create:

> All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to 'remember' the consciousness of childhood (ANDERSON, 1995, p. 204).

Knowing that a sequel to the novel will follow, Michelle Cliff leaves her readers trying to guess the memories that will linger in Clare, how they will shape her as an individual, and what kind of alliances they will prompt her to forge. Clare's memories will be crucial for either her engagement to fight against all the oppression, inequity, and prejudice she witnesses as a hybrid privileged child growing up in a classicist society, or her alienation from it.

4.3 Christopher: The Wretched of Jamaica

In the celebrated *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon gives us the accounts of the many victims of the Algerian uprising during the national war of liberation against the French occupation that took place in Algeria in 1954. In that book he shows us how harmful it is for the process of identity construction of the colonized, when he is objectified as the "other" and how deeply rooted that feeling is. The colonizer's main purpose is to pacify, "tame", and

indoctrinate the ones they have to consider as inferiors so that their indifference towards their suffering can be justified:

> Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: "Who am I in reality? The defensive positions born of the violent confrontation between the colonized and the colonial constitute a structure which then reveals the colonized personality" (FANON, 2004, p. 182).

The 'other' is defined as: "anyone who is separate from one's self" (ASHCROFT, 2002, p. 169), which is an essential notion that we rely on in order to establish prejudiced ideas and stereotypes around what we consider to be 'normal' or acceptable in our society. An interesting phenomenon is that, as Ashcroft explains:

> The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view (ASHCROFT, 2002, p. 169).

Bill Ashcroft also comments on the relationship between the way one is perceived and the treatment he/she will get for being considered different, or the "alterity," underscoring that how people are perceived controls how they are treated, and physical differences are crucial in such constructions. The critic also points out that: "this view of the body as a site for representation and control is central to many early analysts of post-colonial experience, notably Franz Fanon" (ASHCROFT, 1999, p. 183).

Fanon writes about the social gap existent between the world of the rich white colonizers and the miserable black colonized. That social contrast is crucial for us to understand how colonization was able to compartmentalize the world in two completely different realities inhabited by two different species. This division, based on racial difference, applies two different categories to the people of colonized countries: rich and white, black and poor.

> The colonist's sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It's a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers… The colonist's sector is a white folk's sector, a sector of foreigners. The colonized's sector, or at least the "native" quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. […]The colonized's sector is a famished sector, hungry for bred meat, shoes, coal, and light. […] It's a sector of

> niggers, a sector of towelheads. The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy (FANON, 2004, p. 5).

Homi Bhabha investigates the effects of colonial discourse and its contribution to the maintenance of negative stereotypes when it comes to the construction of 'otherness'. Bhabha makes an analogy between difference and fetishism when he defines fetishism as a form of disavowal of difference. He makes an association between the Freudian statement 'all men have penises', an archaic affirmation of wholeness, and 'all men have the same skin/race/culture' treating them as superficial considerations. He points to the colonizer's tendency to regard anything that deviates from that norm as a disturbance of an order that should not be changed, and whose disorganization would lead to confusion, fear, and anxiety. He approaches the idea of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority, as a myth produced to empower the colonial discourse employed to dominate the others. Bhabha affirms that: "The stereotype, then, as a primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defense – the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, color and culture"(BHABHA, 1999, p. 298).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Christopher is the representative inhabitant of the colonized's sector that Fanon elaborates and the "other" that Bhabha defines. Christopher's awareness that he does not belong to society combined with the fact that he is constantly in contact with the abundance and richness of the colonizer's sector is an element that triggers his rage.

Christopher is black and, just like Zoe, he is objectified and condemned to suffer the same racial discrimination of which Zoe is a victim. Christopher's pilgrimage is very representative of this search for an identity that keeps being shaped by colonial forces that encroach in the individual's soul the belief that he/she is inferior and not worth of any respect or social acknowledgement.

Everything Christopher has ever known his whole life was poverty and deprivation. As a boy he could only count on his grandmother who lived in a shantytown, the Dungle, where everything was scarce and precarious. The everyday life of the Dungle was dictated by the emergency to satisfy the most basic and immediate needs, such as finding some leftovers to eat, or a roof to protect their inhabitants from the unmerciful weather. In the following quotation we have a glimpse at what life in the Dungle was like:

> Women and children jammed together with other women and children, and a few old men, discarded elders, scattered about. Shacks clustered around a standpipe which dripped into the ground[…]Women on line with their enamel pans, filled with old condensed milk tins used as cups, flattened tins used as plates, all manner of scarred utensils[…]This was the Dungle. Here was the dung-heap jungle where people squirmed across mountains of garbage. On one mountainside stood their home (CLIFF, 1996, p. 32).

After the decease of his grandmother, Christopher wonders the streets of Jamaica as a beggar for some years when, at the age of ten, he is ultimately rescued by a rich woman who sends someone after his grandmother to replace her old servant. When his grandmother cannot be found she agrees to take Christopher, instead. Unlike most of the inhabitants of the Dungle, Christopher ends up working for several years in the house where he is sent to. Although he has a steady job, there is never a moment of security or tranquility during his provisional stay. Being a well-behaved, hard-working and obedient boy is not enough for him to be accepted, so after a while he is dismissed by his employee who argues, not to his face, that she is just observing a moral conduct of behavior in letting him go, since it would not look proper for a respectable old lady to have a young man working for her. What she does not say to him is that the real reason why she wants him to leave is because she feared a grown black man sleeping within ten yards of her house (CLIFF, 1996, p. 42).

Christopher is discarded without any further explanations like a disposable piece of furniture, and once again finds himself on his own, vulnerable and subjected to the injustices and exploitation most Jamaicans have to endure in the city looking for temporary jobs in the houses of the rich families.

Everyone who could have helped him ended up perpetuating the cycle of exploitation, dispossession and marginality he had known his whole life. Christopher is erased by a society that sees him as the “other”, and is subjected to the same colonial discourse that the slaves who lived in Jamaica were.

After Christopher is dismissed and doomed to wander the streets, one day after getting drunk on Christmas Eve, he develops an obsession with finding the remains of his deceased grandmother, believing that she deserves a decent burial. His grandmother was the only reference of love and care he had ever had, and once she was gone, Christopher found himself abandoned and displaced in a world where no one acknowledged his existence. This prolonged mourning and inability to move on can be interpreted as the result of the impossibility of replacing the painful memories he bares with joyful experiences that are not accessible to him.

> Like his labor, his connections to other people were casual. If he had thought about it, he would realize that there was no one single smaddy in the world who cared if he lived or died. His death would cause inconvenience to no one – unless him dead on them property. In this loneliness he longed for his grandmother (CLIFF, 1996, p. 44).

Christopher goes to Mas'Charles' house in the middle of the night to ask for his assistance about his grandmother's affair, believing that his master had the duty to help him since Christopher and his family had always been faithful servants. Christopher enters the house and walks up to his master's bedroom carrying his machete, the tool he used to cut grass and trim shrubs, hanging from his body. His master wakes up perplexed, unable to believe his servant's intrusion, and not only refuses to help him, but also calls him a fool for trying to rescue his grandmother's bones. He attacks Christopher for speaking nonsense and kicks him out of his house. Christopher, still numb and sedated under the effect of alcohol, has a fit of rage and promotes a slaughter in the house. The brutality and intensity of his blows release the years of anguish he repressed being humiliated and ignored by the people around him. Christopher could not find other means to articulate his rage. His impotence triggers a reaction that is an overdue answer to his invisibility, his suffering, and the injustices he suffers. Through the only resource he has access to, violence, he behaves like the savage, the "other" who had always been treated like a beast, but this time he is dictating the terms. When Cliff talks about Christopher, she states: "What I wanted to show with Christopher is how a murderer is created, how somebody like Christopher is created, and how any chance that he has for self-respect or self-love is bashed, and his violent act is based in his self-loathing" (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 613).

Christopher makes sure that his actions will not go unnoticed. The crime he commits is hideous, but in proportion to the events of his life, which little by little anesthetized his senses and made him indifferent to life. When his concern to preserve his grandmother's memory, the last trace of sensitivity he is able to display, is invalidated, his strength to keep living is completely undermined. In the following quotation we can have an idea of the dimension of the atrocity of his crime, when we read the account of the state in which the bodies of his master's family were found by the son of Mas'Charles:

> His throat was cut like the dog's throat was cut, and his penis was severed, so that it hung from his crotch as if on a thin string, dangling into the place between his open legs […]the base of a rum bottle was caught between her legs […] He pulled the bottle out and saw that the neck was broken […]He left to find his sister. He found her as he dreaded, in her youth bed with its thin rail. Her legs were spread wide and she was bloodied (CLIFF, 1996, p. 26).

Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of The Earth* supports that in order to react against the distortions inherent to the colonial system and effectively change it, the colonized resorts to every means, including violence. He states that: "As soon as they (the colonized) are born it is obvious to them that their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence" (FANON, 2004, p. 3). Christopher, as the product of those distortions and inequalities, follows that brutal impetus and cannot help but use violence to change his immediate reality.

An interesting strategy used by the author in order to show how such a destructive act could occur as a result of the tension between social classes and the inequalities produced by it, is to first humanize Christopher introducing him as an orphan who has nothing but his grandmother in his life and goes through unimaginable privations. Then, we see Christopher alone, without his grandmother at the age of eight and nine, hungry and isolated, having to survive in the jungle of the Dungle, amidst a heap of trash and diseases. He has to wander the streets of Jamaica begging for money and food in markets where he is given nothing and is chased by policemen. By then, poverty is already inscribed in his body as we can see in the following passage that shows Christopher's poor reputation as a tramp, since the tourists favored the children who smiled and did small tricks to amuse them: "But he was not at all a pretty child to them; he was ragged and dirty and dark and mauger, and he coughed before he could speak, and his brown eyes were already mapped with red lines, and his back was bent[…] he was not much of a success as a beggar" (CLIFF, 1996, p. 41). When Christopher is working in the country, he is always ready to mend his mistress' fence, feed her cow and chicken, and follow her to church whenever he is called upon. After he is dismissed we see him struggling in the city, homeless, sleeping in the town cemetery, and living hand-to-mouth.

The heinous scene of the murder is described in the beginning of *No Telephone to Heaven*, but we do not know who Christopher is or that he had been responsible for it. It is only after we learn about him that the truth is revealed. By the time we find out that he was responsible for that atrocity, we are able to see Christopher as nothing more than a postcolonial tragic victim.

In her interview with professor Opal Palmer Adisa, Cliff talks about her intention in going through Christopher's life trajectory before revealing that he was the one responsible for the assassinations. "I wanted to show how someone like Christopher [the gardener] could become who he was. And if anything, in this book I want people to have compassion for the

character. He does a terrible thing, but you can understand why he would do it. At least that was my intention" (CLIFF, 1994, p. 276).

It is interesting to note that Clare never comes into contact with Christopher in *No Telephone to Heaven*, although she is fighting for the many wretched that Christopher represents. That choice was absolutely intentional as Cliff elucidates: "They (Clare and Christopher) have parallel lives, and they only meet in two incidents of violence – when he kills Paul and Paul's family and at the very end of the novel, where he's transformed into the movie monster" (SCHWARTZ, 1993, p. 606).

In Cliff's both novels we realize how skin color is determinant in the process of identity construction in Jamaica. Clare's relationships are mediated by her color and her political consciousness is triggered by the differences revealed through it. Because Clare learns to doubt the cultural and political association between darkness and poverty, darkness and silence, darkness and passivity, she is able to overcome prejudice and become a conscious woman and fighter.

5 CONCLUSION

A lot can be gained from the critical reading of novels like *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven,* since they can be read as alternative, yet legitimate, sources that rescue forgotten voices from past histories and articulate contemporary experiences lived by people who are not represented in mainstream literature. These works can give us a perspective of the world that is not usually revealed in traditional or canonic novels and we can resort to them as a tool to promote a dialogue between people from different classes, races, and origins. Their importance lies in the potential they have to instigate changes in society, through debates and studies about controversial issues such as racism, inequality, and misrepresentation of the history of minorities and colonized peoples.

Through the contact with different voices and experiences we are able to adopt a new and non-dogmatic perspective of current social issues and question the unilateral and hegemonic readings that have been imposed upon us. This is a crucial step towards the revision of the discourses that legitimate the unjust organization of our society as a natural development.

The counter-history of Jamaica's past presented in *Abeng* opens a possibility to change our mentality about how revolutions have the potential to start through the re-visioning, re-writing, and re-defining of our histories. The struggle of the Maroons to end domination and resist colonization is an inspiration for us to question our alienation before so much oppression and misery. Once we are aware of the origins of the power relations that are all pervasive, and we are able to see how discourses are artificially constructed in order to maintain class privileges and domination, we start to become the subjects of our own history and be part of the liberating voice that Cliff represents and intends to reverberate. In that sense, the contribution that *Abeng* brings has a huge potential if we are able to be inspired by Clare's journey as she goes back to Jamaica in *No Telephone to Heaven* and commits to a guerrilla in order to overthrow the forces at work that keep oppressing Jamaicans.

Besides denouncing the misrepresentation of the history of colonized populations and the struggle of immigrants to preserve their identity, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* also problematize the limitations related to the female condition.

What is expected from Clare in Jamaica, namely to get married and try to whiten her children, is not what is expected from her in the U.S. or England, where her choice to prioritize her education is accepted and encouraged. In that sense, assimilation into a new culture is not

about losses only. For many women, diasporas represent the conquest of a kind of freedom that cannot be found in their country of origin. Clare's friend, Zoe, stays in Jamaica knowing that she is doomed to repeat her mother's fate working in the markets and going back to a home that does not belong to her. On the other hand, in Jamaica the Savages are seen as respectable because Boy is a descendant of plantation owners and has light skin, but in the U.S. he loses his status and becomes just another immigrant. The experiences Cliff's characters go through reveal that privilege and power are intrinsically connected to race, gender, and class.

The two novels also teach us the complexity of the process of adaptation to new social rules and codes, and how this process is a painful negotiation that can lead to a journey of self-discovery and social awareness. Clare had to go through her experience of displacement in order to search for a sense of identity that she could only find by going back to Jamaica and engaging politically against exploitation.

We understand how rejection , resentment, and resistance are integrant parts of those dialogues between cultures. Cliff shows us that to feel different, to be labeled the "other", or the outsider, can be the initial point that triggers a critical view of a society that is not sustainable, either because of the values it disseminates or because of its insistence in not assuming its failure. We learn how important it is for us to define ourselves instead of letting our identity be shaped by imported elements.

Clare Savage in an extremely revealing character in the sense that she slowly awakens in us a voice that claims for changes. Cliff's protagonist can be read as an allegory of Jamaica since she is as hybrid as the island she inhabits when she is a child. Her genealogy is composed by slaves and slaveholders, black and white, middle class and lower class, urban and country people. She is a town girl who spends her vacation in the countryside, which allows her to have contact with the best and the worst sides of Jamaica. The formal education she receives at school is manipulative and dogmatic, but when she goes to the country she is able to learn from the simple people and see for herself the difficulties they go through which are never mentioned at school. She starts to learn how to think critically about her country and feel uneasy about the social inequality she sees around her. She becomes conscious of her class and what it represents in a hierarchical system. Clare moves from a detached girl to a conscious and critical one and the impression we have is that the narrator expects the readers to grow and mature along with Clare as we are instructed throughout the novels.

Clare's journey embeds an experience that is overflowing in the sense that her learning is not individual, but collective. When Clare leaves the United States, she refuses to erase her roots. Through this voluntary journey back to Jamaica, she assumes the leading role in the process of discovering who she is and developing an identity that would be composed according to the elements that she would select and rescue. She would no longer ignore her past, because she realizes how decisive those elements are if she wants to feel whole and connected to something bigger than herself. When she goes back to Jamaica, she does not have a passive role, as a tourist would, and decides to react to the social inequalities present in her country through her activism when she forms political coalitions. When Clare decides to go back to Jamaica and teach the children the real history behind all the lies that they are told, she is able to bond with her country and her people and teach us that education can be a powerful tool to liberate individuals from political manipulations and existing power structures.

When Clare embarks upon her journey of revolution, with the members of the guerilla she joins, we see how crucial it is not to let histories of resistance and rebellion die. The revolution that the guerilla performs is the reenacting of the struggle originated by the Maroons who had formed a reactionary body that was entirely devoted to fighting against a system that was violating them as a people and as individuals.

In her two novels, Michelle Cliff is able to portray the discursive manipulations that marked the relationship between white masters and black servants. The black people had to be convinced that they were inferior and powerless and internalize the notion of a superior race broadcasted by the plantation owners. This discourse was used to imprison and take away the lives of millions of slaves. After the abolition of slavery, the physical punishments were no longer a threat, but the stories and traumas told by the ones who experienced the brutality of the slave trade still dwell in their children. When the narrator exposes these racial discourses, we realize how they need to be fought and destabilized, since they are responsible for the marginalization and discrimination of many ethnicities and minorities today.

When Cliff shows resistance and reaction as possible weapons against oppression she teaches us to review our beliefs, to get rid of stereotypes we learned to accept, and to open our minds to new possibilities of being in the world as more critical and committed human beings. Her novels can be seen at least as a provocation since they cause a great deal of discomfort and uneasiness about the social and economic practices being adopted right here right now. It makes us think about the common history Brazil shares with Jamaica and we realize that we

are not so alien to that brutal past of slavery practiced in the Caribbean societies. Although we like to believe all that was a long time ago, Cliff shows us that there is no such past that cannot be rescued and reworked, despite of its inconvenience.

Clare Savage can be read not only as a *bildungsroman* heroine but also as a mythical character due to the message of her journey that urges us to reconnect with our common pasts and come together as one people. In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell writes about the universal reach of symbolic language and its importance as a source of knowledge that is able to reveal many truths about humanity and society. If we analyze Clare's journey on a symbolic level, she goes through the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero, which comprises the following rites of passage: separation- initiation-return (CAMPBELL, 1973, p.30).

In the chapter entitled "The Hero Today", Campbell shows us how deceiving it is to believe that it is possible to disconnect from society and become an isolated individual. The myth of the autonomous and self-sufficient modern being is one of the promises of modernity that Michelle Cliff fights when she stresses Clare's need to bond with her community. In the following quote Campbell indicates the significance of collective communion:

> Hence, the totality – the fullness of man – is not in the separate member, but in the body of the society as a whole; the individual can be only an organ. From his group he has derived his techniques of life, the language in which he thinks, the ideas on which he thrives; through the past of that society descended the genes that built his body. If he presumes to cut himself off, either in deed or in thought and feeling, he only breaks connection with the sources of his existence. (CAMPBELL, 1973, p. 382).

In "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," critic bell hooks, in a more feminist tone, also emphasizes the importance of bonding between women if we want to live in a fair and egalitarian society. She states that: "we are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another (HOOKS, 1997, p. 1).

The impossibility to feel part of a society that discriminates and excludes is the source of all the pain, disengagement, and dissolution of many of Cliff's characters. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Christopher wonders the streets of Jamaica enduring every minute of his ghostly existence as an outcast. Clare does not feel integrated when she moves to the United States or England, where the impossibility of labeling her causes great distress. Since she does not fit in, she feels vulnerable to racial and class oppression. Kitty's experience of rejection when

she looks for decent jobs in the United States leads to a growing sense of displacement and rupture. Boy decides to stay in the United States but at the cost of the disintegration of his family. In short, Clare's gregarious action can be seen as mythical in the sense that she transforms her journey of return into a collective battle against the oppressive forces that keep her people dominated and alienated. Her attempt is to integrate the margins to the center and dissolve the social and economic barriers that keep the outcasts in a state of denial of their potential to question, review and change the terrible conditions they are forced to live in.

The end of *No Telephone to Heaven* is especially critical about, as I read it, our inability to fight neocolonial pressures, especially the financial dependence of many former colonies from the IMF and World Bank. The clumsy action of the guerrilla Clare is part of, when they decide to attack a film setting reveals that in order for a revolution to take place, there has to be a huge mass movement towards change. Nevertheless, the novel is successful in showing the possibilities to raise a voice against oppression. Even as the helicopters flying over the guerrillas' hiding places in the bush tell us that their mission has failed, the novel ends with "a burst of sounds – English, patois, bird sounds-which signify the unharnessed possibilities of discourse: the power to name, signify, create. These remain embedded in the landscape, future potential to reclaim representation." (EDMONDSON, 1993, p.190).

Aesthetically, Cliff is extremely skilled in creating a personal mythology that is representative of so many people from former colonies who might feel alienated from their own histories as well. Cliff, like many postcolonial writers, takes risks in her writing. She has a "sense of urgency" that Françoise Lionnet's defines, when she talks about postcolonial autobiography, as : "the writer's sense of responsibility and his or her ability to take risks that might help change the form of the genre as well as relations of power in society" (LIONNET, 1992, p. 322). Cliff is able to achieve self-definition through her writing, and her use of standard English and Jamaican creole contemplates the polysemy inherent to the contact between cultures. This hybrid language and the subversion of traditional literary genres are intended to value the noncanonical traditions and the shift between standard English and patois reflects the split subjectivities of the postcolonial subjects. Lionnet also points out that in choosing to use patois, Cliff fragments the linguistic unity of the book, and limits the range of textual understanding for the non-Jamaican reader. Cliff's strategy to insert a glossary of Creole terms as a post text forces us to experiment a certain degree of exclusion that is characteristic of the postcolonial condition.

Because Cliff's narratives are part of a new genre of autobiographical texts by writers who are more interested in the rewriting of their ethnic history and the re-creation of a collective identity through performance of language, the author has been defined as an *autoethnographer* (LIONNET, 1992, p.334). She experiments with historiographic metafiction, appropriates the colonial language and transforms it through the use of creole.

Besides subtly calling the attention of the readers to the process of narrative construction, the narrator in *Abeng* and *No Telephone To Heaven* unsettles certain narrative norms, such as: "the desire for continuous history", and "the myth of progress", and "linear time" (SMITH ; WATSON, 2001, p. 58). The constant shift between standard English and patois also disturbs and undermines the homogeneity of the official colonial historiographies of the master narratives. This use of Creole, as Françoise Lionnet puts it:

> This move from Standard English to Creole speech is meant to underscore class and race differences among protagonists, but it also makes manifest the double consciousness of the postcolonial, bilingual, and bicultural writer who lives and writes across the margins of different traditions and cultural universes (SMITH ; WATSON, 1992, p. 324).

What I found especially insightful about *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* was Cliff's ability to make us want to retrieve our own hidden history, and realize how categories such as race, class, and identity are unstable and artificial.

The author is also very successful in denouncing the neocolonial presence in Jamaica through the film crew when she shows how the filmmakers believe that Jamaica and its people are for sale. The producers of the film are British and Americans and they intend to make a movie about Nanny and the Maroons. If they succeed, the Maroon's history of fight and resistance against oppression, slavery, and colonial rule runs the risk of being appropriated by neocolonial powers and misrepresented, which would be a repetition and perpetuation of what has already been done. The film crew represents the neocolonial presence of multinationals such as Nike, Coke, McDonald's, and so many banks and international brands that exploit the cheap labor that countries like Jamaica and Brazil offer, and take advantage of the high taxes that we pay so that they can maximize their profits.

The main purpose of the novels seems to be to educate and liberate, to raise awareness and generate a response. Whether this response is through social awareness, political engagement or a commitment to educate, the contribution of the two novels to create a more critical society is invaluable.

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