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(Re)i-magining Identity: Plural Subjectivities in Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

A thesis submitted to
the Department of English
and Program in Women's Studies
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario

in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
with Specialization in Women's Studies

by
Taina Chahal ©
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this thesis is dedicated to
my mother, Ritva Maki and
the memory of my father, Kalevi Maki

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Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the concepts, definitions, theories, and poetry of black women, in particular highlighting those of Africaribbean women, to look at the construction of identity in two novels by two women of the Caribbean diaspora: *Frangipani House* by Beryl Gilroy and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff. Black women's self-articulations counter the dichotomies of self/other, black/white, the West/Third World, and oppressor/oppressed that underlie dominant Western stereotypes of black womanhood. Attending to black women's voices opens up the complex, shifting matrix of social and political relations that constitute the lives of the people populating Gilroy's and Cliff's novels. The plural and migratory subjectivities that surface not only counter the Cartesian concept of identity, but also differ from a generalized post-structuralist subjectivity by drawing on the specificities of women whose histories are anchored in West Africa, the Middle Passage, and slavery. The plural subjectivities of women such as Mama King and Clare Savage (the "protagonists" of the two novels) reveal the intersections of self and community, past and present, ancestors and inheritors, imagination and reality, and the political and the spiritual. Central to this thesis is a close look at Gilroy's and Cliff's re-writing of English and English Literature through an analysis of each author's particular use of language, her narrative strategies, and the structure of her novel. In this thesis, then, I highlight the intersections of language and subjectivity, and by looking at memory, the community and the self, develop the idea that a black woman's identity is multiply situated and shifting, and that a multiplicity of voices constructs her story. In other words, her story is always already plural.

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Contents

1. Acknowledgements

2. Abstract

3. Methodology and Introduction 4

4. Chapter One: Definitions and Theories 13

- *(i)* Knee Scrapers and makers of history: what it means to be a [black] [Caribbean] woman 13
- *(ii)* Creoleness, Diasporic Identity and "the Caribbean" 15
- *(iii)* Talking Back: Black Women's Critical Speech 19
- *(iv)* The Braided Strands of Memory, Subjectivity and Community 23
- *(v)* Her Head a Village 34

5. Chapter Two: Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House* 38

- *(i)* The Wordshop of the Kitchen 39
- *(ii)* The Politics of Home 44
- *(iii)* "Wash[ing] out we children": attaining whiteness 52
- *(iv)* Re-writing community: the signifying Mother 57
- *(v)* Through the Glass Darkly 68
- *(vi)* Speaking the Unspeakable: The Unsilenced Voices 78

6. Chapter Three: Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* 87

- *(i)* Ruinate: Written on the Land 88
- *(ii)* De-colonizing literature: the subversive strategy of a shifting protagonist 91
- *(iii)* White Chocolate: blurring the colour line 95
- *(iv)* Disjunctive histories and crossover narratives 104

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(v) "kin of [her] skin [he] [is]": Christopher 107

(vi) Making connections: the logic of Harry/Harriet 124

7. Conclusion 139

8. Notes 145

9. Works Cited 149

10. Works Consulted 156

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The realities we seek to understand as scholars are often much larger than the scholarship we pursue [and] the understanding we offer is just approximation, theory based on various fragments of a changing truth.(1)

-- Lisabeth Paravisini-Gebert

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Methodology and Introduction

This thesis attends to an under-researched area: Africaribbean women writers. Simply contributing to an under-researched field, however, does not guarantee research that does not participate in reproducing unequal power relations. How does a woman such as myself—white, embedded in middle-class values, with a Western-biased education—create rigorous and ethical research about the writings of women whose lives are very different in many ways from my own, whose voices and perspectives were largely in the margins of my education if not absent altogether, and who continue to be subordinated in the unequal power relations of the larger society? How does one not participate in "what research has done to black people" (unidentified 16-year-old black female qtd in Phoenix 53) and make better an academic mode of production? How then do I analyse the writings of Africaribbean women without appropriating them for academic consumption, without privileging the center and re-imposing marginality, without contributing to injustices which, as black female critics point out, are common?

An awareness of the production of knowledge is a key step; as Donna Haraway makes clear, unlocatable knowledge is ethically and politically irresponsible (583). Self-reflexivity about one's complicity in academic discourses, and about one's historical specificity and the terms of reference with which one constructs her study are essential. Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenburg suggest three guiding principles to promote feminist research that combines rigorous scholarly work, ethico-political accountability, and inclusivity: "building complex analyses, avoiding erasure, specifying location" (306). For my feminist inquiry, I combine these ethical guidelines with the tenets of multiracial

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feminism. Multiracial feminism's themes include using wide-ranging methodological approaches and recognizing the following: gender as constructed through a matrix of domination; the simultaneity of systems in shaping women's experiences; the intersectional nature of hierarchies at all levels of social life; the relational nature of domination and subordination; and the agency of women.[1]

To ameliorate the erasure that results from much academic work—every inclusion inescapably results in an exclusion (including my own selections/omissions)—I inform my critique of academic discourses and my readings of Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* and Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House* primarily with critical perspectives and theoretical frameworks which are largely marginalized in mainstream contexts: those of black women. In spite of the salutary work of critics like Myriam J.A. Chancy, Carole Boyce Davies, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, Lisabeth Paravisini-Gebert, and Opal Palmer Adisa, the writings of Africaribbean women are often marginalized, and at times excluded from mainstream contexts. Davies states that the Caribbean text "remains still peripheral to what the Eurocentric perceive as the central discourses be they feminist, Marxist, traditional or whatever" (1990 xix). In later research she continues to voice her concern: "we have to admit that many scholars in the academy participate in the devaluing of Black women who are writers and theorists by not recognizing them or engaging their ideas" (1994 55). Karla Holloway identifies bourgeois feminism as contributing to the devaluation of black women's perspectives: "Although feminist literary critics have consistently acknowledged a need to examine the intersections of race, gender, and culture, their texts too often assign marginal or limited

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space to work by and about women of Third World cultures" (57). This thesis turns to the texts, definitions, criticisms, concepts and theories put forth by black women writers, from theorists and literary critics to cultural critics, novelists and poets and places them at the centre of my analysis. "Critics intent on discovering and uncovering the meaning behind the words," explains Chancy, "must either utilize the theoretical tools the works themselves suggest or those which women of African descent (such as Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, Carole Boyce Davies, and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, among others) have themselves articulated and provided for our use" (217-8). I also heed the advice of Patricia Hill Collins who asserts that black women have the most astute critical perceptions of their lives and are the ones to turn to for understandings.[2]

Another guiding principle of inclusive inquiry is "specifying location." All research, as Haraway notes, is but a partial perspective, mediated by historical factors that shape one's particular (and limited) vision. Despite my best intentions, my positionality as a white woman with an elite western-biased education disposes me to having "cataracts" (Morrison), that is, intellectual and spiritual blindness that clouds my perception of reality (cited in Roemer 181-2). The texts of Africaribbean writers may contain complexities currently beyond my ability to decode as a non-Caribbean. To counteract my "cataracts," avoid erasure and build complex analyses, I provide space in my thesis for the "poelitics" of Africaribbean women to thread their meanings through my analysis. Coined by Chancy, poelitics is a resistant strategy of black women which re-defines the genre of poetry. Chancy explains that poelitics is "a dynamic fusion of poetics and women-centered politics" which re-writes history and "[i]n so doing, the silence that

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surrounds the issue of the sexualization and exploitation of Black women transhistorically is broken and replaced with particularly feminist visions of the plausibility and possibility of also breaking the cycle of that oppression and its diverse manifestations" (xxi). Poelitics, which I highlight through using a different font, provides condensed, alternative articulations of the multiple realities and meanings informing and underlying Africaribbean women's lives.

WE THE WOMEN

We the women who toil
unadorn
heads tie with cheap
cotton

We the women who cut
clear fetch dig sing

We the women making
something from this
ache-and-pain-a-me
back-o-hardness

Yet we the women
who praises go unsung
who voices go unheard
who deaths they sweep
aside
as easy as dead leaves

-- Grace Nichols

I have selected poetry that contests the silencing of black women by opening up what M. Nourbese Philip calls the *i-mage* behind the words (I will explain this concept later). Like the in-and-out pattern of negotiating their identities, Africaribbean women's poelitics intervene in an intermittent fashion and disrupt my linear presentation of their lives and

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my partial perspective of the knowledges encoded in their writings.

I realized early on in this project, that despite my years of education and avid reading I knew very little of the historical specificity of Africaribbean women and did not have the conceptual tools to contextualize their writings/lives. In addition, selecting which novels to study was a challenge because prior to my research I was unfamiliar with the novels of Caribbean women. I finally chose two novels, neither of which has been the object of much literary criticism: Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*. Both particularly challenged by own Western preconceptions of literary merit and, in distinctive ways, illustrate the plural subjectivities of Africaribbean women.

Frangipani House is a sliver of a novel crafted through the "simple" language of the "wordshop of the kitchen" (Marshall's concept that I will expand on in Chapter Two). Because "cataracts" blurred/blur my vision, I initially wondered if there was enough in Gilroy's book to analyze critically in order to meet academic standards. Looking through cataract-clouded lenses, I worried that Gilroy's book might not be good enough to meet the standards of the masculinist, western-centered academic mode of production through which my work must filter. The question of worthiness is an unwritten code that circulates through institutional discourses despite feminists' and post-structuralists' dismantling of master narratives and concepts such as universality. My questioning the worth of Gilroy's novel is itself a statement of my internalisation of racism. I also worried that if I could not find critical articles on her book, with my limited knowledge about the Caribbean context, I would have no guide in my analysis or

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ideas with which to engage. Whose theories and concepts would I use? Theories formulated by white feminists for Western (con)texts? those of African-American feminists? General psychoanalytical theories? Postcolonial theories? After much research and writing, I came to learn, through the dialectical engagement with black women's texts, how profound Gilroy's seemingly simple novel actually is.

When I originally read Cliff's novel, I didn't want to include it. I felt that the violence in the beginning of the novel was overdone. Sensational. I felt at the time that the book was unsuitable for an English Literature thesis because I assumed (with my "cataracts" firmly in place) that it was too 'dime-store novel-ish.' I also wondered if it even had a female protagonist, because for the first third of the novel, she is barely visible. As with Gilroy's text, my process of research revealed that there is much more to Cliff's novel than my pre-research, cataract-clouded eyes had seen.

During my research, I looked for writings by Africaribbean women, and those of other black women critics, poets and theorists, as well as other people of colour. Locating the books and articles that I needed to build a complex analysis was a challenge because I was familiar with only a scant few theorists at the onset of my research and also because Paterson Library at Lakehead University had, at the time, besides the odd Caribbean-authored text scattered in other sections, less than one shelf of Caribbean writers. Most of the references I found through bibliographies at the end of books and journal articles, a few through searching the MLA disc, and some through the recommendations of my supervisors. The extensive bibliographies at the end of Davies' books *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* and *Moving*

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Beyond Boundaries: Black Women's Diasporas Vol. 2 were invaluable.

In Chapter One, I explore the question of how to theorize and inform readings of Africaribbean women's fiction. Chapter One provides the theoretical and ethical context to argue that black women's self-articulations and critical perceptions are mandatory for analysing Africaribbean women's fiction, and that these perspectives emerge from a broad range of spheres. In this chapter, I highlight black women's oppositional challenges: two key interdependent areas that I introduce are how some black women use language and the (de)construction of identity. In other words, I look at how the women themselves—from their black women's standpoints—express what it means to be black and female. Chapter One, then, explores the intersections of plural subjectivities, i-mage making, and mothertongue, which are the concepts that guide my readings of *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven*.

The following two chapters of my thesis each focus on a specific novel. Chapter Two analyzes *Frangipani House* by Beryl Gilroy and Chapter Three highlights *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff. I look at the construction of identity in the novels and theorize the subject as a social configuration produced through intersecting axes such as gender, race, class, sexuality and age, and anchored in historically specific material contexts. By analyzing the different strategies of resistance that Gilroy and Cliff use, I show how the authors dismantle "the Master's tools" (Lorde)[3], disrupt dominant constructions of black women, and reveal the women's plural positionings. The multiplicity of vision found in *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Frangipani House* illustrates the complex relationality of women's lives and the women's embeddedness in political,

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historical, and socio-economic contexts. No individual heroines materialize: Mama King and Clare Savage are not individual heroines on a path to self-enlightenment within self-contained narratives such as one finds in classic realist fiction. Instead, each woman expresses a plurality of self/selves emerging from her multiple positionings, from the multiplicity of voices located in a collective struggle, and from the numerous stories underlying her own. In other words, each woman's story is located on a palimpsest overlaid with a polyphony of voices. The story/stories is/are plural. The narratives within *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven* suggest that personal history converges not only with family history but also with the historical and political contexts—national and international, past and present—that inform Caribbean society. Renu Juneja points out that, "the psychological, the cultural, and the political function as interchangeable and interactive signs in Caribbean literature" (8). Africaribbean women such as Mama King and Clare Savage can be understood only in relation to other members of their communities and within the complex, shifting field that constitutes their existence, an historical-material and economic-political field embedded in the hegemonic power relations of a defining "West" and a dependent, underdeveloped "Third World." [4] There is a continual dialectic between subjects, between subjects and sociality, and between subjects and history. The narratives embedded within *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven* reveal the juxtaposition and interweaving of the multiple stories and meanings encoded within the novels and the criss-crossing struggles and engagements of Africaribbean women—including precursors and foremothers.

A brief, concluding chapter draws together the two novels and looks at their

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intertextuality. *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven* tell two different stories—one of the grandmother and the other of the granddaughter—in two divergent ways, as the authors develop the plural subjectivities of Africaribbean women through the specificities of their (the authors' and the women's) geopolitical social contexts, but neither the women's histories nor the novels lie outside each other. In *Frangipani House*, Gilroy tells the story of an elderly black woman, Mama King, and presents some of the multiple voices encoded in Guyanese history through "the wordshop of the kitchen" and through a narrative structure that reflects the intertwining of Mama King's reality and imagination. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff develops the multiple voices that construct the plural stories underlying Clare Savage, a young, middle-class Jamaican woman, through a disjunctive narrative form that echoes the notion of plural subjectivities. In both novels, I analyze the concept of migratory subjectivity through the marasa principle and by decoding each author's particular i-magination.[5] The complexities that I unearth reveal that, as part of the Caribbean, the female characters in the novels (as well as the authors themselves) have identities and communities that are multiply layered, uniquely constituted and diversely expressed; yet as their stories (and narrative strategies) show, the women share histories of colonisation and a legacy of resistance. Brenda Carr states that "cross-border traffic in inspiration, homage, and filiation by peoples of African descent is an enabling practice" (90); both Gilroy and Cliff engage in border crossing and their texts meet at the crossroads of the marasa.

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Chapter One: Definitions and Theories

"She Scrape She Knee: The Theme of My Work"

> ...My work emerges from the core of my life—my family—from which I weave the memories that we think we no longer know with the memories that we forgot we have with the memories that are lived! As such my writing is encompassing and circuitous, no separation between the past, the future, and this moment ... My writing is an attempt to grapple with what it means to be a woman, Black, Caribbean, conscious. These are not different realities; they are integrated. I cannot emphasize the wholeness enough. Too often nothing gets accomplished because we separate into camps and compartmentalize our experiences based on an internalisation of our Euro-American education. I am symphonic, and whatever I process is integrated in myself as a woman, a person of African descent, a Caribbean. Like the tree of which I am a branch, I am perennial. I am certain of my continuation even though the form might alter to adapt to a new climate. I/we will be around because we are knee scrapers, survivors of the seas and wind, reapers of cane and banana, makers of history.
>
> -- Opal Palmer Adisa

Knee scrapers and makers of history: what it means to be a [black] [Caribbean] woman

Black women are engaged in a continual struggle to define for themselves their identities and their realities. Given prevailing and continuing power imbalances, deconstructing the term "black women" is crucial. The term can be totalising when used to imply an undifferentiated, monolithic group, and thus reinforces stereotypes and women's subordination and oppression. The idea of plural subjectivities that I explore in this thesis counters the reductionist, essentialized categorization of black women that, as Amina Mama states, permeates Western constructs of black identity.[6] In my use of the term "black women," I follow the meanings of feminist "women of colour." Terms that construct dichotomies such as "women/women of colour," "black/white," and "the West/Third World" are, as Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose explain, "historical

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epistemological *effect[s]* rather than ... essential categorization[s]" (xvii); that is, the terms are produced through political and discursive processes. Ghosh and Bose continue that, "The configuration of these terms ... matters less than who uses them, in what contexts, and for what purposes" (xvii). In my thesis I use the term "black women" as a political concept of identity that "black" women deploy to reject the essentialist stereotypes of dominant discourses for self-definitions that speak of agency, resistance, mobility and the continual re-negotiation of the self/selves.

It is also important to note that black feminist writers, critics and theorists, including the ones I draw on in my thesis, do not comprise a generalizable category but articulate a range of varied, and at times opposing, critical positions, from Afrocentrism (eg. Joyce Ann Joyce) to poststructuralism (eg. Amina Mama). Moreover, the significations black women, women of colour, and Africaribbean women are neither mutually exclusive nor synonymous. Black women share histories of colonization and sexist, racist, neo-colonial and imperialist discourses, as well as the legacy of various African heritages, and belong to an "imagined community" (Anderson 7), yet they are not a homogenous block but rather heterogeneous subjects who occupy a multiplicity of historically and culturally specific positionings. As Ghosh and Bose clarify, "Each person is faced with a distinctive set of practices, discourses, and institutions that create very different horizons of meaning/signification, since these horizons vary in different geopolitical locations and historical contexts" (xxi). Black Caribbean women are multiply situated and internally fragmented, with differences, conflicts, and contradictions within subjects and among them, yet at the same time their lives intersect and share

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ground with other Caribbean women (as well as men). Also, in light of the persistence of neo-colonial policies and practices. Africaribbean women cross spaces and maintain linkages with other black women and women of colour. To use the words of Ghosh and Bose, when larger historical and geopolitical contexts coincide, uniquely situated women negotiate their way through, and meet in, spaces of heterogeneous "transnational dialogue."[7] This thesis addresses the specificities of Africaribbean women's varying enactments of subjectivity, and while acknowledging the differences among black women, recognizes their shared histories and the imagined community of the African diaspora.

Creoleness, Diasporic Identity and "the Caribbean"

The fluidity of diasporic Caribbean identity is also a key consideration for understanding the writings of Africaribbean women. The term "Caribbean" compounds the slipperiness of the term "diaspora." The Caribbean, although it exists in a material and geopolitical context, is also a discursive site that includes diasporic experience. Wendy Brown explains that, "It [the Caribbean state] is highly concrete and yet an elaborate fiction; powerful and intangible; rigid and protean; potent and boundary less; centralized and decentered" (cited in Barriteau 196). Diasporic Caribbean communities cross national, ethnic, geographical, linguistic, and political boundaries. The novelists I selected to study, as well as many of the literary critics, theorists and poets, do not physically live in the Caribbean, yet they do inhabit "imagined communities." In the introduction to *Her True-True Name,* Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson speak of Cliff's "compromised authenticity" and place her in an "alienated tradition" rather than a

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Caribbean cultural context (xvii). They see Cliff as light enough to be white and as having Western feminist sensibilities. Cliff was born in Jamaica, yet has resided in the United States since she was a young girl, and although she does not, as Francoise Lionnet explains, position herself as a "representative" of West Indian life, she does situate herself as one who "prefers to recover the African heritage of her matrilineal ancestry" (325). Gilroy was born in Guyana, moved to England in 1951 and continues to write from there. Stefano Harney states that to make visible a nation, to understand the limits and meanings of terms like "the Caribbean people" one must turn to the writers' imaginations. Place is imagined and brought into existence through language: "There is no Venice, no Trinidad," states Harney, "except in the telling" (9).

Back Home Contemplation

There is more to heaven
than meet the eye
there is more to sea
than watch the sky
there is more to earth
than dream the mind

O my eye

The heavens are blue
but the sun is murderous
the sea is calm
but the waves reap havoc
the earth is firm
but trees dance shadows
and bush eyes turn
— Grace Nichols

The imagining of "the Caribbean" by Gilroy and Cliff reveals a complex matrix of power relations constituting many peoples, socio-economic statuses, ethnicities and

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histories. As the cultures and peoples have both creolised and migrated, "the Caribbean" cannot be contained by definitive boundaries or material place; indeed, as Mrs. Taylor in *No Telephone to Heaven* shows, creolisation complicates the identity categorization so integral to western taxonomy. Caribbean identity, as Clare Savage's heritage makes clear, is a multiracial and multiethnic mix. The languages Caribbean people speak are multiple, varying across and within "nations." In both novels, the characters exemplify different ways of speaking: Mama King's tongue is very different from Clare Savage's language—which itself varies according to her social context. Western binary categories are insufficient and inappropriate for an analysis of the multifaceted, creolised Caribbean identities depicted in *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven*; indeed, as Bernabe, Chamoiseau and Confidant maintain, such categories are incapable of capturing the complexities of "the Caribbean" (892).

C'est Juste Une Guepe

don't be scared
c'est juste une guepe
it's just a wasp
exploring your forehead
scrutinizing the forest of
your lovely hair
don't be scared
c'est juste une guepe
it's just a wasp
puzzled and baffled
busy looking
wondering if there's space enough
for shade
in this new type
of frizzy grass
don't be scared
c'est juste une guepe

-- Gilda Nassief[8]

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Bernabe, Chamoiseau, and Confiant argue eloquently that, "Because of its constituent mosaic, Creoleness is an open specificity. It escapes, therefore, perceptions which are not themselves open. Expressing it ... is expressing a kaleidoscopic totality, that is to say: *the nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity" (892).* The very principle of creoleness is complexity; it escapes either/or dichotomies. Creoleness does not synthesize disparate elements, but is a process which retains—in new forms—differences and contradictions. One aspect of creoleness that I explore in the following two chapters is the notion that collective memories and stories inhabit the spaces of creolité. These memories are drawn from multiple sources, which are themselves hybridised. Aijaz Ahmad explains that, "[the] cross-fertilisation of cultures has been endemic to all movements of people... and all such movements in history have involved the travel, contact, transmutation, hybridisation of ideas, values and behavioural norms" (18). Both Mama King and Clare Savage have multiple attachments and creolised heritages; both exhibit what Bobb Smith explains as "a linkage to origins of ancestors whom Caribbean women may have embraced through direct or indirect experience" (167). The women's self-definitions include these heritages because the heritages carry creolised facets drawn from multiple sources that enable the women to survive their multiple oppressions.

"Leh We Talk See"

> Man we couldn' stan fe be in dem chains. Ah wha dem tink we is animals? From de very beginnin' we decided we wuzn' goin stay in no chain, so we resist! We use fe bun down de massas Plantation an run way to de hills. We ain' only run to de hills fe hide yuh know, we use fe attack de white man dem all de time. We destroy so much of de property an so till dem had no odder choice buh fe set we free. We wuh bad meh son! Eh-eh, hear me say we we like if I wuh dere. I guess

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> I feel dis way because we is all black an dem wuh fe me ancestors. Ah yes Lawd we are all one in de spirit. Alright, den, now dat yuh understan' where I cumin' from I goin go ahead an say WE. Anyway like I wuh sayin' before. we show dem dat we no whan fe adopt no culture of deres, we whan fe keep we heritage alive. We no whan no vanilla in de cawfee. De white man try fe make we believe dat black is sinful, so we fe hate weself and wuk hard fe dem fe better weself cause dem is we salvation. I know fe sure I ain' goin wurship nobody who does treat me as bad as de white man treat we. I know we never sen' call dem. Dem jus whanted fe geh we fe slave fe dem so dey make up dis lie bout tryin' fe help we fe fool dem moomoo dem in dey homelan'. Den when we geh here dem make everybody believe we no human buh savage. (270)
>
> -- Jeannette Charles

Talking Back: Black Women's Critical Speech

Black women's struggles for self-articulation and emancipation are entangled in the discourses of gender, race, class, and sexuality that emerged out of the histories of slavery and imperialism. During the conquest of the Americas, such discourses interlocked to reinvent black womanhood, regulate relationships between mother and child, and disconnect women from their maternal ancestors and female communities. At the same time, slavery's disruption to familial and communal relations contributed to the transplanted peoples becoming matriarchal which cultivates women's interdependence. Another predilection of the discourses and practices of slavery was to sever women from the mothertongue. The plural identities of Africaribbean women's writings are expressed in the plurality of the mothertongue, which, as Velma Pollard explains, "might usefully be thought of as 'language' rather than 'a language'" (252). Unlike the fathertongue of English, which can truncate black women's self-expressions, mothertongue is multiple and has, according to Philip, "some deeper patterning—a deep structure" (23).[9] Mothertongue—the speech, voice, tone, language, grammar, musical rhythms, i-mage, and metaphors of the linguistic legacies of the African cultures of the Caribbean—works

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its way through the English language to make the now "dislocated and acted upon—even destroyed—" father tongue a "language by the people, honed and fashioned through a particular history of empire and savagery" (Philip 8). This thesis develops the concept of mothertongue as a discursive field that includes multiple layers of reality and alternative conceptual frameworks by looking at *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven* through specific theoretical lenses. The theories I highlight are Marshall's "wordshop of the kitchen" which focuses on black women's "everyday" language, Vévé Clark's marasa principle which articulates a third space beyond dichotomies, Philip's "i-mage" that speaks of an irreducible Presence behind words, and Karla Holloway's concept of language as predicated on plural narrative voices that highlight repetition, recursion and (re)membrance. Reading the mothertongue through these theoretical lenses allows women's plural subjectivities to surface and testify to the various injustices inflicted on black women. Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue; her silence softly breaks* and Grace Nichols' *I is a long memoried woman*, excerpted throughout this thesis, reveal how contemporary black female poets, through mothertongue, speak of the attempts to silence enslaved women and sever them from their communities.

We New World Blacks

The timbre
in our voices
betrays us
however far
we've been

whatever tongue
we speak
the old ghost
asserts itself

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in dusky echoes
like driftwood
traces

and in spite of
ourselves
we know the way
back to

the river stone

the little decayed
spirit
of the navel string
hiding in our back garden

— Grace Nichol

The past is not a closed book; the histories of enslaved women do not lie dormant, but rather lie inside the stories of their descendents. As part of the "open specificity" of Creolité, plural subjectivities are not fixed but fluid configurations that cross boundaries of time and space. The women of the past "live" inside their descendents; their histories are encoded in the language of mothertongue. The i-mages that Cliff and Gilroy create show that the lives of the women populating their novels are embedded in the interlocking social and political relations which were institutionalized during slavery. The women undermine the authority of the language of their colonizers that scripts their "non-being, [their] lack of wholeness" (Philip 20) through re-writing English and making visible the presence and persistence of a fluid, ever-changing language, the mothertongue. The women's writings testify to the self-articulations and transformations wrought, not by individual heroics, but through "[their] collective strength, like that of a chain"(Busby xxxviii).

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The Chain

I no longer care, keeping close my silence
has been a weight,
a lever pressing out my mind.
I want it told and said and printed down
the dry gullies,
circled through the muddy pools
outside my door.
I want it sung out high by thin-voiced elders
front-rowing murky churches.
I want it known by grey faces queuing under
greyer skies in countries waking
and sleeping with sleet and fog.
I want it known by hot faces pressed against
dust-streaked windows of country buses.

And you must know this now.
I, me, I am a free black woman.
My grandmothers and their mothers
knew this and kept their silence
to compose up their strength,
kept it hidden
and played the game of deference
and agreement and pliant will.

It must be known now how that silent legacy
nourished and infused such a line,
such a close linked chain
to hold us until we could speak
until we could speak out
loud enough to hear ourselves
loud enough to hear ourselves
and believe our own words.
-- Christine Craig

By speaking out on the silencing of black women's histories, poelitics such as Craig's challenge what Hill Collins calls "the controlling images" of black women. Hill Collins explains that,

> As part of a generalized ideology of domination, these controlling images of Black womanhood take on special meaning because the authority to

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> define these symbols is a major instrument of power. In order to exercise power, elite white men and their representatives must be in a position to manipulate appropriate symbols concerning Black women...These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life. (67-8)

Controlling images can be explicit, but more frequently, as Hill Collins' comment suggests, they are innocuously packaged and taken-for-granted. Brand expands on the racism that constructs controlling images: "You don't have to wear a sheet to take part in it [racism]. You don't even have to be white. You just have to absorb the taken-for-granted knowledge about race and racial difference produced through colonialism and Black slavery" (159). Indeed, as I show through the shifting subjectivities of Matron in *Frangipani House* and Clare Savage in *No Telephone to Heaven,* one does not have to be white, middle-class, nor male to participate in racist ideologies.

Through presenting the complexities of plural subjectivities, Gilroy and Cliff "talk back" (hooks)[10] to controlling images. The writers resist denigrating[11] stereotypes that characterize black women as de-sexualized, self-sacrificing mammies or promiscuous Sapphires.[12] Their writings challenge the grave and subtle misrepresentations of black women not only in mainstream writings, but also in white female and black male works. The women contest the homogenization of their experiences and the essentializing of black womanhood by talking back to the misinterpretations that fail to capture the complexities of the multiple relations that constitute black women's lives.

The Braided Strands of Memory, Subjectivity and Community

Gilroy's and Cliff's writings show that subjectivity, community, and memory are indivisible. Memory is kept alive by individual women and the networks of black women

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connected to the chain of life. As part of their creolised identities, Africaribbean women imaginatively, psychologically and spiritually inhabit a space beyond dichotomies. Claire Harris describes the space she writes from as "chaos/multiple worlds/time confounded with space/the notion of every gesture changing the universe/ the forever 'now'/the notion of unity and aloneness" (33). Unlike the linear time of traditional western history which compartmentalizes time, in a space such as Harris articulates, the past, present and future co-exist. Ancestral voices seep into the present realities of diasporic African women: the carefully crafted words of writers such as Gilroy and Cliff call up i-mages that speak those voices.

Reclaiming and integrating the experiences of Africaribbean people can only be done, as Philip asserts, through "a language with the emotional, linguistic, and historical resources capable of giving voice to the particular i-mages arising out of the experience" (15-6). I-mage is a deconstruction of the word "image" and, as Philip explains, "draws on the Rastafarian practice of privileging the 'I' in many words" (12). Behind the i-mage lies "[an] irreducible essence...[that] can be likened to the DNA molecules at the heart of life" (12). I-maging, which is the process of bringing the i-mage to the surface, "becomes one way in which society continually accepts, integrates and transcends its experiences, positive and negative"(Philip 14). Through their ability to craft words, Gilroy and Cliff symbolically access the i-mage and express a whole field of experiences, emotions, histories and realities. Philip explains that:

> In her attempt to translate the i-mage into meaning and non-meaning, the writer has access to a variety of verbal techniques and methods—comparison, simile, metaphor, metonymy, symbol, rhyme, allegory, fable, myth—all of which aid her in this process. Whatever the name given to the

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> technique or form, the function remains the same—that of enabling the artist to translate the i-mage into meaningful language for her audience. (12)

I-mages are realized through the writer's i-magination and the words that she strings together to tell the stories of the people of the Caribbean. Gilroy's and Cliff's subversive use of the English language brings out the deep layers of their texts that speak of varying histories and multiple meanings.

"Hard Against the Soul" VI

listen, just because I've spent these
few verses fingering this register of the heart,
clapping life, as a woman on a noisy beach,
calling blood into veins dry as sand,
do not think that things escape me,
this drawn skin of hunger twanging as a bow,
this shiver whistling into the white face of capital, a
shadow traipsing, icy veined and bloodless through
city alleys of wet light, the police bullet glistening
through a black woman's spine in November, against
red pools of democracy bursting the hemisphere's
seams, the heart sinks, and sinks like a moon.

-- Dionne Brand

Holloway's theorizing is also helpful for understanding the plural subjectivities encoded in *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven.* Holloway explains that the languages of black women dissolve false dichotomies and linear constructs of time. She states that the multiple narrative strategies that black women use in their writings, which emerge through "their history…the history of orature—the primal mythic source" (100), open up spaces that suspend the dichotomy between the present and the past. She writes:

> The vitality inserted into language by the mythologies in black women's writing becomes their especially distinct means of allowing the presence of historical, mythic, and contemporary figures to exist simultaneously in the text. Their insistence on making the worlds of the past and present collide

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> creates a literary history that indicates a different world view operating—one that both denies the primacy of Western historiography and that challenges standards external to the text as a means, a frame of understanding." (105)

As Holloway's comment suggests, black women's writings are layered with simultaneous realities and multiple voices. The past surfaces through their narrative strategies; their fiction becomes a repository for memory. Bernabe, Chamoiseau and Confiant, addressing the creolised Caribbean context, also speak of the pivotal role of writers as purveyors of historical knowledges and submerged voices:

> our history (or our histories) is not totally accessible to historians. Their methodology restricts them to the sole colonial chronicle. Our chronicle is behind the dates, behind the known facts: *we are Words behind writing.* Only poetic knowledge, fictional knowledge, literary knowledge, in short, artistic knowledge can discover us, understand us and bring us, evanescent, back to the resuscitation of consciousness. (896)

This statement clarifies the importance of the craft of writing and positions the writer as a purveyor of change, through whose words cultural memories and histories are activated and accessed. Caribbean women in particular play a powerful role as disseminators of consciousness because they are customarily the primary bearers of tradition and the principle agents for keeping the past alive through story-telling.[13] Keeping the past alive is crucial; it is vital to Africaribbean women's tenacity and affirmation of self. Remembering the past is the key to their resistance and survival; both Mama King and Clare Savage learn this lesson. Both *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Frangipani House* support the idea that a legacy of resistance lives in the memory encoded in black women's writings. As I will show in my chapter on *Frangipani House,* a legacy of resistance jumps out through Mama King's tongue and enables her escape

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from sexist, classist and ageist discourses. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, a history of resistance carried through her mother and her maternal grandmother weaves its way through to Clare Savage and spurs her politicisation and guerrilla resistance. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that, "Resistance is encoded in the practices of remembering, and of writing .... The very practice of remembering against the grain of 'public,' or hegemonic history, of locating the silences and the struggle to assert knowledge which is outside the parameters of the dominant, suggests a rethinking of sociality itself" (39). Bringing to the surface the memories that have lain silent inside the fathertongue and bringing knowledges out of the margins and into the centre transform the lives of Mama King and Clare Savage, spurring their social and political consciousness.

> From dih pout
> of mih mouth
> from dih
> treacherous
> calm of mih
> smile
> you can tell
>
> I is a long memoried woman
>
> -- Grace Nichols

Memory lives in the writings of black women because the texts are, as Holloway states, oracular. She explains that oracular texts are predicated on narrative voices (always plural) and are incantatory; that is, the techniques of language highlight repetition, recursion, and (re)membrance, all of which direct one inwards. In brief, repetition, recursion and (re)membrance are textual strategies which look at the relationships between meaning, voice, and community, and which work together to open

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up the multiple meanings underlying texts. Repetition recalls the oral, story-telling voice in the written word and deepens the syntactic level of the text, disrupting linear concepts of time and the linear arrangement of words; recursion blends the figurative (reflective) and the symbolic (reflexive) processes which layer the culture at hand in the text with the tradition/source "behind" the words; (re)membered texts privilege black women's history and cultural memories and acknowledge a spiritual point of origin. Holloway argues that black cultures are inextricably linked to the spiritual; to use her metaphor, cultural moorings are intertwined with spiritual metaphors. She also argues that the writings of black women are layered, polyphonic texts in which the voices of ancestors are always present. As I argue in this thesis, these voices find their way into and are expressed through the plural subjectivities of the female characters populating the textual field of Gilroy's and Cliff's novels; furthermore, the cultural moorings of Mama King and Clare Savage are inextricably intertwined with their spiritual consciousness. Gilroy's and Cliff's oracular texts evoke consciousness and memory, allowing Mama King and Clare Savage to join the chain of ancestors. "[V]ision and act," explains Holloway, "are proffered as ways toward memory, and memory is recovered through language" (37). The matrix of memory encoded in the language of oracular texts allows the *Words behind writing*—the i-mages—to become translucent. As Holloway clarifies:

> A translucent moment in a text encourages the shimmering of its metaphorical layers. They strain against the literal narrative structure for an opportunity to dissemble the text through their diffusive character. Figurations that assert themselves over the literal level of text claim the reader's attention. Imagery and metaphor are the deconstructive mediations of translucence....The narrative structure in these works force the words within the texts to represent (re)memories in/of events and ideas that revise and multiply meanings. (55-6)

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From Holloway's and Philip's perspectives, memory is encoded in language. The past inhabits the mothertongue of black women writers and speaks through their words, through the i-mages that the women call up, through the translucent moments their narrative strategies evoke. Amina Mama, who takes a poststructuralist perspective, also posits that the past inhabits the discursive realm of language.

Mama states that the discursive positions a subject takes up can be located in the collective history of a particular social group, the social and historical relations in which "collective assumptions and shared meanings and values ...have been cumulatively built up through the collective experience" (98). Moving through multiple and various positions which are collectively constructed, that is, shared rather than separate, the subject is constituted out of collective experience. Subjectivity is not only "a dynamic social process emanating from the collective history of the people under consideration," states Mama, "but also an intrapsychic process in which positions and changes are constituted out of the personal relational history of the individual" (142). Like Juneja, Mama posits a continual dialectic between individuals and discourses, between social experience and psychodynamics, between history and the self (133). The psyche constructs the social simultaneously as historically-laden discourses inhabit the subject; in other words, there is no separation of the individual and the "outside," no history distinct from one's present. As Mama notes, these politically and historically-laden discourses, some of which are suppressed, are embedded in the psyche. The subject, then, is a complex configuration constituted discursively through psychosocial historical relations, and the kaleidoscopic totality of discourses that circulate are not separate but rather

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intertwined in a complex nexus of relations. The characters in the two novels I analzye exemplify Mama's position that an individual is not a fixed, Cartesian *isolato,* but rather a subjectivity produced through collective discursive processes, always already embedded in historical power relations and other historical legacies.

Deconstructing the concept of identity is a key factor in decoding the knowledges and memories embedded in Gilroy's and Cliff's novels. As a woman of colour, an Africaribbean woman is not singular and insular but, as Mohanty's work reminds us, "a plurality of self." Davies theorizes the plurality of self through her concept of migratory subjectivity and this concept is key to my own analysis of the two novels. She explains that black women's identity is performative and repetitively produced: "the category Black woman, or woman of colour, exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist" (1994 8-9). Unlike the Enlightenment concept of identity which predominates pre-modernist Western constructs of the self, or the "authentic" other of colonial and neo-colonial myth, migratory subjectivity is anti-essentialist and posits the fluidity and agency of black womanhood. Like the poststructuralist concept of subjectivity, migratory subjectivity rejects fixity of identity for the continual re-negotiation of one's self/selves, but is specifically formulated to analyze black women's lives. To understand the concept of black female subjectivity one needs to attend to the women's shifting engagements in multiple relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and education (to name a few).

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One must also place the women in the historically specific contexts of their local communities and societies as well as analyze the macro factors operating in these contexts. That these social relations exist in hierarchies of domination and violence which disadvantage black women as a group is undeniable. Both the history of slavery and neo-colonialism underlie the discourses that circulate through the spheres that constitute black women's plural subjectivities and are central to the configuration of migratory subjectivities. These larger hegemonic processes variably impact each woman because of specific economic, political and historical conditions. Clark states that it is important to draw on the politics, economies and philosophies that produce the particular cultures of the Caribbean. Clark's concept of the marasa principle arises from the creolisation of the rural economies of the Caribbean with plantocracy and empowering African "mythologies." An Africaribbean woman shifts/migrates through particular creolised intersections which are produced through the specificities of the Caribbean context—and constituted through her active engagement. "The resisting subject," that is, the subject's agency and her refusal to be subjugated, are central to migratory subjectivity, states Davies (1994 36, 37).

Furthermore, as the female characters of Gilroy's and Cliff's novels show, because the women occupy multiple and variable subject positions which intersect, their positions, like the discourses themselves, can be in conflict with each other. Conflictual discourses are inherent to the hierarchical economic and political spheres which impact on Caribbean women's lives; also, as noted earlier, Creole identity encompasses contradictions. Creolisation is a process that combines disparate elements of various

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cultures. languages, and histories that at times clash or have been in conflict. Indeed. in the case of Clare Savage, her conflicts spur her journey towards the mothertongue; Mama King's conflicts lead her down the path to her past. The women's travels in discordant interfaces produce tensions and confusion. As Davies clarifies, migratory subjectivity "promotes a way of assuming the subject's agency ... therefore, the subject is not just constituted, but in being constituted has multiple identities that do not always make for harmony" (1994 36). Mama's theoretical work on the political processes which construct black subjectivities shares ground with Davies' theory of migratory subjectivity. Mama also states that the simultaneity of divergent subject positions produces contradictions and conflicts which can lead to collusion and complicity in the oppressive discourses in which one is engaged. They can lead to confusion, anger and bad decisions, even self-destructive behaviour and violence. But the range and oscillation of positions also result in growth, creativity, resistance and rebellion; as the characters of Mama King and Clare Savage show, these intersections can be crossroads of change. Dismantling essentialist notions of black female identity allows the women to be conceived beyond the fixity of oppression and victimization, beyond the resistance/assimilation dichotomy, and instead acknowledged for their "slipperiness, [and] elsewhereness" (Davies 1994 36). The women escape the images which reflect them as "Matriarch, emasculator and Hot Momma...Sister, Pretty Baby, Auntie, Mammy and Girl" (Trudier Harris qtd in Collins 67). Migratory subjectivity constitutes a way of "talking back" to the controlling images of black women, and because it posits the continual re-negotiation of identity, asserts the agency, resistance, and mobility of black women and the complexities of their lives.

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In its dismantling of Enlightenment concepts of individualistic identity, migratory subjectivity allows for nuanced readings not only of particular women, but also of the relationships between women, relationships which I highlight in my readings of *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Frangipani House*. The links between women are vital. In the shifting ground that constitutes Caribbean existence, the relationships between daughters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, *macomeres*[14], 'othermothers'[15], and ancestral foremothers play a pivotal role in female self-definitions. Hill Collins' extensive research on black women speaks of the self-valuation and respect, self-reliance and independence, and change and empowerment which are nurtured through black women's relationships with each other and which are key to the women's self-definitions. Hill Collins examines the importance of mother/daughter relationships in the formation of self and consciousness.[16] She states that mothers and mother figures emerge as central in the narratives and fiction of black women (96). *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Frangipani House* attest to the primacy of mother/daughter connections. The contradictory desires and conduct that various female characters exhibit and the dissonances that erupt in their families and with their friends emerge through the (dis)connections of the mother/daughter bond, in all of its kaleidoscopic complexity.

OMEN

I require an omen, a signal
I kyan not work this craft
on my own strength
on my own strength

alligator teeth
and feathers
old root and powder

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I kyan not work this craft
this magic black
on my own strength

Dahomey lurking in the shadows
Yoruba lurking in the shadows
Ashanti lurking in the shadows

I am confused
I lust for guidance
a signal, a small omen
perhaps a bird picking
at my roof
...

Grace Nichols

Her Head a Village

Nichols's words conjure up the "*Words behind writing*" (Bernabe, Chamoiseau & Confiant 896). She calls upon a female community to guide her. Nichols's poem speaks of the speaker's need as an Africaribbean woman to attend to the voices of the knowledgeable women of her past in order for her/Her to continue Her/their movement through the chain. As I will show in the following two chapters, female elders and ancestors play a crucial role in the empowerment of Africaribbean women and their ongoing resistance to dominant discourses. In *No Telephone to Heaven,* for example, female ancestors speak through the "ruinate"; in *Frangipani House,* Mama King is "visited" by her mother. Davies elaborates on the life-affirming nature of older women: "They become specifically gendered ancestral links in terms of knowledge of healing arts, survival skills for Caribbean women, nurturing, re-membering" (127). Valuable knowledges are passed on through the chain of memory, surfacing through the writer's narrative strategies that allow the i-mages to erupt. In Chancy's readings of

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Africaribbean women's literature, she explains that the female characters unearth their foremothers and in so doing are empowered:

> They reclaim 'Sycorax,' the dead, silenced, and forgotten mother of Shakespeare's Caliban, to say only that there should be no dead, silenced, forgotten foremothers among us, for it is they who provide us with a guide to a memory that will transform our forward motion. In reclaiming these foremothers, we reclaim ourselves and repair the fissures caused by distrust, economic and political turmoil, as well as the process of emigration. We repair the generational disruptions that have by and large fuelled the repetition of the cycles of abuse directed at the youngest and most fragile among us, especially girl children. (214)

Aligning Sycorax with the "sinister wisdom" of the Dahomean Mawu-Lisa, the god/dess of sun and moon, a figure who "recalls both African and women's spirituality" (26), Chancy re-visions Sycorax as a productive symbol of the re-surfacing of Africaribbean women's knowledges. Although in different ways, both Mama King and Clare Savage reclaim their foremothers through the Presence of Mawu-Lisa, who exists within the chain of ancestors. Female ancestors, whether explicit in the writings of Africaribbean women or conjured through i-mages, are a conduit of memory and "repair the fissures" arising from local, socially specific oppressions and hegemonic power relations. The women weave a thread of memory through the text, linking the experience of the past with the present and hence tangle up the controlling images snaking destructively through the web of discourses. The mothertongue intervenes to disrupt the misrepresentations of black women, to break the silences lying inside master narratives, and to undermine the authority of official discourses.

The narrative strategies of Michelle Cliff and Beryl Gilroy open spaces that allow the multiple layers and plural voices encoded in their texts to shimmer through. *No*

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Telephone to Heaven and *Frangipani House* contain knowledges, histories and memories that speak of the unjust effects of unequal power relations and black women's struggles for self-articulations. The characters of Clare Savage and Mama King reveal Africaribbean women's multiple self/selves, and their embeddedness in complex social, political and historical relations. Their plural positions open up the complex interlocking layering and juxtapositioning of women's stories, from their complicities and confusions to their engagements in a chain of resistance. The collective self that emerges from the tale-telling of the women subverts the controlling images of black womanhood and not only challenges the oppressive management of black women but also promotes alternative self-definitions which are based on complex configurations of multiply situated women. Both Mama King and Clare Savage elude the discourse of containment. The "knee-scrapers" (Adisa) that emerge talk back and present women in shifting, changeable positions yet also show them to be simultaneously embedded in a collectivity and rooted in a history of resistance. The memories encoded by Michelle Cliff and Beryl Gilroy re-member and re-connect Africaribbean women and in so doing draw the collective past into the present to re-write and transform history.

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"Her Head a Village"

Her head was a noisy village, one filled with people, active and full of life, with many concerns and opinions. Children, including her own, ran about. Cousins twice removed bickered. A distant aunt, Maddie, decked out in two printed cotton dresses, a patched-up pair of pants and an old fuzzy sweater, marched up and down the right side of her forehead. Soon she would have a migraine. On the other side, a pack of idlers lounged around a heated domino game, slapping the pieces hard against her left forehead. Close to her neck sat the gossiping crew, passing around bad news and samples of malicious and scandalous tales. The top of her head was quiet. Come evening this would change, with the arrival of schoolchildren; when the workers left their factories and offices, the pots, banging dishes and televisions blaring would add to the noisy village. (99)

Makeda Silvera

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Chapter Two: Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House*

This chapter begins with an introduction to the narrative strategy of the "wordshop of the kitchen" and looks at how Gilroy uses language to construct the story of Mama King and the community of women whose histories layer with her own. I analyze Mama King's migratory subjectivity through the multiple social, political and economic strands in Caribbean society that lead to her literal and spiritual homelessness and by looking at her resistance to her positioning in society. By drawing on the marasa principle, I stress the importance of Mama King's self-naming and her counter stance of upholding a heritage that stresses the social and cultural significance of motherhood. Mama King's multiply layered story opens up to reveal her daughters' and Olga Trask's internalisation of the fathertongue and their devaluation of the mother and the history she/She represents. By exposing the intersections of colorism, classism, sexism and ageism, I examine the conflicts and shared space within the women's interweaving histories. I then move to a reading of Mama King's (dis)placement into the nursing home and the "ugly-beautiful" frame that opens up to memories, histories and voices found inside a vista of "dreams." Mama King's "dreams" untie the bonds of a previously silenced history and lead her down the path towards the noisy village she carries inside her head.

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> A strip of road, brown as burnt sugar, and tender as old calico
> led to a large low house which had become a home for old folk.
> Aged old folk – black women.
>
> Beryl Gilroy

The Wordshop of the Kitchen

The above description of home and place is the opening passage to Gilroy's novel *Frangipani House*. Gilroy begins her building of *Frangipani House* with language that conjures up an earthen road the colour of cooked sugar drizzled on dessert and evokes the tactile sensation of something as soft, familiar and comforting as a grandmother's dress. Her opening lines also draw attention to the women who are often ignored or dismissed in society. Gilroy makes clear that black women are her subject, in particular, the black women who have been most silenced and misrepresented yet who insist on speaking of themselves in their own terms: the calico-wearing grandmothers.

Gilroy follows her long, descriptive opening sentence with one that is unadorned, short and to the point. This juxtaposition draws immediate attention to the women at the centre of her novel: "Aged old folk – black women." Gilroy's careful use of language is the key that points the way to finding the knowledges encoded in the text. The opening lines introduce the reader to one of the strategies of resistance Gilroy uses to re-present Africaribbean women in history: "the wordshop of the kitchen" (Marshall 208). Gilroy develops her settings, her characters and their experiences with words arising from what Paule Marshall calls "Common speech and the plain, workaday words that make it up" (201). The words Gilroy uses arise from girlhood, motherhood, and grandmotherhood, are connected to the domestic realm traditionally relegated to the women in their paid and unpaid work, and speak from "the beauty, poetry and wisdom" (Marshall 201) of

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Africaribbean women's everyday lives.

The seemingly simple prose of the opening lines of *Frangipani House* is a strategy Gilroy uses to "talk back" (hooks) to the racism, sexism, classism and ageism embedded in the discourses which intersect to dismiss elderly, poor, black women like Mama King, the central character of the novel. Throughout the novel, words informed by the "wordshop of the kitchen" draw attention to Africaribbean women's self-articulations and to their resourcefulness and creativity in overcoming the multiple, interlocking oppressions of their lives. Gilroy's words not only show the visual imagery of the women's everyday lives, but also evoke tactile and auditory detailing. In her article "Writing, Ancestry, Childhood and Self," Gilroy cites her grandmother, Sally Louis James, on the illumination which follows from simultaneously drawing together multiple senses: "To be able to feel, she said, was to combine all the human senses in a single act, like 'opening an umbrella over everything'" (1995 59). The detailing that emerges from the narrative style Gilroy learned from her grandmother results in translucent moments which allow the i-mages encoded in the text to surface.

For the readers of *Frangipani House*, the attention to multiple impressions draws the reader in to engage with the text and to read the spaces between/ underneath words, or as Bernabe, Chamoiseau and Confiant put it, the *Words behind writing* (896). Gilroy evokes responses which move beyond surface meanings to the deeper levels which give voice to ancestral legacies. Like the narrative strategies that Toni Morrison describes in her own writings, Gilroy's wordshop "urge[s] the reader into active participation in the *non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text*, which makes it difficult for the reader

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to confine himself [sic] to a cool and distant acceptance of data" (387 emphasis added). The "non-narrative, nonliterary experience" of *Frangipani House* points towards, what Philip calls, the Presence of the mothertongue, which is brought to the surface through the re-working of the English language. As explained in Chapter One, the author's subversive re-writing of the fathertongue allows the i-mages which circulate through the field of history, memory, culture and experience, both positive and negative, to erupt. In *Frangipani House*, the narrative strategies Gilroy employs enable the i-mages to speak the truths about the experiences of elderly, black women in Guyana, those who have been abandoned by their families and by society. The i-maging scenes that I explore in this chapter include Mama King's "dream" of being a girlchild that follows the moans of anguish that rise "from the graveyard inside her" (18), her critical speech to Matron in which she sasses back about being called Marma, and her stroll across the grounds of the nursing Home to "join" the washerwomen at the pond. Gilroy's "wordshop of the kitchen" reveals i-mages that expose the complex socio-political historical relations that create the shifting web of Mama King's existence, and speak of the psychological, political, economic and social costs of the historical legacy of slavery paid by her and the women of her community. Gilroy's narrative strategies provoke political and collective consciousness, as collective empowerment is effected through a writer's subversive deployment of i-mages:

> The power and the threat of the artist, poet, writer lies in [the] ability to create new images, i-mages that speak to the essential being of the people among whom and for whom the artist creates. If allowed free expression, these i-mages succeed in altering the way a society perceives itself and, eventually, its collective consciousness. (Philip 12)

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The i-mages that Gilroy creates in *Frangipani House* conjur up a variety of voices that speak the suppressed histories of the women that populate her novel.

Questions! Questions!

Where she, where she, where she
be, where she gone?
Where high and low meet I search,
find can't, way down the islands' way
I gone—south :
day-time and night-time living with she,
down by the just-down-the-way sea
she friending fish and crab with alone,
in the bay-blue morning she does wake
with kiskeedee and crow-cock—
skin green like lime, hair indigo-blue,
eyes hot like sunshine-time;
grief gone mad with crazy—so them say.
Before the questions too late,
before I forget how they stay,
crazy or no crazy I must find she.

-- M. Nourbese Philip

The "non-narrative, nonliterary experience" effected through the i-maging that Gilroy does through the "wordshop of the kitchen" situates *Frangipani House* as an oracular text. In an oracular text the narrative voices are, as Holloway theorizes, always plural and incantatory; the textual strategies that the author uses call up the multiple meanings underlying the words. The incantation opens the layers of the text to let out the voices of ancestors, which are always present. Through Gilroy's attentiveness to language, the consciousness and memory of multiple voices surface in the text through what Holloway calls translucent moments.

The incantation of polyvocality and the disruption of linear history are evident throughout *Frangipani House*. The first example I look at is Mama King's "dream,"

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which is a vision that emerges from the marasa crossroads of time and space that lies in the gap between fantasy and reality, and past and present. During her stay at Frangipani House, while looking out the window, Mama King dreams of being a child (pp. 18-19). She walks down a road alongside her mother, comforted by the sound of "voices singing familiar tunes" (18). She walks with the wisdom of her mother and is enveloped in a community of voices. The road, like her/their movement through life, is a shifting terrain, which in Mama King's dream turns to liquid: "The road suddenly became liquid and there she was swimming in the cool, chattering waters" (18-19). The cool waters drown the familiar voices surrounding her, and out of her mother's disappearance emerges Matron. Matron is a woman who has long since lost her connection to the familiar sounds of the mothertongue and who, as I will show later in this chapter, having assimilated Western values, is a mouth piece of the fathertongue. A youthful Danny (Mama King's husband) embraces "*this nice clean skin woman*" (Gilroy 19) and spurns an aged Mama King. In Mama King's dream, Western and non-Western values meet and clash. Mama King's sense of belonging, which is defined through holding close to the maternal, to a collectivity, and to the rootedness of place, is disrupted by Danny and by Matron, who have both internalised negative aspects of their colonial heritage. Danny's rejection of an aged Mama King reveals her fears of abandonment and emphasizes how embedded in the psyche is the Western construction that aging women are unattractive and undesirable. The dream reveals Mama King's fear that Matron, who is symbolic of white-ordered meanings despite her blackness, takes precedence over the values Mama King represents. In the nursing home that she operates, Matron's clinical administering of scientific

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management principles shows her internalization of the oppressors' values and exposes the oppressor within; as Brand's words remind us, "You don't even have to be white" (159) to partake in oppressive discourses. This dream that Mama King has early in her stay in Frangipani House reveals her prescience: although white overlords have been left in the past, their destructive discourses, in new forms, live inside the people of her community.

The Politics of Home

The question of belonging is central to *Frangipani House*. The narrative strategy of "opening an umbrella over everything" highlights the importance of place. Place is not only defined materially or literally but also psychologically and spiritually. Holloway theorizes that oracular texts dismantle linear time for spatial considerations outside the notion of progression (as the convergence/simultaneity of time and identities in the above "dream" example shows). In *Frangipani House,* place and space figure prominently; indeed, the opening line of the novel focuses attention on landscape and home. An emphasis on place in its variable meanings is part of the writings of many women of the African diaspora. Holloway points out that, "Over and over again, black women's texts have characters that are poised between a spiritual place and a place that has been defined for them, assigned by some person, or because of some ritual of which they have no active memory" (59). Mama King is poised in the liminal space between the realities mapped out for her in the anglocentric politics of her culture and her movement through the chain of ancestors, that is, her place in the on-going, spiritual narrative of her community.

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Because she is sick and aging, Mama King no longer has a place in a society colonized by Western narratives. She is expelled into the margins, into a nursing Home. Despite her new residence, the lack of a place for her in the social order makes her homeless. The nursing Home that her daughters place her in is a telling statement of her loss of "Home." Her sense of homelessness is brought about through her discomfiting fit with her new set-aside space, and is symbolic of her (non)status as an elderly, lower-class, black woman in a neo-colonial world order. Not only is she disposable from a social and economic perspective like the truly homeless are, but also she is abandoned by her family and stripped of emotional nurturing—whether to give or receive. The nursing Home cannot become Home because it does not provide the fabric and texture of life, only the threads of existence. Ironically, only with the rag-wearing, destitute beggars, the homeless of South Asian origin who are situated even lower down the rungs than poor black folks, does Mama King find a temporary refuge and a sense of belonging.

Mama King is dislocated; her place is one of exile, a situation brought about through the displacement induced by capitalism and its destructive socio-economic principles. The scene in the market where she is beaten unconscious by a group of unemployed youth who greedily eye her few, meagre coins exemplifies her displacement. She enters a cake-shop, "a lively little place full of noise, cheap cakes and a gaggle of young men standing around," (66) and buoyed by the song about Grandmother's hands that is playing on the sound system and which some of the young men sing, Mama King feels "For the first time in years [that] she wanted to dance" (67). From the lyrics of the song, Mama King finds comfort in her value as a grandmother of young men and boys

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and presumes, naively, this respect from the men in the shop. The ambulance attendants who come to pick her up, however, have become familiar with seeing the results of greed coupled with a lack of reverence towards elderly people: "'We get plenty of these everyday. If they get money, they rob them. If they don't have money they choke them. Such is life!' they said. 'Dem boy hate old people. They spend all they young days with ole people and then turn on dem when they ole. Dey joke on dem and everyt'ing. Such, such is life'" (68). The violent beating of Mama King by the young men exposes the ageism, classism and sexism of their oppressors that are embedded in their psyches. If their hybrid identities were empowering rather than destructive, the young men would consider her like a community othermother. This vicious attack of an elderly women by young men shows the break between generations brought about by individualism.

Mama King's journey to find a literal home is simultaneously a search for meaning, for belonging, for peace, and for identity. Mama King's identity is "found" through her narration. Through her gathering and recounting of stories and memories, and their interweaving with her everyday life, Mama King makes sense of herself and her place in society and in the chain of ancestors. "Home" for Mama King is a journey towards her plural/collective self, towards her own history/ies. Indeed, the concept of "Home" is found in/through movement, in the differences located at the interstices of her multiple relations—in both social hierarchical relations and those of kinfolk / community. Through re-claiming the multiple fragments that compose their interweaving stories, Mama King and the women in the novel locate their individual and collective identity/ies and a sense of place (and/or displacement) within their communities and in history.

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The opening passage of *Frangipani House* introduces the reader to the contradictory places/spaces that Africaribbean women inhabit. The road, like the shifting road in Mama King's dream, has two surfaces. The earthen road, which is described through images that evoke connectedness to place and community, leads to the epitome of Western separation, alienation and marginalization—an old folk's home. In this passage, Gilroy juxtaposes the landscape, connoting a multi-sensory richness and a comforting familiarity, with a symbol of sterility, scientific management and institutionalization. Frangipani House, like other western-style nursing homes, is an institution to hide-away the throw-away people of market economies, those like Mama King, Miss Mason and Mrs. Gomez who are considered dependent, useless and redundant. Class intersects with the discourses of gender, age, and race to push these elderly, black women to the margins of their former lives. The money of their grown up children buys the women, unlike truly destitute and slum dwelling older women, their particular set-aside spaces. Mama King's critical comment, "I old now. Just trash to throw out" (Gilroy 8), incisively describes the plight of many elderly women in the shifting socio-economic landscape of the Caribbean, which is embedded in a relationship of dependency on the capitalist West. In an age dominated by market forces and where powerful external factors manipulate the local economy of Mama King's community, elderly women like her are no longer seen as economically productive or as contributing to society. From a use-value perspective, old women like Mama King are unneeded, and because their families have earned enough money to pay for their care—often by going away to America, England or Canada—the women are set apart from society.

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This hierarchically stacked system that privileges particular groups of people is the over-arching umbrella of Mama King's life. Mama King is an old black woman who struggles to provide for herself. She comes from a rural background and her family is far away. Despite the multiple factors that place her in a disadvantaged position, Mama King led an active, purposeful, productive life prior to her institutionalization. After her husband disappeared, she raised her children on her own, and she also nurtured and supported the children her daughters left behind, when they left home hoping to escape the poverty of their country and to improve their class status. Mama King was an othermother to children such as her friend Miss Ginchi's fostered son, Carlton, and worked untiringly in poorly paid jobs, usually domestic work, to provide for her extended family. At one point, because her grown-up daughters' remittances failed to reach her due to a postal strike there was "No send-home money. No nothin," recalls Mama King. Without money from her daughters to bolster her meagre wages, "There was no choice. It was either that [breaking bricks] or starvation" (Gilroy 42). Mama King's comment makes clear the precarious situation of poor women like herself: finding paid work is essential. Brick-breaking echoes the hard, manual labour that many enslaved black women were forced to do and the memory of that back-breaking labour lies in the language of the women. The labour of the roads, the labour of the kitchen, and women's language are all linked. As Adisa writes: "Language, in the context of Caribbean literature, is a tool that women have always wielded, just as, traditionally, women were the ones who cracked stones to pave roads. So too they mold and knead words and make bread to feed the nation" (29). For most of her life, Mama King was solely responsible

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for the emotional and physical survival of her charges and she never faltered in her commitment to provide for them. "When Mama King husband left her," explains Nurse Carey, "she worked—turned her hand to anything" (Gilroy 26). Hard work and persistence define Mama King's existence. She does not shirk her responsibilities and is proud of the work she undertakes, in particular the everyday care of her family.

Her laundry tray, for example, when not heaped with the "paid-for washing .... was the show-case for the grandchildren's clothes washed and ironed with love" (Gilroy 52). Mama King does not consider low-paying domestic work demeaning. Gilroy's text is peppered with metaphors and images linked with domestic work: after a troubling episode Mama King feels like she has been "rubbed raw and sprinkled with salt" (35), another time "as if she was suddenly scorched by a hot flat-iron" (96); during a reverie she recalls "the familiar feel of cotton, crisp as new biscuit...beneath her fingers" (53); Matron shouts "as if her voice had been starched and left in the sun to harden" (54); Mrs. Gomez's breasts "swung about like a pair of dark brown socks in the washday wind" (44) and during a seizure her mouth froths "like soapy water on wash day" (55); Carlton's story rambles on "like thread from a spool" (83). The tropes and metaphors that Mama King uses arise from her immediate context, from her paid and unpaid work in the domestic sphere.

By using the wordshop of the kitchen, Gilroy participates in the re-claiming of the kitchen. After slavery was legally over, the management of black women by the larger economic system was effected through channelling them into the domestic realm—enslaved women were "freed" to domestic ghettoes.[17] The women, however, escape

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their containment by creating for themselves 'kitchen space': "a space of women's power and ... a storehouse of creativity; a space in which women, while creating words of culinary art, feed their children and one another with a language of resistance" (Gadsby 155). In other words, although power relations continue to suppress black women as a group and relegate them to particular set-aside spaces, the women resist their management and make of their externally defined place a site of individual and collective empowerment. Through the language she uses, Gilroy reclaims kitchen space to re-present the experiences and struggles of black women such as Mama King. Mama King's everyday, simple words are "culinary art" that speak a language of resistance.

In the harsh economic realities that define her existence, Mama King struggles to provide for her family and actively searches out work. The domestic work she does is rewarding; indeed, as her language reveals, the domestic sphere is one of the bases of her knowledge. Paid work, like her unpaid care-taking of family, sustains Mama King. Miss Ginchi echoes Nurse Carey's appraisal of Mama King's work ethic: "She like to hustle. She hustle all her life" (Gilroy 48). While in Frangipani House, Mama King reminisces about her physically challenging "years of faithful service" and, recalling "all the distance she had walked in the life, all the loads of wood and bags of charcoal, buckets of water, trays of washing and heavy fruit she had carried on her single, strong head" (Gilroy 24), is amazed at her own stamina. Yet despite years of hard work and unfailing care-taking of others—which as she points out, her daughters self-centeredly expected: "*Nobody ever ask me! They just make it so I got to do it*" (Gilroy 20)—in her later years Mama King ends up sick and alone, abandoned in Frangipani House.

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Tree

I am a tree –
Not the tender seedling
Young, vulnerable.

Nor the supple sapling
Flirting, flaunting
Greenery in the wind.
I am a tree —
I am a tree —
Broken, gnarled
Rooted fingers
Clutching desperately to my soil.
Battered, bruised shoots
Struggling fiercely towards the sun.
I am the tree
You chopped.

-- Colleen Smith-Brown

Because of their pursuit of the American dream, Token and Cyclette, her daughters, (dis)place Mama King in the nursing home. Economic forces prompt their migration and they leave the poverty of their home in hopes of bettering their lives in America or England—the very political systems that promote the discourses, policies and practices that continue to keep the Caribbean economically dependent and its peoples socially disadvantaged.[18] Token and Cyclette leave for America, which, as Marshall's quoting of the kitchen poets of New York reveals, was "a place where 'you could at least see your way to make a dollar'" (203). For Token and Cyclette, the dream of "mak[ing] a dollar" has supplanted the vision of their mother(s). In fact the decisions they make in life are informed by the colour of their skin. Token and Cyclette's light skin puts them on the path to socio-economic opportunity and privilege and to the false promise of acceptance and advancement. Their skin colour leads them towards denying their

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difference, that is, towards assimilation.

"Wash[ing] out we children": Attaining whiteness

Token learns the lessons of passing as a young girl, the nuanced relations between race and gender discourses, and the contradictions that she is required to negotiate. "*They did want Token for Snow White*," relates Mama King, "*But she was too tall. She make a good dwarf*" (Gilroy 15). This statement is symbolic of the contradictory places and the conflictual messages with which black women are continually confronted. Token learns that the most desirable role in the play for a girlchild demands femininity as defined by the standards set for the ideal white woman. She not only learns that being tall is undesirable but also that the standard for a black girl is to be what she is not: Snow White. Black girls and women are faced with the unattainable task of fulfilling an impossible standard, yet the teachers, the parents and the students have internalized it and reproduce this ideal in their everyday practices. Token learns that her light skin makes her the most favoured candidate—but she also learns that she is not diminutive enough for this feminine ideal. The paradox of being too tall to play Snow White yet not too tall to play a dwarf teaches Token about the tricky ground she is expected to negotiate. Token learns that her light skin gives her the opportunity to be allowed to join in with favoured groups—to be the token player—even though that means playing on their precarious terms and becoming a marginal player. Like the other girls and boys at school—which is a primary socializing sphere for learning one's place in society—Token learns competitiveness based on skin colour and gender norms. She learns the rules of an anglocentric society: there are rewards for adopting the standards of the economically

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dominant, yet her position is unstable.

Vows

White
satin ribbons
White
cotton sox
White
Bata shoes
White
Book of Common Prayer
White
satin-cotton confirmation dress
White
Soul
The cyclamen girl
stood
ready
to
Promise
the triple lie
She
who believed
in and on
the "triune majesty"—
sunshine
black skin &
doubt
(in that order)

-- M. Nourbese Philips

Because of their light skin, Token and Cyclette obtain higher paying jobs than their mother. Nursing and secretarial work are a step up from their mother's work, but are not divorced from it; both are a continuation of the domestic realm: nursing, the nurturing and ministering to the sick, and secretarial work, the minding of the Man and obeying his orders. Mama King relates that her daughters' light-coloured skin helps them to find work: "*It look like yesterday when Token pass for nurse and Cyclette for*

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secretary. Because they had a little complexion, they get work easy. Token was a good nurse. The patient dem like her and Cyclette could make a typewriter sing, laugh – run and jump" (Gilroy 15). In this statement, Mama King refers to passing the school requirements for the two occupations, but "pass" is also more than literal, it is a statement that reflects the socio-economic advantage light skin accords her daughters. Indeed, pale skin as a road to advancement and privilege is embedded in the Caribbean. "We must wash out we children," Ginchi pointedly reminds Mama King when as young women they search for mates (Gilroy 6). Ginchi warns Mama King to dismiss Danny because of his dark skin. Olga Trask's mother repeats Ginchi's warning: "Never go back to Africa," she tells her daughter, "I humiliate myself to give you nice hair and skin. Never go back to Africa" (Gilroy 72). Ginchi's and Olga Trask's mother's comments express the insidious impact of colorism and show how issues of class are embedded in the most intimate relations of the women. Africa is a metaphor for dark skin and back-wardness and is linked to all the disadvantages arising from the hierarchical relations of Caribbean society. Pale skin, on the other hand, marks the possibility of transcending one's assigned place in society.

If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire

> None of this is as simple as it may sound. We were colorists and we aspired to oppressor status. (Of course, almost any aspiration instilled by western civilization is to oppressor status: success, for example.) Color was the symbol of our potential: color taking in hair "quality," skin tone, freckles, nose-width, eyes. We did not see that color symbolism was a method of keeping us apart: in the society, in the family, between friends. Those of us who were light-skinned, straight-haired, etc., were given to believe that we could actually attain whiteness—or at least those qualities of the colonizer which made him superior. We were convinced of white supremacy.
>
> – Michelle Cliff

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Token, Cyclette and Olga Trask share not only light skin but also their internalized acceptance of the colonizer's racism and classism; in the negotiations of their multiple identities, the women share spaces at the intersection of the discourses that construct white skin privilege. All three women hope to claim an identity divorced from their African-based histories; all three seek to discard the past by disregarding the mother(s). Token and Cyclette hope that by placing their mother in Frangipani House they can wipe their hands of their past. They acquiesce to Olga Trask's demands for inflated fees—who as a "hard-face woman" herself is familiar with the pretense of caring and surface illusions—and insist that "white people care for her" (Gilroy 92, 3). Indeed, Matron's desire to silence the voice of her mother and the painful histories her mother carries inside her—that is, keep still the tongues of the enslaved women who were forced into sexual relations with the master—is her impetus to open Frangipani House. As much as Matron wishes to keep her mother's memories at bay, however, the light skin of women like herself speaks the rapes of their ancestors. Yet despite black women's history of oppression, all three women see dominant/white ways of ordering the world as superior because the women have become disconnected from the mothertongue. They are riven from their female community, from the relational, cyclical philosophies of their African ancestors, and the histories of their enslaved foremothers. All three women are estranged from the collective wisdom of women.

Token and Cyclette are not only geographically but also psychologically and spiritually disengaged from their roots. Although disjunct identities can lead to spaces of empowerment, they do not always cause one to feel at ease in one's multiple positions or

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comfortable in negotiating difference. Token and Cyclette's fragmentation leads to increased loyalty to the values of the dominant culture and withdrawal from the "black" aspects of their identity. They have problems living with a multiple sense of self and thus entrench themselves in a binary logic rather than critically surveying their possible positionings. They seek separation, not re-connection. Through their actions, Token and Cyclette symbolically lock up their history/ies. Mama King represents the past; she is a visible reminder to them of the subordinate position of women in Guyana, of the colonization of black women, of the class position assigned to them by the politico-economic processes that impact on their everyday lives. Because they are unable to hear the voices of their ancestors, Token and Cyclette fear becoming their mother. Rather than see her as a source of wisdom, they see her as having "low, low goals"; they look from behind western eyes and see: "poverty, hardship and useless mud and dung, pain mosquitoes and old age" (Gilroy 98). Believing in individualism and personal salvation, they each hope to become the "token" woman on the linear path to financial success and not spiral backwards in a "cyclic" return to their—as they see it—impoverished roots.

To assuage their guilt, the daughters hope, like the others "always coming and… always crying" about leaving behind their elderly mothers, that they had "bought what was considered superior care for their parents" (Gilroy 3, 2). They believe that dollars can replace their love. Frangipani House, however, is built on blood. The money that buys peace of mind for those who seek self-serving solutions, as Mama King tells it, "got old people blood on it!" (Gilroy 16). Mama King's assessment refers to the elderly people whose lives have been exchanged in a deal with the devil[19], but her words also

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echo recursively to the blood of her/their slave ancestors. The economy of the Caribbean was built on the backs of enslaved women, men and children. Frangipani House, although staffed by black people, is a western-style institution that is a successor to the systems of exploitation and oppression that took root in Guyana during colonial days. Token and Cyclette, however, caught in the meshes of destructive discourses that reinscribe white superiority, avoid looking at its foundations. Like Olga Trask, they cannot hear the voices of their enslaved female predecessors speak through "dreams," and thus do not recognize their own blood on the money.

Among the Canes

Like the cyclic blood
that snaps within her
so too her faith
flowing
    in darkness   across the fields
now she's over-run
by the mice of despair

O who will remember me?
Who will remember me? She wails
holding her belly

stumbling blindly
among the canes
...
-- Grace Nichols

Re-writing community: the signifying Mother

Unlike her daughters, Mama King has not left behind the past. She immediately recognizes the life-draining, soul-crushing effect of Frangipani House. The Home circumscribes her psychological and spiritual movement, but "independent and determined" (Gilroy 3), she wilfully resists its fixity. She knows the importance of self-

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assertion and self-naming. For black women like Mama King who struggle with the multiple oppressions of sexism, racism, classism, colorism and ageism, language is a site of struggle and resistance; it is a place where they wrest control over their lives, over their physical, psychological, and spiritual selves. Like the working-class black women Marshall chronicles, Mama King learns that in order to survive "In this man world you got to take yuh mouth and make a gun!" (Marshall 204-5). Language is a powerful tool that in her later years Mama King wields to assert herself and to comment critically on the world around her.

Early on in her confinement at Frangipani House, Mama King talks back to authority and refuses to accept the inferiorizing that threatens all the institutionalized women. She fears the anonymity that the nursing home confers on its residents: "Many women had occupied that room, and yet, and yet they had left nothing" (Gilroy 6). Lest she slip away like them, Mama King insists on being acknowledged on her own terms. Although her proper name is Mabel Alexandrina King, everyone close to her knows she wants to be called Mama King. When Matron starts calling her Marma King, quick as a flash Mama King retorts, "Why you callin' me Marma King? I am Mama King. Mama mean mother. Don't call me dat stupid name! Marma King! I ask you! What kinda name dat is?" (Gilroy 4). Mama King's critical speech shows the importance of naming and autonomy; she refuses any labelling that is not of her creation. Self-definitions disrupt the controlling images that snake through the web of discourses. Negotiating her way through a life fraught with difficulties, Mama King has learned to use language in her own defense. She comes from a long line of women who are adroit in their language and

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assertive in their articulations. The enslaved women of the Caribbean were noted for their sharp tongues. Despite threats of flogging, the stocks, sexual abuse, imprisonment, banishment and death, enslaved women were relentless in their outspokenness and verbal acumen. In fact, they provoked fear in their colonial overlords. Lucille Mathur quotes a leading colonial official of 1823 who stated that enslaved women deserved greater punishment than the men because they used to great effect "that powerful instrument of attack and defense, their tongue" (13). Court documents from 1819 to 1835 reveal that the majority of black women brought to trial in Jamaica were accused of either violent conduct or violent language, which was described as indecent, scandalous, outrageous, insulting, abusive, or threatening (Mathur 15). The tongues of Mama King's ancestors refused to lie still—and continue to refuse to lie still—because their stories are inside Mama King; the tongues of her enslaved foremothers speak through Mama King's mouth.

> I have crossed an ocean
> I have lost my tongue
> from the root of the old one
> a new one has sprung
>
> -- Grace Nichols

Along with a language of resistance that developed from a history of slavery, Mama King's outstanding ability to express herself arises from her rural peasant lifestyle where an oral, story-telling style underlies everyday conversations. Lack of formal education works in Mama King's favour. She has not been indoctrinated like her daughters in the daily rule-making and instilling of the values of the dominant society brought about through the fathertongue and a colonial education. Adisa explains that in

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the Caribbean, "The peasant with little or no contact with urbanity or metropolitan values is very comfortable with her/his speech and ways of life" (20-1). Indeed, as Merle Hodge notes, the majority of Caribbean people do not speak standard English most of the time: "Ninety-nine percent of Caribbean people, for 99 percent of their waking hours, communicate in a Creole language that is a fusion of West African syntax and the modified vocabulary of one or another European tongue" (204). Mama King's productive days in a rural environment have enabled her to maintain traditions and values that are more easily eroded in institutional settings and crowded, alienating urban centers. Despite Mama King's impoverished conditions and lack of formal education, she is perceptive and knowledgeable in ways that many urban dwellers—including her daughters—have forgotten, do not know, ignore or simply refuse to accept. Mama King speaks the mothertongue and knows that, as Adisa puts it, "De Language Reflect Dem Ethos " (17), which is why she insists on being called Mama.

Riddym Ravings (The Mad Woman's Poem)

wen mi fus come a town
mi use to tell everybady 'mawnin'
but as de likkle rosiness gawn outa mi face
nobady nah ansa mi
silence tun rags roun mi bady
in de midst a all de dead people dem
a bawl bout de caast of livin
an a ongle one ting tap mi fram go stark raving mad
a wen mi siddung eena Parade
a tear up newspaper fi talk to
...
Eh, Eh,
no feel no way
town is a place dat ah really kean stay
dem kudda – ribbit mi han
Eh – ribbit mi toe

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mi waan go a country go look mango
so country bus, ah beg yuh
tek mi home
to de place, where I belang ...

-- Jean Binta Breeze

Unlike capitalism's demeaning of motherwork and the domestic sphere, to Mama King, motherhood holds an esteemed status and is a valuable role in life. Mama King is steeped in the ethos of her people; the high regard of motherhood is traditionally part of the cultures and philosophies of her West African ancestors. The high status accorded to women arises from their crucial role in reproduction and the survival of the community. As Stanlie M. James explains, "In the traditional African world-view as in the world-views of indigenous peoples around the globe, a very high value is placed on reproduction ... reproduction is perceived as a means of strengthening the human group, and ensuring the survival of life. It is, in fact, equated with the life force itself" (45). The reverence for women's reproductive capabilities and nurturing abilities shapes a woman's sense of self through motherhood's link to the supreme. Mothering in the African context, as J. Mbuti reveals, "incorporates the symbolism of creativity and continuity, and as such forms an integral aspect of women's identity" (cited in James 45). It is also important to note that while reverence for motherhood is a cultural principle in Western African societies, it is an ideal that was not always put into practice; for example, under slavery, which pre-dated colonization, women were not treated equally, and also, the colonization of Africa greatly disrupted indigenous values. Despite threats to its existence, the West African esteem of motherhood survived the Middle Passage and is embedded in the history of the Caribbean—indeed, this esteem was strengthened because

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the lack of control black people had over their reproduction increased their determination to exist in self-defining communities. Although the reverence for motherhood is jeopardized by the contemporary market economy of Guyana (as the incident in the cake-shop shows), Mama King struggles to maintain its regard. Motherhood is integral to Mama King's self-conception because she recognizes its historical importance in the chain of black people's survival. She highlights its centrality by naming herself by what she defines as her primary role in life: mama.

Because slavery violently separated mothers from their offspring and displaced many children, motherhood in the African diaspora moves beyond the biological and individualistic mothering of Western definitions to othermothering. This concept of mother includes fostering children not biologically a woman's own to meet the children's physical and emotional wellbeing; raising children communally; critiquing the behaviour of members of the community and then providing them with direction; and providing analyses and critiques of conditions that affect the well-being of the individual and the community (James). Mama King claims this far-reaching concept of motherhood as her right—but her daughters and Matron have left it behind in their movement out of the chain of ancestors and into tangled discourses. Frequently, Mama King's fragments of memory concern her mothering/othermothering, and comment on the mothering practices of other women in her community, including her own mother, daughters, and mother-in-law.

Naming herself is integral to Mama King's survival as a self-defining black woman in the racially stratified, class conscious, sexist, ageist, and colourist ground of

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the Caribbean. Adisa writes that for the colonized people of the Caribbean, "any kind of development has to begin with the fundamental issue of naming oneself" (24). Mama King's self-proclamation is a statement that reflects her values, her attitudes, and her self-perception—which are community-oriented and not individualistic—and is the cornerstone of her survival. With its linguistic combination of female and male—Mama and King—the juxtaposition of the regenerative power of the female with the apex of male institutional power, Mama King's name is a syncretic mix of dualities. The sign "Mama King" points towards one of the structuring principles that informs the themes and narrative techniques of *Frangipani House*: "marasa." The marasa principle is "an intellectual passageway into peasant ways of ordering their largely agrarian realities, a passageway that derives from memories of enslavement and the monocrop culture of plantation economies" (Clark 273). Marasa is a home-grown theory emerging from the socio-economic context of Caribbean history which recognizes the ugly history of plantocracy and neo-colonialism, yet simultaneously, the empowering histories of West Africa and the resistance fomented during the Middle Passage. Marasa calls up the memories of slavery and the political realities of its legacy, but is not mired in mirroring or reaction. Rather than a concept advancing polarities, this creolised principle advances the creativity and continuity of Africaribbean people and "illuminates a third or wider field of expression beyond binaries" (Clark 254).

Resistance is encoded in the layers of Mama King's name because her name discloses the power of Mawu-Lisa within her history. "*Marasa* is a New World deformation of Mawu-Lisa," states Clark, "the female and male gods ... [who] stand at

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the interstices between divine and human formations of meaning and participate in both" (272-3). *Mawu* is the female component of the supreme being, and in the spoken Twi of West Africa, depending on subtle shifts of tone and stress. the word plays on various meanings, all centered around women giving birth. Yet it is a concept of life-giving that in its verbal articulation also holds within it the concept of death.

Mawu/Mawo	**Mawu/Mawo**
mmmmmmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmm
mmm mmm mmm	mmm mmm mmm
mm mm mmmmm	mm mm mmmmm
mmm mmm a	mmm mmm a
mma mma aa	mma mma aa
maaa	maaa
mmmmmmaaaaa	mmmmmmaaaaa
maaa	maaa
maaaa	maaaa
mama mama	mama mother
ma ma	I I've
wo	given birth
ma ma wo	I, I've given birth
mama ma wo	ma, I've given birth
ma ma wo	mama, I've given birth
ma wo	given birth
mawu	mawu
mawu!	mawu!
mawu ae! Ma wo	oh mawu! I've given birth
ma wo	I've given birth
ma wo	I've given birth
mmaa wo	women give birth
mmaa wo	women give birth
mmaa wo	women give birth
mama mawu	mama mawu
mama mawu	mother mawu
mama mawu	mother mawu
a wo	has given birth
a wo	given birth
mawu a wo	mawu has given birth
mawu a wo	mawu has given birth
mawu a wo *wo*	mawu has borne *you* [s]

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mawu a wo *wo*	mawu has borne *you* [s]
mawu a wo mama	mawu has borne mama
mawu a wo mama	mawu has borne mama
mawu a wo mu	mawu has borne you [pl]
mawu a wo mu	mawu has borne you [pl]
mawu a wo mu ma	mawu has borne masses of you
mawu a wo mu ma	mawu has borne masses of you
mawu a wo mmaa	mawu has borne women
mawu a wo mmaa	mawu has borne women
mawu wo mmaa	mawu bears women
mawu wo mmaa	mawu bears women
mawu wo mmaa	mawu bears women
mawu wo mmaen	mawu bears nations
mmmmmmmmmmmmmm	mmmmmmmmmmmmmm
A!	A!

In "Performance, Transcription and the Language of the Self," Abena P.A. Busia presents the orature poem "*Mawu/Mawo,*" which she describes as "a creation poem on the name of an African goddess mediating between the birth and death of Alpha and Omega to finally embrace humanity" (213).[20] The left column of the poem is written in Twi. Busia explains that meanings change from the written poem to the spoken chant, and that changes in intonation shift the meaning as well. The duality, the "dialectical hinge between birth and death"(212), is evoked through enunciation and performance. Through subtle shifts in inflection the word "mama" collapses into "mawu" and signifies giving birth but just as quickly doubles up to signify death; thus the meaning shifts yet without setting up oppositions. Opposites are united yet not erased.[21] The concept "mama," an almost universal word for "mother," and *mawu* are semantically and symbolically linked. The West African worldview, as the elision of *mama* and *Mawu* in Busia's poem shows, links motherhood with the life force. Mama King's insistence on being called Mama and not Marma helps her maintain her Spirited resistance to the

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fathertongue. Through her claim to the name Mama, Mama King aligns herself with the life force.

Reading Mama King's name through the marasa helps us understand the "thickness" of an oracular text like *Frangipani House*, and allows the translucency of its words and the memory within the mothertongue to become visible. As Holloway argues,

> the lexicon of traditional (white, male, and Western) theory is semantically meagre in comparison to the other deep linguistic structures they represent. In these (deeper) places, the sounds and the sense of culture and experience generate transformations of the arrangement and semantic categories within the linguistic surface structures.(22)

Mama King's name is a linguistic surface structure that points towards (deeper) places and the recursive layering of culture and history. Her name is a word symbol for an i-mage shimmering to be let through. Under the surface of her name lies the Presence of Mawu-Lisa, the intertwined female(Mawu)-male(Lisa) bearer of both life and death. When Mama King is badly beaten in the market by the young men, she enters the cusp of Mawu-Lisa: while she "lay suspended, between being lost and the coming of her destiny, Mama saw Death and Life, both children of the same father, both legitimate" (Gilroy 78). Gilroy draws in only a father creator, but as the Mawu-Lisa figure suggests, s/he is a father who stands inseparable from and inter-twined with the mother. The mother and father are twin manifestations, mutually interchangeable yet not reducible to each other. Read through the marasa principle, Mama King's name is a symbolic interface, a semiotic code which suggests the co-mingling of dualities and the interactive nature of signs and existence; it alludes to the syncretic possibilities encoded in creolisation. Mama King's name calls up the i-mage of the "beautiful-ugly" (Marshall 205) awful power—or what

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Chancy calls, "sinister wisdom" (23).

Caribbean Woman's Prayer

Wake up Lord
brush de sunflakes from yuh eye
back de sky ah while Lord

an hear dis Mudder-woman
on behalf of her pressure-down people

God de Mudder
God de Fadder
God de Sister
God de Brudder
God de Holy Fire

Ah don't need to tell yuh
how tings stan
cause right now you know dat
old lizard ah walk lick land
and you know how de pickney belly laang
and you know how de fork ah hit stone
an tho it rain you know it really drought
...
God de Fadder
God de Mudder
God de Sister
God de Brudder
God de Holy Fire
...
I want to see de loss of hope
everywhere
replace wid de win of living
I want to see de man an woman
being
in dey being

Yes Lord
Aleluia Lord
all green tings
an hibiscus praises, Lord

-- Grace Nichols

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Through the Glass Darkly

Although Mama King is the central character, the telling of her story and the unfolding of her history opens up a collective story pieced together through the lives that interlock with her own, whether or not they actually share geographical space. *Frangipani House* is the dwelling place of numerous histories besides Mama King's, each as multiply produced and as multifaceted as her own. Her mother, her daughters, Olga Trask, Carlton, Danny, Chuck, Miss Mason, Miss Tilley and Ginchi are all part of the noisy village Mama King carries inside her head. Their concerns and opinions blend and bump and join and jar Mama King's narrative to construct collectively the story/stories of black women in Guyana—as told through the window of the grandmother.

The "fair-sized glass window" (Gilroy 2) of the tiny room at Frangipani House to which Mama King's life has been reduced is, like the marasa sign, double-sided. The window is an "ugly-beautiful" shifting frame. On the one hand, the glass contains Mama King and restricts her prior freedom to repetitive, mindless movements like those of "the bees that buzzed against the glass" (Gilroy 6). The routine of the nursing home and the medicalization of the inmates, that is, the institutional and discursive scientific management of the women's health and lives which make them controllable, threaten to snuff the spark of the women. From its surface appearance, the nursing home, with its "Sleepy headed windows dressed in frilled bonnets of lace and fine, white cotton, [and] hibiscus shrubs that danced their flower veils to the songs of the wind" (Gilroy 1), conjures up an idyllic, comfortable place. In fact, many travellers stop outside its gates "as if under a spell" (Gilroy 1). The grounds are neatly manicured, the interior neat and

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clean, and efficient nurses attend to the physical needs of the inhabitants, dispensing food and medicines, and even single out a woman (once a year) by celebrating her birthday. The nursing home's welcoming exterior, however, is a façade. Although the administration in the Nursing Home pays attention to its occupants' physical health, their emotional and spiritual needs are ignored. The business ethos that directs the nursing home impedes the women's psychological and spiritual movement. Frangipani House is not a homeplace, but an alienating, sterile place. The scientific management of the home mandates the clinical caretaking regulated by the "fiercety woman" who is "insatiable for power in a serious and efficient manner" (Gilroy 96, 2): Olga Trask. Matron's administering of "the Masters' Tools" (Lorde) threatens Mama King with the termination of her movement/identity; that is, she is threatened with fixity and spiritual asphyxiation.

"Nothin' doin' in here!" (Gilroy 5) Mama King critically assesses. As Gilroy notes in an article, "There is little activity in the Home and [Mama King] is almost conquered by dread and despair" (1995 54). Like all the other women living in the old folks' home, Mama King is in danger of "zombification," a theft of spirit brought about by the colonial encounter. Kevin D. Hutchings, citing Erna Brodber's *Myal*, discusses zombification:

> colonialism functions to steal the "particular world view" or "*spirit*" of African people in Jamaica (O'Callahan 52.) In *Myal*, Reverend Simpson refers to the subjective processes effected by colonialism's overarching act of cultural theft as "zombification": without "knowledge of their original and natural world," he asserts, Afro-Jamaicans become "empty shells – duppies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out" (Brodber 1988 107). (104)

In this passage, zombification is specifically related to the experiences of Afro-Jamaicans

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during colonialism, yet spirit thievery brought about by colonial relations is historical ground shared by Mama King and the Africaribbean women of Guyana and can be applied to their neocolonial context. Africaribbean women are situated, as Dannabang Kuwabong clarifies, "within patriarchy and the peculiarities of Africaribbean history, dipped in the experience of slavery, colonialism, and neo-globalist European and North American cultural neo-imperialism" (135). Matron, through her mimicry of the methods and the ideologies of the neocolonial overlords in all their discursive disguises, identifies with her oppressors. She has learned the lessons of the dominant class; their methods have anaesthetized the village she carries in her head and silenced her ability to speak with the tongue of her ancestors. Stripped of her histories and memories, Matron has lost her Spirit and counts on the strength of bottled spirits to "gurgl[e] its way to comfort her...take her into another world...and illuminat[e] her dreams" (Gilroy 74). Unlike Mama King's, Matron's dreams are not a path into memory. Zombified, Matron stands guard at the colonial door—and it is not a "beautiful-ugly" shifting frame. She carries out the orders of the dominant class and in so doing threatens to steal the spirits of her sisters in Frangipani House.

As Mama King quickly intuits: "Dis place is a hole. A deep, dark hole. They killin' me in here!! (Gilroy 8). Her despair increases to the point that "She felt trapped – like a bee in a bottle" (Gilroy 29). Mama King is trapped within rules not of her own making. Gilroy writes that "Since her entry into the home, she had begun to see the world through the glass window of her room as was the destiny of many old people" (5). Mama King's once productive life and her position as a knowledgeable community

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member are severely restricted by the "finely wrought iron gate" and "the slender, white painted spears of railings that marked the limits of the grounds" (Gilroy 1) and which now mark the boundaries of Mama King's existence. The Home is an artificial world. Locked into a linear, routinized pattern where time and tasks are parcelled out, the nursing home's buttressing of the chronological inhibits the consideration of time outside of Western constructs and the flow of Presence. It is a duplicitous place, symbolic of the endurance of powerful, destructive institutions; it is built on the blood of enslaved people and simultaneously drains the life-force from their inheritors. With her usual acumen, Mama King decries, "Wha kinda place dis is!" (Gilroy 5).

Mama King's outbursts show her to be a "knee-scraper" (Adisa) who resists spirit thievery. Although the window in her tiny room hedges her into a clipped life, an "ordered rhythm of life" (Gilroy 4) based on time management and control, the other side of the "ugly-beautiful" window shows another view, provides a different perspective. The window is also magic. Although Mama King has a constricted view and a curtailed existence, the window also "[gives] her a close-up of grass and tree" (Gilroy 4). For Mama King, attending to minutiae such as watching "the most wanton...petals" of the "sweet-scented orange-coloured flowers" of the frangipani trees "danc[e] and glid[e] on the wind" (Gilroy 14) "open[s] an umbrella over everything" (Louis James) which provokes self-reflection and unearths buried stimuli. Feeling the grass underfoot, picking up petals and pressing them to her lips, listening to voices outside the window, and watching bees buzz against the glass, all allow her to leave behind linear time and enter the stream of cyclical rhythms:

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> The water hardly stirred but some dragonflies hunted close to the surface. From the depths of the pond she could hear voices of women long dead and gone—the washerwomen she used to know, singing as they beat the dirt from the clothes with their faithful wooden beaters. They had left the echoes of their songs to tell how life had robbed them of their youth, of their spirit and then of their lives. (Gilroy 52)

Her peering closely beyond surface appearances and the intensifying of her senses that nature evokes, draw Mama King inwards. She leaves the confines of her small contained space and wanders down corridors she had closed off, refused to enter, missed, and—like her washerwomen friends, in the struggle to make ends meet—never had the time to enter.

Bud/Unbudded

This bud beheld me watch
Her glory faded
This bud beheld me move one minute spot in time
Unbudded/Outrose/her petals myriading...

This flower sees me watch
Her glory flaunted
This flower hears me pause and knows I pause
To grieve for her tomorrows spaces.

-- Velma Pollard

In the matchbox world of the Home, Mama King must live by someone else's rules which means she often "stand[s] there with an empty bucket for a mind" (Gilroy 54). Once outside the boundaries of the enforced mindscape, however, Mama King enters the unsettling ground of what Gilroy describes as "[the] interior experience with its insights, mystery and moments, and its urgencies of intuition and anxiety" (1995 54). When Mama King sits by the window and looks out, "on the grass outside, a patchwork of events from her life lay sprawled before her in kind of half-light" (Gilroy 18). Mama

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King's fragments of memories also surface in the time just before she falls asleep. The pieces of dreams that come up are, like her window reveries and her moments in nature, valuable parts of her movement towards "Home." Michelle Cliff explains that, "Dreaming may be a glimpse into the Great Silence out of which we come, it may be a way into memory. past .... Re-enacting the past is part of the process of decolonization" (1995 29). The seemingly trivial snippets of thought emerging in dreams may be the key to piecing together the past. Toni Morrison explains that: "When we wake from a dream we want to remember all of it, although the fragment we are remembering may be, and very probably is, the most important piece in the dream" (388). Dreams, in all their vacillating versions, are often an integral part of oracular texts. Without dreams, the women of Mama King's community have difficulties hearing the voices of the past. Token, Cyclette and Matron shut out the wisdoms of their ancestors or their female community that cross through dreams because their faith lies in the specious rationality of Western thought. not in women's wisdoms. Both Kuwabong and Carol B. Duncan write of the significance of dreams in the context of Africaribbean women's lives. In an analysis of the poetry of Lorna Goodison, Kuwabong explains that

> the death of the mother, which is a bigger silence, does not indicate a break in mother-daughter relationship. Indeed, the dead mother is closest to both daughter and granddaughter now that she has become an ancestral spirit in the Africaribbean pantheon. As a spirit, she is able to communicate much more effectively to her progeny via dreams and visions in an exclusive female sphere of human relations. (136)

Dreams, according to Kuwabong, are unique domains which allow meanings to pass from woman to woman unpoliced by the boundaries of colonial, patriarchal discourse.

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In dreams, time collapses. Duncan, in an article on women spiritual leaders in the Africanadian community, explains that the wisdom of female ancestors accessed through dreams comes at times of transition: "These ancestral mothers, who cross barriers of time and space, appear at moments of crisis, to give guidance. They frequently issue the summons for women to enter another phase of her spiritual life... (129). Duncan's statement reinforces Holloway's suggestion that repeatedly in black women's texts, female characters are poised between a spiritual place and a place assigned to them by society.

Matron sorely needs to enter another phase of spiritual life and move beyond the chronological time of the masternarratives; despite her appearance, she is poised on very shaky ground. Although from her look and manners Matron appears, like Frangipani House, orderly and efficient, this is just a façade. Underneath her surface lies the pain and suffering of the women forced into sexual relations with the Master. Mama King is her conduit to these memories. Mama King's presence at Frangipani House disturbs the tucked-away silences lying under Matron's false composure. Her entrance into Matron's life nudges Matron closer to the chain of memory, and fragments of dreams also begin to disrupt her ordered way of life. Matron senses the Presence of dreams, yet fears Her/their powerful, disruptive presence. Gilroy writes of "the muffled sounds of moans and sighs that seem...to be fragments of anguish rising from the graveyard inside her" (18). This passage, although linked specifically to Mama King as it is her voice speaking, also recursively echoes over to Matron. Read through Holloway's notion of recursion in which voices of the past layer with the present moment, this

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passage speaks not only Mama King's pain, but also the anguish of a whole "graveyard" of women, that is, the black women ancestors of the Caribbean. Matron—like Mama King—has a silenced history inside her. Matron's light skin is a physical reminder of the "unspeakable thing unspoken" (Morrison), of the rape of enslaved women. Yet Matron fears the pain of her silenced, suffering enslaved foremother(s) and thus cannot connect with their heritage of resistance and self-definitions either.

VII

> Still I must say something here
> Something that drives this verse into the future,
> Not where I go loitering in my sleep,
> Not where the eyes brighten every now and again
> On old scores, now I must step sprightly. I dreamless.
>
> -- Dionne Brand

Matron's fear of identifying with her mother(s) and her/their legacy is shown through the incident when Matron shouts at Ben Le Cage. Matron furiously demands that Ben stop provoking Mama King, stop stirring up ghosts: "Memories! She mustn't have memories. She can't cope with them. I wish I could get them out of her but I can *not*" (Gilroy 34). Mama King herself does not begin to dream until old age: "'She never dreamt', she said. She had never been able to recall a single dream but that evening one stuck in her mind and frightened her" (Gilroy 18). This is the dream mentioned earlier in which Mama King imagines herself both a child and an aged woman, sees herself walk down a road that turns to liquid, and watches Danny embrace Matron, who slips out of Mama King's mother. Mama King's dream speaks the wisdom of the mothertongue:

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Matron and herself are sisters under the skin; they are birthed of the same mother, have shared the Passage, and belong to each other's history.

When Mama King enters her interior world through "dreams," that is, through closing her eyes, feeling the grass, or looking through glass, she enters her/their history/ies. She re-collects fragments both pleasing and painful: she comes into contact with the ugly-beautiful. Indeed, the form of *Frangipani House*, with its italicized passages of Mama King's interior world and dreams interspersed with and interrupting the narrative of her confinement, escape, and search for a homeplace, suggests that Mama King's "reality" is mediated by her "imagination." Memories are also found inside Mama King's "main" narrative and not italicized; this literary technique of Gilroy's also points towards the fuzzy boundaries and the indivisibility of reality and imagination. According to African cosmology, as Molefi Asante mentions, form is not separate from content in creative expression; both are *activity* unified by *force* (cited in Joyce 33). Likewise, in the homegrown Afrocentric marasa principle of the Caribbean, the borders between imagination and reality, between myth and history, like form and content, are fluid. Although traditional African philosophy is marked by its difference from dominant Western ontology, Amina Mama's poststructuralist theorizing of the co-mingling of opposites blurs the divisions between the worldviews; her work exists in the wider space beyond binaries. Mama's work reminds us that the 'interior' world is not separate from the 'exterior' world. The multiple relations which constitute individual and collective existence are psycho-socio-historical. The psyche is in a continual dialectic with sociality which is embedded with the shared meanings and values of the collective history of a

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particular social group (Mama 98). In this light, the histories of the West are not external to but inhabit the mindscape of diasporic black people and intersect with the histories carried from Africa. Meanings and memories are carried through language, across time and between relations.

When Mama King drifts through the liminal space between reality and imagination, she walks inwards towards a noisy village. Just before falling asleep, Mama King relates that,

> *I sit down and my whole life pass before me – like a film at a picture show. I get so tired but yet I can't stop. And everybody think my mind empty, my head empty and my heart empty. I see people, dead and gone, walking and talking and young. And out of my old worn out body, a young woman walk out and life is like a roll of new cloth waiting to roll out.* (16)

Unlike the inactivity that is forced upon the women of Frangipani House, Mama King's interior world is one of movement, and her moving backwards and forwards in time and space spurs her escape from the home to "Home." Because of her slipperiness, her elsewhereness, Mama King eludes the discourse of containment, by both literally running away and psychologically escaping the sentence. Tellingly, the roving homeless—those who are so far on the margins of the social order that they are considered to be criminals—help her elude her physical imprisonment in the institution. During her enforced stay at Frangipani House, the window in her room and the brink of sleep open to a space where Mama King gathers her thoughts and her memories, and looks closely at her experiences and the people in her life. Indeed, her abandonment and displacement into the alienating and restrictive nursing home provokes her "dreaming." As Cliff explains, "Under severe conditions of existence the movement into dream, especially if

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dreaming is a behavior and resource of the people, may accelerate, and the people may find themselves more and more in dreamtime in order to endure the harsher, unreal world" (1995 30). Mama King's reveries are fragments that come to the surface to allow her to muse on her place in life and her space in the chain. By walking among her memories, voicing past silences, questioning her actions and those of others, and confronting her present fears of "zombification," Mama King situates herself in a time and space that is beyond chronological and spatial fixity. Mama King re-visits/enters her past while simultaneously mapping out her future.

Speaking the Unspeakable: The Unsilenced Voices

One of the first fragments conjures up Danny, the father of her two children. Mama King's loneliness and unhappiness in the nursing home cause her to re-live the sense of abandonment she felt when Danny disappeared early in their marriage. Over and over again she calls for him. Her repetition calls Danny to her because she must confront his ghost; she must dig up the painful shards of the abusive relationship that she had suppressed. Her despair opens the wound of her history/ies. She must "dream" to allow Africaribbean women's legacy of sexual oppression—to speak the unspeakable things, the degrading sexual violence inflicted on enslaved women that ties up their tongues—to disrupt the linear passage of time and history, and the linear flow of the narrative. Gilroy's use of dreams is a literary technique that, by exposing the i-mage behind the words, allows the voices layered in *Frangipani House* to become translucent.

Mama King is outspoken in her old age and uses her tongue to great effect, but she was not always so quick with her critical speech: Ben Le Cage puzzles, "She was so

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quiet! So altruistic!...What could have brought her to this?" (Gilroy 34). Ben's remark implies that in certain contexts Mama King was silent. From Mama King's present day narrative, we see that she is quick with her tongue; thus her silence is not the absence of words. Her silence emerges from the code of racialized femininity that upholds Snow White, the passive white de-sexualized angel woman, as the ideal, and the black woman as her seductive, sexual foil; it is embedded in the codified edict of the colonizers that threatened Mama King's ancestors—both female and male—with flogging, imprisonment, and the removal of their tongue.

> **Edict II**
>
> *Every slave caught speak-*
> *ing his native language*
> *shall be severely pun-*
> *ished. Where necessary,*
> *removal of the tongue is*
> *recommended. The of-*
> *fending organ, when re-*
> *moved, should be hung*
> *on high in a central place,*
> *so that all may see and*
> *tremble.*
>
> -- M. Nourbese Philip
> from "Discourse on the Logic of Language"

In her old age, through the reveries and dreams that mix with the everyday world she moves through, Mama King's past silences come to re-visit her and insist on speaking their truths. In her life as a young woman with Danny, Mama King abides by the code of femininity that tells her to hold her tongue, but her silence is double-voiced: it is also a strategy of resistance against the violence of her husband.

As a result of slavery, which separated men and women at the whims of the

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slaveholders, black women and men developed a variety of sexual and familial arrangements. The legacy of slavery, as well as the creative responses of the women and men, continue in the relationships in Mama King's community. The relationships between men and women are loving, supportive and helpful to building self-esteem, but can also be destructive, silencing and abusive—indeed, they can be all that at the same time when read as part of the "love and trouble" tradition of black communities (Hill Collins 183). "Love and trouble" relationships are characterized by the simultaneity of good and bad feelings; love is not seen as antithetical to suffering but intertwined with trouble. This is in keeping with the marasa principle of the Caribbean. Suffering is part of life. Indeed, as the marasa principle is derived not only from West African cosmology but also from the memories of slavery, the troubled ground of colonial history erupts into the beds of Mama King and the women of her community.

Tilley, for example, wants many children and enjoys sex with many men—she was, "so it was said, insatiable"(26) and "used men as if they were spoons of sugar that she soon forgot about"(69)—but wants no commitment; she wants "No man to mix up things" (Gilroy 21). Miss Turvey stays with the same man for thirty years and they have six children, but she will not marry because it is not viable for her: "Wher' [one] want wid a t'ing like dat?...Only white people married" (Gilroy 90). Miss Mason never married and remains a virgin because social dictates reverberate with her mother's warning: "men are evil. Men are bad. Men are the devil" (Gilroy 9). Coerced by her mother because the family owes him money, Olga Trask marries an aging "drunken world-weary degenerate when she was just sixteen years old" (Gilroy 72). Token gets

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pregnant at seventeen to a man who abandons her in America, and Cyclette marries twice, once to a husband who beats her "*like she was a kettle drum*" (Gilroy 43). In these "love and trouble" relationships, the women both resist and conform to the tangled discourses of gender, race, class and colorism which emerge from the colonial exploitation of the Caribbean, which in changing forms, make their way into the psyches of the women and men of Mama King's community.

Danny's and Mama King's interactions are part of these interlocking social relations. When Mama King first meets Danny, she desires him but she "*didn't give a quick yes*" because she "*had to know his ways*" (Gilroy 6). Mama King wants Danny to be the "do right, all night man" she is looking for, which, in the context of male and female relationships in the black diaspora, is a man who is respectful to women, faithful, financially responsible and sexually expressive (Hill Collins 185). Mama King is wary about Danny because she has been witness to the multifarious relationships between men and women in her community—and the sexism of the master that infects their interactions. Despite her initial apprehension, Mama King grows to love Danny. She lovingly imagines a time when "*They walked across the sand, across the shadows and through the shimmering light*" (29). While brushing away frangipani petals, she recalls that in earlier times "she walked with Danny when work was done and sat on the clean sand, and listened to the river chortling as it flowed, and watched the mangrove trees motion-less in the dull, leaden darkness" (Gilroy 14). Mama King and Danny have a "love and trouble" relationship and her sweet reveries co-exist with suffering and trouble.

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VII iv

I took no time in the rose light of
the sun departing the hill, her dress turning
ochre and melting, the child at her skirt
looking back and looking alone after the mist
of the mother disappearing into the going
light. This peace filled in evening smoke
of evening pots cooking so much or so little
on this Carib road, and her mouth springing
water and drying at the thought of her own shack
at the head of a cane field smokeless.
This peace swallowing woman, three children
and a road, this peace closing ochre on vermilion
on utter, utter darkness where sleep is enough food
at least and she could fool those children
to a sleep cooing a watery promise of nice things
tomorrow, ladling sugar water into their mouths
and then sleepless waiting for his sodden body to fall
and lay near the steps outside or break a window
coming in.

-- Dionne Brand

Danny's love brings trouble. He is "lovey-dovey with [her]" (11), but he is also a "chop-down man" (Gilroy 37). "He bumped, bruised and boxed [her] face and kick[ed] [her] about worse than a football," reveals Ben Le Cage, "He was the cruellest, most ignorant man in God's world" (Gilroy 33). "He was a brute," Ginchi bluntly states, "All he ever do is to break women will, break women back, and drink rum" (Gilroy 76). The side of Danny that both Ben and Ginchi bring out into the open bumps up against Mama King's hopeful thoughts. Because Danny is dark, he is at a disadvantage in Caribbean society. As part of the disenfranchised young men of Jamaica, Danny searches for ways to redeem his manhood. At times he asserts his masculinity by identifying with the darker side the master. Through Ben's and Ginchi's comments, Mama King's romantic reverie is disrupted by the violence of the master.

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Danny's beating of Mama King rises out of the history of slavery. Slavery codified the objectification of black women through violence. Danny is embedded in the sexist and racist discourses that inhabit the terrain of the Caribbean. When Danny beats Mama King he mimics the violence of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Like the young men who beat Mama King in her old age until "she looked like debris often seen along the shore when the tide was out" (67), Danny has eyes clouded with the racism of the master. The young men look from behind the eyes of their oppressors and through the lens of racism, classism, sexism and ageism they see Mama King as a useless, de-sexualized Mammy; Danny looks at a youthful Mama King from behind the controlling images of the oppressor and sees a possession, sees the threat of an immoral, hypersexual Sapphire[22]. Masculinity in the Caribbean, as the male characters of *Frangipani House* reveal, is complexly constructed out of multiple, contradictory and changing strands. Mama King recognizes part of the complex coding and the performance of masculinity in her community: "*Maybe he got bad ways who can tell wid a man?*'" (Gilroy 6). The "bad ways" of men like Danny, Ben Le Cage, and Franky share discursive ground with the sexism of their Jamaican cohort. Adisa is worth quoting at length on the sexism in the Caribbean that Danny and his friends exhibit:

> Sexism…is…pervasive and entrenched in the very fiber of the society. Sexism cuts across all classes and color stratifications. You might say the unofficial motto of Jamaica is, 'Man is King.' Men are peacocks who strut about, flaunting their power. Jamaican men are allowed great sexual freedom, and it is often assumed that they will have sweethearts or outside women along with their wives. It is taken for granted that they will father as many children as they are inclined to, without providing support; they are not required to help with any domestic chores … they spend long hours away from home with their 'buddies'—male friends —drinking rum, playing cricket or dominoes; they slap their wives and/or

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> women whenever they believe they warrant it … Those women who object to this kind of behaviour often find themselves divorced or without the companionship of a man, and are often referred to in a derogatory manner. They become objects of the widespread belief that something is wrong with such women: that's why they are incapable of 'holding' a man. Women in the society are still expected to cater to men. A man's value is seldom, if ever, questioned. (25)

Adisa's passage spells out the problematic behaviours that some men adopt in their scramble to assert their masculinity in a neo-colonial environment of joblessness and exploitation where a man's worth is tied to his monetary value and his money-making potential. Danny, like many other dark-skinned, uneducated, sporadically employed Caribbean men, is underprivileged in master discourses. Furthermore, his crossover hybridity is regressive more often than transgressive. Rather than guarding against the worst aspects of creolisation, he unfortunately adopts many of the counter-productive positions that Adisa maps out.

In her younger days, Mama King cannot untangle the multiple strands that constitute Danny's identity, but Ginchi, a woman who "clung to her independence with a fumbling enduring fierceness" (Gilroy 75), questions the value of men in her community. Indeed, Ginchi kills Danny for his compliance with the edicts of masculinity as defined by their oppressors that condone the beating of black women, and for his failure to follow the black-defined code that signifies a "do right, all night man." Ginchi critically appraises Danny: "he was cruel, too cruel and she would have none of him. But she loved his wife – like a sister" (Gilroy 75). Because of Ginchi's commitment to her community of women, she encourages Danny to overindulge in alcohol, knowing full well that it is "man-killing bush rum" (Gilroy 75). She feels no remorse for bringing

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about his death because "He deserved to die for the way he tormented his wife – a comely, peaceful woman whose innocence of life made her so eager to suffer" (Gilroy 76). Although as a young woman Mama King strives to avoid men with bad ways, the men tainted by the sexism of the master, she is also, as Ginchi's comment suggests, naive about the complexities constructing masculinities. She struggles throughout her marriage to cope with Danny's bad behaviour and violence, yet her pain is rendered silent. It joins the unspoken river of blood coursing through Frangipani House; it becomes part of the unspeakable until her old age.

Carlton, the boychild poised on the cusp of manhood, expresses the conflicting thoughts that emerge in performing masculinity in an anglo-androcentric society: "'Be a good man,' [Ginchi] once said. But what was a good man? He had heard talk of Danny and Ben Le Cage. He had met other men. But were they good? He did not know'" (Gilroy 82). Men like Danny and Ben Le Cage are considered by the community to be good in some ways; for example, they relax and laugh with their women and share good-naturedly in the routines of everyday life, yet it is clear through Ginchi and Mama King's testimonies that they also have "bad ways." Their position cannot be defined through a reductionist dichotomy of either/or, but rather through the both/and of the marasa principle. They are both good *and* bad. Like the women, the men shift between compliance and resistance as they negotiate their way through the interlocking discourses of the creolised ground of the Caribbean.

The marasa principle advances the creativity and continuity of Africaribbean people and illuminates a space of alternative possibilities. *Frangipani House* by Beryl

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Gilroy highlights the movement into a space beyond the binaries of western thought. The story of Mama King's physical, psychological and spiritual escape from the dispiriting confines of Frangipani House is a narrative encoded with the complexities of the socio-economic realities of Caribbean women and layered with her/their history/ies. Using the resistance strategy of the "wordshop of the kitchen", Gilroy dismantles not only the foundation of western institutions such as Frangipani House but also the racist, classist, ageist and sexist discourses snaking through the histories of the Caribbean people who populate her novel. Mama King's despair that arises from being a colonized, black, elderly, poor woman subjected to powerful socio-economic relations intertwines with the razor-sharp tongue she develops in her movement through life to open the wound of her history/ies. The voices of the past break through the linear narrative to disrupt the silenced history of Africaribbean women. By unraveling her memories and entering "dreams", Mama King makes sense of her present situation and locates meanings which keep her Spirit alive. When Mama King enters her past she walks towards a noisy village; the gathering and telling of fragments of memory opens up a chain of stories which helps re-write her/their past. The interlocking stories/dreams weave into each other and through the everyday reality narrated in the larger thread running through *Frangipani House* to stitch together a collective story composed through a plurality of self/ves—as told through the window of the grandmother.

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Chapter Three: Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

From the vantage point of the grandmother's window in the preceding chapter, my thesis now shifts to the granddaughter's perspective. *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff tells the story/ies of Clare Savage, the granddaughter of Miss Mattie. In this chapter I look at how the form and the content of Cliff's novel reflect each other. The structure of the text is a narrative strategy that reinforces the notion that multiple voices construct the story of the "main" character. The story of Clare's search for her mother is plural; her personal history echoes with voices that, following an oral tradition, call and respond to her narrative. The histories of her political/spiritual mentor, Harry/Harriet, and her Other side, the Dungle-raised Christopher are inscribed in the silent spaces of Clare's story. Each of their stories, like Clare's, is multiple and the multiplicity that they reflect opens up the plural positions that Clare inhabits in her migration across geographical and discursive territories. Taken together with Clare's, the stories unfolding from Harry/Harriet's and Christopher's construct a multi-layered history of intersecting social, economic and political relations. Their voices speak of particular and communal experiences and blur the boundaries not only between the personal, the family, and the community, but also between the past and the future. Through their stories, Clare enters a broader realm of history, a political history embedded in the violence of colonization and the resistance of its survivors. For Clare, learning her personal and collective history is key to her self-identity and sense of belonging. Clare's feelings of fragmentation and isolation diminish through her development of a political, social and spiritual consciousness about the struggles of

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resistance that are encoded on the Jamaican landscape.

Ruinate: Written on the Land

> *Ruinate:* "This distinctive Jamaican term is used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into ... 'bush.' An impressive variety of herbaceous shrubs and woody types of vegetation appears in succession, becoming thicker and taller over the years until 'high ruinate' forest may emerge .... Ruinate of all forms is an all-too-frequent sign on the Jamaican landscape, despite population pressure on the land" (B. Floyd, *Jamaica: An Island Microcosm*, pp. 20-21).

No Telephone to Heaven opens with an i-mage of the formidable power of nature and its enduring continuity: ruinate. The word ruinate suggests decay but it also signifies renewal. Ruinate speaks of continual birth and what is, has always been, and will be regardless of the individual narratives written on the palimpsest of the earth's surface. Ruinate is a word-symbol evocative of the marasa crossroads; it calls up the i-mage of the dialectical hinge of creation and destruction. Cliff figures ruinate as an "exploding disorder ... A wild design of color" (8) and simultaneously as a "blackness filled with the richness of the river and the bones of people in unmarked graves" (11). The epigram to chapter one makes clear that ruinate is not a universal concept but one that is distinctively Jamaican. It refers to land previously cleared for agricultural purposes that has "now lapsed back into ... 'bush' .... [and which] is an all-too-frequent sign on the Jamaican landscape, despite population pressure on the land" (B. Floyd cited in Cliff 1). Floyd describes ruinate as a recurring cycle that continues beyond the struggles for existence that mark the land. From the perspective of the marasa principle, ruinate calls up the i-mage of the culturally specific political, economic and psychic histories of the Caribbean. Commenting on the Caribbean, Glissant explains that multiple histories of varied people

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co-exist on the land: "Landscape is more powerful in our literature than the physical size of countries would lead us to believe. The fact is that it is not saturated with a single history but effervescent with intermingled histories, spread around, rushing to fuse without destroying or reducing each other" (cited in Lionnet 336). Inscribed on the physical landscape are local and historical struggles, past and present, which exist simultaneously. To use Holloway's metaphor, the word ruinate signifies a "mooring" to anchor "the (re)membered consciousness" (25); it is a bridge to cultural memories, to a Presence (Philip) which is not pre-given but laden with heterogeneous voices that are never outside history.

In the opening chapter of *No Telephone to Heaven* Cliff introduces both the land and its people and, as she does throughout the novel, intertwines the "incredibly alive green" (10) natural environment of Jamaica with its political history. The verdant landscape is indelibly marked with the lives of the people who struggle for existence. On "a hot afternoon after a day of solid heavy rain," a truck carrying a group of rain-drenched, khaki-clad freedom fighters travels up a narrow roadbed, weaving its way through "the thick foliage along the mountainside" to an encampment hidden behind "Mahogany. Broadleaf. Mosquito wood. Shadbark. Silk-cotton. Guango. Cashew. Lignum vitae. Ebony. Wild pine." (Cliff 3, 8). Clare Savage, whose story *No Telephone to Heaven* chronicles, stands anonymous and unremarkable among twenty people crowded in the back of the truck. Although part of the landowning class—her grandmother, Miss Mattie, once owned the land—Clare's journey to self-actualization returns her to a collectivity and she becomes "one of the members of the band…taking

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her place now in the truck back" (8). "Her story is a long story," told through shifting time-schemes and layered with the stories of others: not until almost halfway through the novel does Cliff focus specifically on Clare's life. Prior to the fourth chapter, Cliff develops other histories which, pieced together, enable the reader to understand "[h]ow she [Clare] came to be here" (87) among people whose backgrounds contrast with her own, among "stacks of guns, automatic rifles, and a few machine guns, boxes and belts of ammunition, grenades" (7). Chapter four of *No Telephone to Heaven* signals a crossroads; at this point in the novel, Clare shifts out of the margins of the preceding stories and into herstory.

Drum-spell

...
O once again
I am walking
roots
that are easy

Once again
I am talking
words
that come smoothly

Once again
I am in the eyes
of my sisters
they have not
forgotten my name

Osee yei yee yei
Osee yei yee yei

they cry from behind
their evening pots

rejoice!
rejoice!

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rejoice!

she is back
she is back
she is back

Waye saa aye saa oo!
Waye saa aye saa oo!
She has done so
She has done so
She has done so

Mother behold
your wilful daughter

Yes the one who ventured
beyond our village is back

Osee yei yee yei!
Osee yei yee yei!

-- Grace Nichols

De-colonizing literature: the subversive strategy of a shifting protagonist

Like her unstable occupation of the in-between spaces that she inhabits, Clare's position as the protagonist of *No Telephone to Heaven* also shifts. In fact, defining Clare as the protagonist is not quite appropriate as the concept of a sovereign protagonist is problematized in texts like Cliff's that re-write English literature and history. The inappropriateness of the word points to the limitations of using traditional Western concepts to analyze texts which engage non-Western cultural values and codes. "Protagonist," which stems from the leading figure in a Greek play, privileges Eurocentric meanings and delineates a central character in terms of importance, but Cliff's "postcolonial" novel troubles traditional literary categorizations. Just as Cliff does not write only in either English or nation language because to do so would mask her

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hybridity—"It would be as dishonest to write the novel entirely in *patois*," she states in the preface to *The Land of Look Behind*, "as to write entirely in the King's English" (14)—neither does her "central" character fit easily in an either/or definitive categorization.

Cliff's construction of Clare diverges not only from the modernist notion of a central individuated hero/ine, but also differs from a narrative strategy that emerges from the Caribbean: Glissant's notion of the group as the protagonist. In this narrative strategy, each character is one among a number of equal voices constructing a collective social history. In her article "The Group as Protagonist in Recent French Caribbean Fiction," Beverley Ormerod discusses the reading of Caribbean texts through culturally specific ways such as Glissant's; although Ormerod addresses French literature, Glissant's concept of *ántillanite* (which she cites) also draws in literature written in English as it "is the notion of a unity existing amongst the diverse racial and linguistic groups in the Caribbean, despite their different colonial histories" (2). English language texts of the Caribbean evolve from a shared, yet disjunctive, history and thus often use the narrative strategy of group as protagonist. As a heterogeneous Caribbean text that promotes ambivalent interpretations, Cliff's novel could be read as having the group as the protagonist or read as one in which the protagonist is not a human character. The ruinate in Cliff's novel could be the leading character, like Patrick Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept miseres*, which—as Ormerod explains in her article—has the market as the central character. My reading, however, looks at the collective story of *No Telephone to Heaven* through the character of Clare Savage; I argue that she is neither a

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traditional protagonist nor just one among a group, but rather negotiates between the two positions.

Cliff introduces Clare in chapter one, but indirectly. Cliff does not name Clare individually but places her within a family hierarchy and a maternal history as "Miss Mattie's granddaughter" and within a class hierarchy as "[t]he daughter of landowners" (12). Cliff defines Clare in relation to those around her, through her positionings rather than her individual name, and in this sense immediately places her into an historical context. Her anonymity signals that her individuality takes a back seat to the collectivity. Clare stands in the back of a truck among others with whom she shares a collective history, but their histories are not identical. The group is internally fragmented, divided through various intersecting of social relations. Cliff describes the differences of the people who stand together:

> This likeness [sharing a common purpose] was something they needed, which could be important, even vital, to them—for the shades of their skin, places traveled to and from, events experienced, things understood, food taken into their bodies, acts of violence committed, books read, music heard, languages recognized, ones they loved, living family, varied widely, came between them. (4)

As Cliff's passage shows, a shared purpose draws the people together, yet their experiences, relationships and histories vary widely. In Clare's personal history of crossing and passing through barriers as well as floundering in exile she shifts into particular and variable positionings. Because of her shifting subject position, Clare at times occupies the space of the subaltern. For example, when she enters the States, the sign "YOU ARE IN KLAN COUNTRY" (Cliff 58) signals a sudden shift from a privileged position in Jamaica into an inferior position. Back home, her middle-class

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status, light skin, education and land-owning background not only create advantages for her, but also incite resentment in others without these socially ascribed privileges. In a description of Clare, Cliff states the effect of a colonial legacy that upholds white supremacy and favours light-skinned, higher ranked people: "A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, emigres. Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her" (5). The unequal power relations that circulate through the Caribbean create divisions between the privileged land-owning minority and the majority "who did not have enough land to support them" (Cliff 12). Clare carries multiple histories within her, from a legacy of slavery and the genocide of the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean, but her light-coloured skin coupled with her class status grants her social and economic advantages.

Within the extreme material disparities of Jamaica—in which Clare occupies a position close to the top of the hierarchy—the bottom of the heap is the Dungle, "the dung-heap jungle where people squirmed across mountains of garbage.... [and which was] perimetered by a seven-foot-high fence of uneven and rusty zinc wall, one entry and one exit"(Cliff 32). The fence that encloses the Dungle is a material manifestation of the desire of the ruling class to keep the poor, the "ragged and dirty and dark and mauger" (Cliff 40) like Christopher, at a distance. In *The Land of Look Behind,* Cliff comments on colorism: "Under this system of colorism—the system which prevailed in my childhood in Jamaica, and which has carried over to the present—rarely will dark and light people co-mingle. Rarely will they achieve between themselves an intimacy informed with identity" (73). Despite the separations that capitalism and neo-colonialism

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forge between the population, between the light-skinned and the dark-skinned, the bourgeoisie and the underclass, the educated and the illiterate, Clare's story is a testament of movement through divisive barriers. Although she "was educated in several tongues, the mastery of which should have kept her from that truck" (Cliff 106), in her migration across geographical and discursive spaces she becomes critically conscious of the destructiveness both to herself and to the collective of not knowing her/their history, the relationships and divisions among the black population, and the larger political processes that shape their lives. In a process of decolonisation that furthers her social and political conscientization, Clare seeks a place in the back of the truck among people whose status, like that of the inhabitants of the Dungle, places them in the background of society. By standing with the people in the back, Clare joins those from whom she had been taught to maintain a distance, and who themselves had also learned distrust—distrust of light-skinned, middle-class people like her.

> **If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire**
>
> *Looking back:* To try and see when the background changed places with the foreground. To try and locate the vanishing point where the lines of perspective converge and disappear. Lines of color and class. Lines of history and social context. Lines of denial and rejection. When did *we* (the light-skinned middle-class Jamaicans) take over for *them* as oppressors? I need to see when and how this happened. When what should have been reality was overtaken by what was surely unreality. When the house nigger became master.
>
> -- Michelle Cliff

White Chocolate: blurring the colour line

Like Mama King's name, Clare Savage's name reveals hidden layers of meaning. As a meeting ground of contradictions—she is, as Cliff states, "a crossroads character, with her feet (and head) in (at least) two worlds" ("Clare" 265)—her name signifies the

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hope of bridging the gap between the disparities of colour and class that divide Jamaicans, and of bringing histories of denial and rejection to the surface. It is a signifier that draws together the transparent and the unfathomable, the underclass and the ruling class, black and white, and life and death, yet without cancelling their differences.

Her first name, Clare, stands for light, for "privilege, civilization, erasure, forgetting. She is not meant to curse, or rave, or be a critic of imperialism" such as her ancestor, Bertha Rochester, states Cliff ("Clare" 265). Like Cliff's earlier novel *Abeng*, which develops Clare's childhood, *No Telephone to Heaven* re-writes Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Like Antoinette, whom Rochester re-names Bertha yet who physically and verbally resists her containment by the Law of the Father, Clare is meant to reflect an untarnished history; but also like her predecessor, Clare learns to talk back to imperialist history and thus she twists the meaning of her name. As shown in *Abeng*, Kitty gives Clare her first name; she is named after Clarinda (Clary), the dark-skinned servant girl who saved her mother's life. As a poor, black, uneducated female, Clary is further stigmatized because she is "not quite right in the head. A little slow. What they used to call dull" (*Abeng* 138). The simplemindedness of Clary, who is at the bottom of the hierarchy, talks back to the judiciousness of the top of the hierarchy: Clare's surname comes from her father's great-grandfather, Judge Savage, a white plantation owner who burned his one hundred slaves on the eve of their emancipation (*Abeng* 37-40). Neither Boy nor Clare ever learn about Clary. Boy believes that his eldest daughter is named after the college his grandfather attended at Cambridge University, but as Cliff relates in *Abeng*, "her [Clare's] namesake was a living woman, a part of her mother's life, rather

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than a group of buildings erected sometime during the Middle Ages for the education of white gentlemen" (141). That a living black woman rather than a white-ordered institution underlies Clare's naming is significant in the constitution of her identity, as I will show later when explaining Clare's need for knowledge that lies outside of her university education.

The non-institutionalized, non-Western type healing power of the supposedly dumb and slow Clary, her "holding her [Kitty's] hand night after night, singing to her, jumping up to get her cool water from the well out back" (*Abeng* 141), not only helps Kitty survive, but also works its way across the savage/Savage side of Clare's history. Although Clare's surname is linked to the savagery of the colonial overlords, the word "savage" also talks back to racist stereotypes; as Cliff points out,

> It is meant to evoke the wildness that has been bleached from her skin, understanding that my use of the word *wildness* is ironic, mocking the master's meaning, turning instead to a sense of non-Western values which are empowering and essential to survival, her survival, and wholeness, her wholeness. ("Clare" 265)

Signifying the syncretism of creolisation, Clare's name mirrors the contradiction of "White Chocolate," the title of the chapter that finally draws her to the forefront. Seen through the marasa principle, the significations "Clare Savage" and "White Chocolate," like "Mama King," are symbolic interfaces that suggest the co-existence of opposites. The terms co-relate to the $1 + 1 = 3$ formula that Clark says best depicts the marasa (267). In each of the three terms, two words join together to create something new, a site of difference which is a third space beyond binaries. All three signify the creative possibilities of creolisation and open up and talk back to the violent history of colonial

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oppression.

Eucharistic Contradictions

with a speech spliced and spiced
into a variety of life and lies
sowbread host in we own ole mass of
double-imaged
doubly imagined
dubbed dumb
can't-get-the-focus-right reality
of mulatto   dougla   niggerancoolie
that escaped the so-called truth of the shutter—
confirms contradictions of church
God
doubt &
dogma
the cyclamen girl—yellowed confirmation dress—
(photograph circa 1960)
curls like a copra left to dry
in the glare of unanswered questions
away
from the brittle matrix of her coconut cocoon

-- M. Nourbese Philip

Through the marasa principle, the "variety of life and lies" (l.2) inside the label "White Chocolate" comes to the surface. The term is not innocuous; the following comment by Mrs. Taylor, the racist and classist principal of the high school in New York that Boy wants Clare to attend, makes this clear. She cites the authority of her scientifically educated husband to explain her rejection of Clare as a student:

> "He is a very witty man. Do you know what he would call you?" … "He would call you white chocolate….I mean, have you ever seen a child's expression when he finds a white chocolate bunny in his Easter basket" He simply doesn't understand…he thinks it strange. I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens." (Cliff 99)

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Despite drawing on a seemingly innocent image of the Easter bunny, Mrs. Taylor's comment is both racist and sexually coded. Within her dismissal lies the fear of miscegenation, the mixing of "races" that blurs and threatens to erase the fixed categories that order Mrs. Taylor's world. Her dismissive and scornful comment reinforces the dominant perception of essentialist identities and rigid dichotomies and reveals an underlying fear that the sexual history of black and white relations will surface. The histories of the "in-betweens" threaten the dominant historical narrative, and both Boy and Clare are visible reminders of the crimes of the white men of the past. Clare's embodiment clarifies the lie of racial purity. Inscribed in the innervision of "White Chocolate" are memories of the troubled history of master and slave, of the unequal power relations shaping white/black, male/female, and planter class/underclass interaction. The term (re)members the sexual assault of black women by their white oppressors. Indeed, Clare's light skin reflects "the glare of unanswered questions" (Philip 1.17) and is a testament to the sexual violence inflicted on enslaved women that lies silent inside the Father tongue.

If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire

> A pregnant woman is to be whipped—they dig a hole to accommodate her belly and place her face down on the ground. Many of us became light-skinned very fast. Traced ourselves through bastard lines to reach the duke of Devonshire. The earl of Cornwall. The lord of this and the lord of that. Our mothers' rapes were the thing unspoken.
>
> -- Michelle Cliff.

Finding a place in the social order and enjoying the privileges of movement and status because of one's light-skin come at a cost. The price of moving in upper circles is

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paid through silencing one's history. The light-skinned bourgeoisie mimic the qualities that grant white people superiority but negate the parts of their identities that are on the side of inferiority. Cliff states: "this [the behavior of white people] was seen by us—the light-skinned middle class—with a double vision. We learned to cherish that part of us that was them—and to deny the part that was not. Believing in some cases that the latter part had ceased to exist" ("Land" 72). A social and economic hierarchy that is also a racial taxonomy incites divisions both within the self and between one's self and others. Knowing one's place in the hierarchy becomes crucial. The self is defined in relation to others and those in positions of power define themselves as the One by constructing others as the Other. Clare's father, recalling his schooldays, lists the complicated divisions and racial categorizations created by the colonizers:

> A lesson from the third form on the history of Jamaica sprang to mind: mulatto, offspring of African and white; sambo, offspring of African and mulatto; quadroon, offspring of mulatto and white; mestee, offspring of quadroon and white; mestefeena, offspring of mestee and white. Am I remembering it right? he asked himself. These Aristotelian categories taught by a Jesuit determined they should know where they were—and fortunate for that. In the Spanish colonies there were 128 categories to be memorized. (Cliff 56)

Knowing and keeping one's place in society is looked at favourably by some of the lighter-skinned, like Boy, who profit from a colorist hierarchy and can move further up the hierarchy. The relations of ruling validate and reward assimilation to dominant values and thus encourage personal gain wherever one sees an advantage rather than promote solidarity among various groups. The position of the lighter-skinned black people in the hierarchy depends on the darker-skinned among them accepting their place as the serving class.

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Unlike Boy, Kitty, who is darker-skinned than her husband and daughters, challenges the white-washing of jobs and hierarchical stacking of people in the economic system. While Boy is intent on finding a place within the system, Kitty "was not at home with pretense" (Cliff 75). Kitty's re-writing of the laundry notes at White's Sanitary Laundry is a telling example of her refusal to go along with the lies that prop up a white-ordered world. Through her subversive act of bringing to light Mrs. Black, Kitty exposes the black labour that lies beneath false images that promote dominant ideals, such as Mrs. White, "the imaginary wife of an imaginary man" (Cliff 73). Boy and Kitty occupy a house divided; they hold conflicting positions. Her husband pressures her to bend to his assimilationist ways and thus, until she leaves America, "She lived divided, straining to adjust to this place where she seemed to float, never to light, the shopkeepers at Bed-Stuy her only relief" (Cliff 75). Because she is unable to ground herself in the conflictual soil of America, Kitty is like the duppies who never find a place to light. The divisive dichotomies of the larger society that constructs terms like "white chocolate" permeate Boy's and Kitty's relationship; their conflicts and those of the larger society are played out intrapsychically within Clare. The conflicts encoded in the term "white chocolate" bump up against each other inside/through Clare, and after her mother leaves she struggles alone to reject the disciplinary power of the term. The alienation and the sense of disconnection that she experiences are exacerbated through her categorization as "white chocolate."

Clare is an outsider to both white and black groups, yet she is not either/or but both/and and neither/nor. She holds an insider/outsider position and is simultaneously

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oppressor and oppressed. Within the black population of Jamaica, particularly among those who have the lowest status and who occupy the lowest rungs of employment, Clare's class status and light skin mark her as a collaborator who has taken the place of the white master despite the fact that both her mother and grandmother challenged injustices; her privilege points towards, to use Amina Mama's words, "the denied history of collusion" (136). Clare's label of "white chocolate" speaks of the distrust and horizontal violence that the colonizer's classification system provoked and that neocolonialism and capitalism perpetuate. Clare's land-owning status and her education distance her even further.

Clare's father's example shows that to fit into white society—to pass as one of "them"—one must negate one's black history and be silent about the violences perpetrated by white society during colonization, slavery, and their aftermaths. Throughout their life in the United States "he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (Cliff 100). Kitty's example counters Boy's and she refuses to go along with sanitizing history. The question of blending in and the conflicts it produces cause Kitty, "who was cut from home" (Cliff 60), to return to Jamaica. After her mother dies, the unresolved divisions that played out in her family increasingly come to trouble Clare. Clare leaves her father's home only to enter an institution of white privilege, that is, graduate studies in England; thus, she does not leave behind his internalization of white superiority and class elitism. It is during her years at the institute, when she travels back to Jamaica and meets Harry/Harriet, that she becomes more conscious of racism and her complicity in its production. Ramchandran

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Sethuraman explains that, "Clare is implicated in the very outrage she also protests against. The context in which she speaks, in the library looking down and outside into the street, shows her three-way separation, by race, education, and class, from the working class" (273). Her institutional home and the confined quarters of her bedsitting room are symbolic of her displacement and the reduction of her movement. Davies explains that in black women's writings, "Rooms...become metonymic references for reduced space and the reference to homes are therefore often within the context of alienation and outsideness" (102). Clare had hoped that "Her place could be here [in England]" when she first arrived but she immediately notices "the dark women in saris cleaning the toilets at Heathrow," and thus just as quickly "she tried to put them from her mind" (Cliff 109). The hatred rising up from the National Front march and the bemused reactions of Clare's colleagues, however, do not allow the silencing of her inner questions. The collision of her father's lessons on camouflage and her mother's counter stance of refusing to blend in re-surface in England.

Liz echoes the racist sentiment internalized by Boy when she tells Clare that she (Clare) is different than "them," the Others who are classified as less educated, cultured, and civilized. Liz's remark that Clare is exceptional and that racism is not her issue provokes Clare to reflect on the links between social acceptance and social compulsion. Clare's acceptance into elite circles requires the silencing of her history and connection to the marginalized: "Passing demands quiet," writes Cliff, "And from that quiet—silence" (*Land* 22). Alongside the lesson of the dominant society, however, lies resistance to it. Clare increasingly questions this silence and her role in reproducing the social order

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through its maintenance. Despite her father's example, societal and peer pressure to fit in, and the advanced education she pursues which completely obliterates black history, Clare learns to hear the silenced voices embedded in the master historical narrative. She does that by leaving the linear history of her oppressors and journeying in a back and forth pattern towards the multiple parts of her history. She leaves the logos of the Father for the Mothertongue.

Universal Grammar

when the smallest cell remembers—
how do you
how can you
when the smallest cell
remembers
lose a language

– M. Nourbese Philip

Disjunctive histories and crossover narratives

As stated earlier, the "White Chocolate" chapter signals a sharp focus on Clare's psychosocial movements through life, but prior to this chapter she is a background presence; indeed, at times, she is an unwritten silent presence. Clare's shifting in and out of the position of protagonist reveals that Cliff's narrative strategy shuttles between the individual or group as protagonist to that of both/and. Although the narratives of the group, which includes the freedom fighters, Christopher, his grandmother, Paul H., the maid, Mavis, Kitty, Boy, and Clare's grandmother, predominate in the beginning of the book and Clare's story does not surface until chapter four, the stories are not self-contained. As I will develop through an analysis of the stories of Christopher and Harry/Harriet, Clare sits on the margins of their stories (as well as others) and even when

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not explicitly mentioned, she is an absent presence in them. Conversely, when Cliff highlights Clare's personal narrative, other characters stand in the shadows of her story, and at times, burst to the forefront and intervene in the progression of her tale, disrupting chronological linearity with their Presence. This intermingling of people and stories in the style of what Paul Gilroy calls a call and response antiphony (13), reveals that although Clare's individual history and destiny are particular to her multiple positionings her movements are also caught up in the collective history of black diasporic people—which is one of fragmentation and discontinuity.

Clare's narrative does not proceed in an uninterrupted linear fashion because her personal and collective history is discontinuous and anti-linear. James Clifford points out that, in the history of black diasporic people, "Experiences of unsettlement, loss, and recurring terror produce discrepant temporalities—broken histories that trouble the linear, progressivist narratives of nation-states and global modernization" (317). Both the content and the form of *No Telephone to Heaven* show Clare to be part of this chain of history that is broken by the material and discursive practices of slavery and colonization. Sometimes Clare is central and other times she is not, but she is never left behind, nor is the past or the future. As an oracular text, Clare's story migrates across the temporal boundaries delineated by dominant Western paradigms. In her journey that spans the geographical terrains of Jamaica, the United States, England, and Europe, Clare stumbles through a process of self-actualization in an anti-progressive movement of repetition, re-memory and recursion. The violence, uprooting and loss arising from the colonial past shadow Clare's present-day narrative, and the fragmentation and dislocation

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which were part of the lives of her slave ancestors are carried along within her; this is a transforming history as her/story is not a reproduction of the past but a history that is constantly being re-written while being re-newed.

Because Clare is not on a linear path to progression, her story cannot be reduced to a bildungsroman of a singular subject seeking successful individuation and enlightenment; Cliff's text, as mentioned earlier, is a re-writing of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Clare's journey to seek a sense of belonging travels along the chain of the ancestors and is simultaneously a struggle for political agency, conscientization, and spiritual wholeness. Because she belongs to a collective history that is discontinuous, multiple voices rupture her story, breaking the linear thread of progressivist history. Piecing together Clare's story necessarily draws in the stories of others as their fragments open up her narrative, reveal the intersections of history, and allow the silenced pieces to surface. Indeed, the stories/voices found in the prequel novel *Abeng* also piece together the multiple layers of Clare's (his)story. Taken together, the different voices help, as Ormerod explains, "convey the collective experience of the colonial past – the heritage of slavery and uprooting, of linguistic and psychological alienation – and also its aftermath of political and economic dependence and cultural confusion" (3). The discontinuous pattern of Clare's story in *No Telephone to Heaven* is an effect of the collision, violence, dialogue and creativity that emerges from the creolised ground/discourses of the Caribbean. The back and forth of the different stories follows the pattern of the oral tradition. Various voices call and respond to the silences and sounds of Clare's narrative and open up the complex social, historical, and political discourses that constitute the

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Caribbean and its peoples—and, as Hoving notes, "There is strife and violence between the many tongues" (160). Clare's personal story converges not only with family history but also with histories that are seemingly outside her immediate experience. I will look at two voices that call and respond to Clare's story: those which belong to her counter identity, the dark-skinned and disadvantaged Christopher, and her political/spiritual mentor, Harry/Harriet.

"Kin of [her] skin [he] [is]": Christopher

Christopher's history exists inside Clare's and his movements shape her positionings. Clare never actually meets Christopher, but their lives are undeniably intermeshed. The intersections of class and light-skin privilege that produce Clare's cultural capital can only be understood in relation to the ongoing suppression of the Jamaican underclass, that is, through the violence—both material and discursive—of keeping people such as Christopher at the bottom of the hierarchy. Clare's privilege depends on his suppression. Becoming aware of the disadvantaged and dispossessed and of their history enables Clare to come to terms with her own feelings of exile. Her feelings of homelessness cannot be laid to rest while Christopher has no place, nor while his grandmother is "lost," that is, while she remains neglected, disrespected, anonymous, and has no place of rest. Clare's search for her mother and her grandmother is simultaneously a search that brings to light Christopher's mother and grandmother because his personal, family and community experiences are a silenced but integral part of the history that she seeks. Christopher's homelessness is a mirror to her own displacement, his "madness" a mirror of her conflicts, and his mother and grandmother

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belong to the same chain of history as her maternal relatives and ancestors. Clare and Christopher are different, have never met, yet they are simultaneously part of each other and their destinies inescapably draw them together.

I Go To Meet Him
...
I see
the trembling star
of murder
in your palm
black man

bleeding
and raging
to death
inside yourself

broken and twisted
as a wheel
watching your blood
run
    thin and saltless
to the earth

as you grip the throat of cane

kin of my skin you are

-- Grace Nichols

Despite their diametrically different statuses, both Clare and Christopher, as part of the Caribbean, are embedded in an intricately nuanced history of resistance and violence where the lines between oppressed and oppressor blur. Because of the relations of colorism and classism, light-skinned, middle-class Jamaicans like Clare have, to use the "familiar refrain" of her uncle, the chance (and "by *chance* he meant light skin" (Cliff 110)) to shift into the role of oppressor. This doorway to "chance," however, also

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swings open to let through a darker side.

The blood spilt in the past erupts violently in the second chapter, disrupting the silences which allow the upward mobility of some black people at the expense of others. The light-skinned middle-class gain leverage for themselves, but their affluence depends on exploiting others. As Cliff writes about the upper-middle class lifestyle of Paul H., "He has never been concerned about a mess in his life. He and his surroundings have been tidied by darker people" (22). Chapter two testifies to the intersections of colorism and classism and the violence lying behind passing. The chapter "No Telephone to Heaven" complicates the essentialist dichotomy of white/oppressor vs. black/oppressed by depicting the troubled relationship and the severe disparities among the black population, between the poorest of Jamaicans and those of the middle-class.

III

I thought it was only the loss of the mother—
but it was also the loss of others:
who grew up to work for us
and stood at the doorway while the t.v. played
and stood at the doorway while we told ghost-stories
and ironed the cloths for the tea-trays.
but this division existed even then—
Passing demands a desire to become invisible. A ghost-life. An
ignorance of connections.

– Michelle Cliff
from Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise

The complacency and complicity of the middle-classes and the frustration and dissatisfaction of the lower classes are revealed through Christopher's narrative. Christopher is the rebel successor of the "fire-eyed forest monster" (9), Sasabonsam, who is "out fe tek [one's] spirit" (69), but spends most of his life, as the title of the chapter

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reflects, disconnected from the ancestors. "Had the young man Christopher suspected the power of Ogun in him" (Cliff 177) and had his mother and grandmother been properly buried and visible in the eyes of the larger society rather than considered worthless, he could have had the possibility of claiming a source of power to re-channel his rage. In a comparison between Clare's mother and Christopher's mother/s, Belinda Edmondson explains,

> That these maternal bodies have been dead but not buried reminds us of the invisibility of black women in the narration of West Indian revolutionary discourse, as embodied by Caliban's mother, the absent Sycorax, who represents Caliban's past heritage of might and agency. Therefore, the attempt to "bury" the grand/mother becomes a metaphor for reconciling the "unburied"—that is, unrepresented, ghostly, "magical"—history of the people with the possibilities contained in the land, a fusion which requires violent rupture with present reality. (69)

Christopher's history is buried with his grandmother and a violent rupture is required to unearth its empowering force. Chancy's work reminds us that the reclaiming of Sycorax repairs the fissures of disjunctive histories and propels collective movement away from subjection. Juxtaposed to the organized collective rebellion of the freedom fighters who seek structural change (introduced in the novel's first chapter), the injustices of the past that shape the multiple oppressions of Christopher's present reality result in his seemingly spontaneous solitary rebellion against an individual bourgeois black family and Mavis, who was "In death as in life, their faithful servant" (Cliff 48). Over the generations, the most dispossessed and disadvantaged have been severely limited in the positions that they can occupy; there was, as Cliff explains, "So lickle movement in this place [the shantytown]. From this place. Then only back and forth, back and forth, over and again,

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over and again—for centuries" (16). As part of the disenfranchised, Christopher's loss of maternal history escalates into a rage that turns on those around him. Chapter two shows the horizontal violence, the "Fighting among themselves—as usual" (Cliff 19) that is provoked through the colour and class divisions which were inherited from the master, and that keep people like Christopher multiply disadvantaged and their mothers and grandmothers invisible in history.

Christopher and the other Dungle residents have few options available to them; even their slum is razed so that the tourist industry, which profits not only the foreign corporations that dominate the economy but also the black bourgeoisie, can continue to present its illusion of an untarnished paradise. The messy underside of "shanties, shacks, [and] back-o'-wall parts of town" (178) need not be acknowledged, nor the poor, dark-skinned women like Christopher's mother whose "bod[ies] washed up on the shore outside [the] badhouses" (Cliff 34), nor Mavis, whose burial consists of being burned alongside bloody sheets, nightclothes and pillows. To wipe out political dissent and to purge the slum dwellers' visibility, the police, backed by the local bourgeoisie, force out the Dungle inhabitants. The shantytown people are denied their meagre sense of community and disbanded into homelessness. Like the duppies of the slaves dumped anonymously into mass graves, they wander disconnectedly and search for a sense of belonging; like the duppies, they search restlessly for a place to light.

As an adult, Christopher moves from one temporary bed to another, even sleeping in the cemetery until "they dug it up to pour foundation for more concrete jungle" (Cliff 178). For Christopher (as with Danny and the other lower class men who

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populate Gilroy's *Frangipani House*), finding and holding employment is as difficult and precarious as the relationships he has with the people who cross his path. Like others who "lived as he was used—hand to mouth" (44), he "had never experienced a piece of fairness in him life" (Cliff 45). After his grandmother dies "there was not one single smaddy in the world who cared if he lived or died" (Cliff 44)—nor was there anyone who cared that his mother and grandmother had died and were not properly buried. Mavis too is invisible in society; she has "No papers. No birth certificate. No savings book, no insurance policy" (Cliff 28), nothing to place her in history. In a sermon-like incantation, Cliff links the physical and spiritual decline that permeates those like Christopher who are abandoned by society and left to roam both in life and after death:

> Hear me, Myal-man. Hear me, Obeah-man. Hear me, Jumby-man. Dem say you magical.
> Rum. Ganja. Mento. Ska. Reggae. Prayer. Singing. Jump-up. Hymns. Full-immersion baptism. Nine night.
> Nigromancy.
> Early death for so many. But no relief. Many of them is sufferah. Many of them live in Passion. Suffering nuh mus' be meant for we. Depression. Downpression. Oppression. Recession. Intercession. Commission. Omission. Missionaries.
> ... NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN.
> Maybe the line is engaged and God can't bodder wid de likes of we. God nuh mus' be Hinglish ....How long mus' we wait to get t'rough? (17)

Many of the Dungle inhabitants feel abandoned even by God. For those who live on the extreme margins of society, disadvantages are compounded to the degree that faith and hope are difficult to sustain; indeed, they question whether God too is on the side of their oppressor. Many of the marginalized strive to keep a sense of their own self-worth, and despite the fact that they are variously engaged in "Trying to make communion with God

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Almighty. No matter what him name be. What her name be" (Cliff 16), they feel disconnected, dissatisfied—and look for other alternatives:

> NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. No voice to God. A waste to try. Cut off. No way of reaching out or up. Maybe only one way. Not God's way. No matter if him is Jesus or him is Jah. Him not gwan like dis one lickle bit. NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN.
> The motto suited them. Their people. The place of their people's labor. (Cliff 17)

As their economic suppression continues unabated and they have barely a chance to rise out of an underclass status, the people abandon faith in humanistic principles of love—as the above quotation suggests, turning to violence may be the only way out. As Franz Fanon argues in his analysis of colonial encounters, the dehumanization of the oppressed that is brought about through the violence of colonization "will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (cited in Katrak 164). As Katrak expands, "Given the colonizer's initial violence, the native in the decolonisation process must use violence in order to establish his [sic] human identity" (164). Moving out of stasis and into violence is better than staying caught in a cycle that reproduces the economic and political status quo. But, as *No Telelphone to Heaven* reveals, the most accessible targets of the violence of the dispossessed are the black people who have moved into the places that direct the system's functioning.

Unpredictable acts of violence such as Christopher's disrupt the complacency and the comfort of the middle-classes. To escape the fallout of colonization, the bourgeoisie who have the opportunity leave like "rats … deserting the ship—the rats' nests stand empty, and the mahogany and china gather dust" (Cliff 145). After Christopher's bloody rampage, Boy, in a self-congratulatory way, points out to his

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relatives and friends his foresight in moving his family to America where they can (supposedly) escape violence and continue in their economic pursuits unimpeded by threats. The black bourgeoisie, as Mas' Charles' "success" shows, favour working within the neo-colonial system rather than supporting radical or violent change. As Katrak explains,

> In order to safeguard their own economic interests, [the bourgeois elite] will be complicitous with both the cultural values of Europe and with the economic situation of offering the excolony as a market after independence; both cultural and economic betrayals are just as drastic. Above all the bourgeois elite will be opposed to the use of violence for liberation; they favor compromise. (164)

The collaboration and concessions of the black bourgeoisie are not neutral acts but betrayals. While seemingly benign because they are clothed in social decorum and supported by the favoured tongue of the Father, complicity and compromise are acts of violence. The disenfranchised, who are denied access to decision-making processes, resist the violence of the system with the means at their disposal.

Fighting among themselves is not the problem; as Cliff asks, "Was this so bad?" (19). She questions, isn't the fractiousness of the lower classes better than them "standing at attention on a hotel verandah waiting for some tourist's order" (Cliff 19)? "At least they were doing something" besides reinforcing their subordinate status by participating in the picture postcard illusion of Jamaica, becoming addicted to drinking or gambling, or gardening for "mistress" (Cliff 19). The system is maintained when those lower in the hierarchy fill the subservient roles of "houseboys" or "de gals" of white people and of the black elite who mimic their bourgeois lifestyles (Cliff 18). One is not only trapped in a dead-end, low-paying job where one is expected to be a silent presence,

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but also reduced to a half-life; one's days exist of "waiting around for cuffy-pretend-backra or backra-fe-true while your life passed, the people in the house assuming your time was worthless" (Cliff 19). Through the character of Christopher, Cliff critiques the practices that prop up the tourism-based economy of Jamaica by suggesting that fighting one's dehumanization and resisting deference to the black bourgeoisie are better than occupying the spaces that keep the lower classes manageable and their rebelliousness contained.

Following the rules of the dominant society, fulfilling the needs of the middle classes, and waiting patiently for action are liberal solutions that go nowhere, as Christopher finds out. Waiting for his rights to be recognized results in a thirteen-year-long, and never resolved, quest to have the life of his grandmother acknowledged through a proper burial. Christopher's example shows that staying within the boundaries and waiting for change results not only in his own debasement but also in the continued dishonouring of his maternal history and the silencing of his grandmother's voice. Mavis's staying within her set-aside space also reveals the continued muffling of history. Her life of staying within the controlled kitchen space mapped out by her employers completely obliterates her history; as mentioned earlier, she has no history. The harsh horizontal violence that Christopher metes out reaches its apex in his killing of Mavis. He mutilates her body the most grievously: "He punished her in a terrible way, exacting not just silence but obliteration, and he could not have said why. He cut her like an animal, torturing her body in a way he had not tortured theirs [Mas' Charles and his family]" (Cliff 48). Denied a voice by the law of the Father, Christopher violently maps

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out the silenced pain and history of the dispossessed through mercilessly tearing apart the body of Mavis, the woman closest to him.

The logos of the Father does not provide Christopher with sustenance or meaning: "Turning the pages of his grandmother's Bible he could not bring Jesus to life. He did not hear Him in his heart. The Word was beyond him" (Cliff 41). Christopher cannot find his history within the master narrative. His act of violence takes him outside the lines and into a third space where he re-visits his grandmother and connects with a Presence outside of temporal boundaries and objective reality:

> "Be quick of hand, mi son. Be quick of hand." She spoke to him. He let go. A force passed through him. He had no past. He had no future. He was phosphorus. Light-bearing. He was light igniting the air around him. The source of all danger. He was the carrier of fire. He was the black light that rises from bone ash. The firelight passed through his feet and hands, and his blade quivered with his ignited fury. (Cliff 47)

Although Christopher's killing and sexual mutilation of Mas' Charles, his wife, and his daughter, and his savage torture of Mavis are brutal and unsettling, they are not the acts of a madman. "People say him favor mad. Him favor prophet" (179) and increasingly, after the fire that burns to death old, destitute women—"the grandmothers of our people" (160)—Christopher appears even more mad: "Poor bredda, him mad. Poor bredda, him better watch him nuh catch" (Cliff 179). The burning of the grandmothers is the epitome of senseless, horizontal violence; it is a self-defeating self-destructive move resulting from "One side wish[ing] to bring shame 'pon the other so them set fire to some old women" (Cliff 160). When Christopher encounters the burning of the old women by their own people, the shame of his participation in killing his kin surfaces. His "madness"

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increases after this in-group violence which stems from the violence of colonialism. In a letter to Clare, Harry/Harriet explains that "We have descended as low as we can go" and laments the worsening situation in Jamaica: "Is what kind of world this, girlfriend? Is how long we must endure? We are in a fury down here" (Cliff 160). Harry/Harriet's comment reveals the background of despair that leads to the point, as mentioned earlier, that there is "Maybe only one way [out]. Not God's way" (Cliff 17). Christopher's madness is not insanity but a rejection of the logos of the Word; it is not an individual act, but a fragment broken off from a collective fury—a fury that emerges from the brutal, savage violence that black people endured during slavery.

Christopher's "madness" is a logical outcome of a history of oppression and a senseless and desperate socio-economic environment that is constituted through the law of the Father. His brutal attack brings to the surface the savagery of (in)justices like Judge Savage. His "ignited fury" is a "black light" that bursts from the seams of the contradictions of the larger society and "rises from the bone ash," that is, "the bones of people in unmarked graves" (Cliff 47, 11). Although the film producers try to reduce him to the stereotype of a black devil, a red-eyed, dishevelled, bellowing monster, Christopher escapes their sentence through the force of his grandmother's history and the spilt blood of the ancestors that flows up through the ruinate and into his veins. His "madness" signifies resistance to the dominant order and through his violence the subaltern speaks. "Since the social formation," as Sethuraman explains, "had assigned him the burden of living at the level of debasement and defilement" (263), Christopher's violence can be read as an expression of rage denied articulation. His inarticulate rage

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seeks to open up the gap between surface illusions and the silenced histories that lie beneath. Opening the gap releases the chain of (the) ancestors rattling inside his rage.

E. Pulcherrima

I came awake –
swimming in a pool of blood
was the poinsetta
e. pulcherrima
euphorbia Pulcherrima –
most beautiful Euphorbia
the poinsetta

the blood
the red
poinsetta
....
e. pulcherrima
she bleeds
unseen
uncared for
unloved
untouched
understood and vice versa
"and if you cut her back
before her time of month
she bleeds even more –
just like a woman"
...
description: a tall bright bush
identifying marks: flames
wanted possibly for imitating
the voice
the passion
the birth and death
the body, the blood of life
her dossier reads
"imitatio Christi"
the north fears her
second coming prismed
in all of the above
....
the blood

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the red
poinsetta

e.pulcherrima came awake
in a pool of blood
birth blood
trickling down
thickening thighs
sticky
with her hot milky sap
spilling from broken limbs
milked white
...
was forced to bleed
the buds of blood
the blood of red
the blooded poinsetta
an immaculately forced conception
there was no annunciation

only a joyless mating
of light and darkness
in the ice wounded womb
she finally bled
e. pulcherrima
...
a tall bright bush
a flame
a woman
e. pulcherrima
she finally bled.

-- M. Nourbese Philip

Christopher's fury and violent resistance to his place in society, to the shantytown dwellers' voicelessness in the economic processes that shape their existence, to the complicity of Mas' Charles and his family, and to the misguided loyalty of Mavis, contrast sharply with Clare's behaviour prior to her conscientization: "[She] can agree, [she] can be agreeable, in five languages, you know." As she tells Bobby, "I was raised by my father to be that way. To be the soft-spoken little sambo, Creole, invisible neger,

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what have you, blending into the majority with ease" (Cliff 152). Rather than being a destination at which she arrives, Clare's coming to a critical political and social consciousness is a back and forth process of becoming. She continually negotiates her way through the conflictual discourses around her, and at times "She buried herself in books" (Cliff 90) rather than work through the contradictions. In the "No Telephone to Heaven" chapter, Clare is an anonymous—and passive—presence.

As we find out later in the novel, she is "[the] girl throwing up in the deep end of the pool. Someone's overseas cousin pale from compulsive intermarriage and northern lights come back for the Christmas not used to the sun and the food and too much champagne" (Cliff 21). After a number of years at the institute where "She was praised for the way she analyzed Aristotle's definition of *place* in the *Physics*" and where "People admired her mind and implied her good fortune in escaping the brain damage common to Creoles. [Although] Not in so many words" (Cliff 117-18), Clare returns to Jamaica during her school holidays. At the institute "She began to better herself" and "This suited her for a time" (Cliff 117), but her education in rationality and progress objectifies knowledge (as the telling example of the National Front march filtering into her professor's seminar on Hermetic Tradition reveals) and does not help her find the answers she seeks. The Hermetic Tradition is not her heritage nor her namesake.[23]

The education she receives compartmentalizes knowledge; it does not clear up her confusion nor heal her fragmentation, and thus she engages in self-destructive behaviour. Clare's political detachment and her spiritual dis-ease are simultaneously an unease with sexuality, sensuality, and touch. Citing the work of Audre Lorde, Griffin

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explains that claiming the erotic as a "resource" provides women with "the energy to pursue genuine change within our world [as] .... the erotic is intimately related to the spiritual and the political. To be effective the spiritual and the political must be connected by a 'bridge' of the erotic—the sensual" (526). Clare lacks this knowledge as during her years in the States she has grown up isolated from the wisdoms of her/the grandmothers and has internalized bourgeois sexist and racist values of women's bodies. Amina Mama explains that, "many black women's early experience of their femininity is structured by the racist aesthetics which derive from colonial-integrationist discourses. To be acceptable, black women [are] expected to look as white as possible and to repress their sexuality" (150); as Token's example reminds us, they are expected to be Snow White. Living in America without the guidance of her mother or other senior women who have alternative knowledges, Clare's assimilationist father and the larger society re-channel her erotic energy, disconnecting her "bridges" between the erotic, the spiritual and the political.[24] She has "NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. No voice to God[dess]... No matter if him [her] is Jesus or him [her] is Jah" (Cliff 17). Clare's political, social, spiritual, sensual, and sexual health are all indivisible. Her lack of political and social depth reveals that she is also disconnected from the divine; she is disembodied from Spirit.

She confides to Bobby, "I feel like a shadow...like a ghost...like I could float through my days without ever touching...anyone. I truly cannot remember when I did not feel this way. Locked off" (Cliff 154). Having learned to see herself through the eyes of her oppressors, Clare has a double consciousness and sees herself from the outside.

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She maintains a distance from her own body and, during her years at the institute, lets others abuse her: "She fills her time. In schools, playgrounds, other people's beds" (91) and "could entrust her body to [a] boy she barely knew and watch herself as he fondled her and feel pleasure in her parts but still could be apart from him" (Cliff 88). Clare is the anonymous "girl" who vomits swallowed sperm in the swimming pool after meaningless, unfulfilling sex in the pool house with another member of the up-and-coming Jamaican bourgeoisie, Paul H., "someone she knew, [but] not well" (Cliff 88). The contained, chemical-laden waters and the elitist shallowness that surround the swimming pool are the capitalist simulacra of "the bottomless Blue Hole" (Cliff 146) where, later in her journey, Clare dips into the deep pools inside her that enable her to reclaim her erotic power. Because she has not yet gone through her ritual cleansing by the Waters, Clare lets Paul H. use her body as an object to prove his masculinity and sate his sexual need.

There is no real Presence in the shallow individuality and money culture of the swimming pool scene; the pool scene is a dead vision. That it is a nightmare of emptiness and want is symbolized by Paul H.'s potency—sexually, socially, economically and politically—being cut off the next day by Christopher's machete. Clare's passivity and her self-objectification are clearly shown in the scene when she meets the Queen Mother in England and thinks to herself: "Did you know the boy *I let fuck me* over Christmas had his head cut off from his shoulders?" (emphasis added, Cliff 90). This line also reveals the "rational" head severed from the body; the head must roll to expose the Western intellectual tradition of rationality and its separation of the mind from the body, and the political from the spiritual. The rationality of the white-ordered system is an illusion; as

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Paul Gilroy makes clear, plantation slavery and colonial regimes have both revealed the complicity between the tradition of rationality and the practice of racial terror (12). The act of the one classified as irrational (the dirty, dark and mauger Christopher) talks back to the true irrationality of a racial taxonomy that produces the hatred and violence that results in black people, particularly the poor, experiencing recurring terror. Clare's silent comment to the head of State reveals her scorn of the system but it also reveals her participation in the discourse of rationality and the rituals of social decorum. After her conscientization, she joins the people in the back of the truck literally, politically, and spiritually and would no longer be curtseying to the Queen nor letting spoiled rich men use her body; before this, however, like Paul H. and the other revellers at Buster Said's party, Clare plays her role as one of the privileged, the cream of the young generation of 70s Jamaica: "Young, Gifted, and Black finally come to Ja. Reggae-style. Number one on Rediffusion and JBC. Drink-ing the Piper-Heidsieck Buster's father got from the cellar of one of his three hotels" (Cliff 20-1). At this point in the novel, Clare is an anonymous presence inside Christopher's story because in her movement across landscapes and mindscapes she has not yet heard the voices of those whose histories are overlaid with her own.

XV

today then, her head is thudding
as wet sand and as leaden,

today is the day after, rum soaked,
she went to bed deciding what she wasn't,

didn't she used to be that girl
her skirt razor pleated, her blouse hot iron blown,

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who never leaned back, who was walking home
books in hand, the red primers blooding

over her palms, knowing nothing,
knowing no one alive inside her after

knowing nothing
nothing more

she should have stopped and changed shape
conch or mantis,

anyway
prayed
...

-- Dionne Brand
from "Every Chapter of the World"

Making Connections: The Logic of Harry/Harriet

To hear the voices that crowd her story, Clare needs other knowledges not accessible through her "rational" education or by "dragging her ass through parts unknown, as Harriet put it" (Cliff 171). Harry/Harriet's words hide a wealth of wisdom; her teachings play a key role in Clare's conscientization and spiritual awareness. That Clare lacks knowledge and must start literally, intellectually, and spiritually from the ground up is revealed in Cliff's statement: "Harriet said she had to start somewhere" (Cliff 171-2). Harry/Harriet, whose words "reach...through levels of consciousness," "know[s] what happens on this island still. [She knows about] The lives of cutters, of timekeepers" as she "hear[s] more than the breeze rattling the stalks, and singing through the blades" (Cliff 132) . She knows, as she tells Clare, "the history they didn't teach us" (Cliff 146). The marasa crossroads of past and present, of suffering and survival, of

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difference and sameness, meet in the character of Harry/Harriet. "One old woman," knowledgeable in the healing practices, "one who kenned Harriet's history, called her Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors" (Cliff 171). Harry/Harriet stands at the crossroads of Clare's confusion. Like the crossroads s/he symbolizes, Harry/Harriet is an agent of change. As shown by her/his playing the role of "Exotic. Af-ri-can" (126) Prince Badnigga for the gullible white male tourist, s/he is also Anansi, the spider, who plays tricks on the unsuspecting. In her many guises, Harry/Harriet spurs Clare to re-visit her history. "Tell me about being a little girl here, darlin'" (Cliff 173), she says, encouraging Clare to revision her ancestral heritage so that she can envision a new future. Harry/Harriet's ambiguity and blurring of boundaries paradoxically clear up Clare's struggle through the contradictions of society. Her/his in-betweenness confronts the false dichotomies of Western ideology and signifies the intersections of multiple relations. In a conversation with Clare, Harry/ Harriet sums up the interconnecting social and political relations of the Jamaican people and comments on the necessity of recognizing the intertwining lives of the privileged and the underclass, despite the classist and colorist divisions of society:

> Cyann live on this island and not understand how it work, how the world work. Cyaan pass the Dungle, cyan smell the Dungle, and not know this island is the real world ...in the worst way. Even if you were to live your entire life on this island, and never see nor smell the Dungle, nuh mus' know it there? It nuh stand as warning for all a we—no matter how light? how bright? how much of dem labrish we master? Nuh mus' question? (Cliff 123).

As Harry/Harriet makes clear to Clare, understanding the conditions that construct Jamaica, the nexus of political relations, and becoming aware of one's position within the

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discourses are integral to resistance.

Also, her transgression of sexual norms brings to the surface the dominant norms of sexuality with which Clare constructs her identity and thus causes Clare to question the gendered norms. In doing so she shifts away from the intersections that promote self-destructive behaviour. Harry/Harriet challenges Clare to rethink her ideas and the discourses she has internalized, provoking critical self-reflexivity, but she simultaneously comforts her. Clare "find[s] [her] strange; how could [she] not? [She] is a new person to [her]. At the same time [she] feel[s] drawn to [her]. At home with [her]" (Cliff 131). One afternoon, after trespassing through a canefield and bush, they reach a beach and "lay side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to, laughing" (Cliff 130). Her lying together with Harriet is a sensual experience of healing, a laying on of hands rather than a passive act of being laid, that is, the meaningless encounters of spiritless sex with anonymous men that cause her to feel disconnected from her own body and disassociated from her partners. Through Harry/Harriet's healing presence, Clare continues to walk across the "bridge" of the erotic that spans the schism of the political and the spiritual—a journey she began with Bobby.

Dreamer

roun a rock corner
by de sea
seat up
pon a drif wood
yuh can fine she
gazin cross de water

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a stick
eena her han
trying to trace
a future
in de san
— Jean Binta Breeze

To "understand how it work[s]" and uncover the facts of her homeland and people, Clare must travel physically and spiritually towards the place of her ancestors and follow in her grandmother's footsteps, both literally and metaphorically: "It was with Harriet and at her suggestion that Clare went to St. Elizabeth for the first time in twenty years, to find her grandmother's place, now left to her, and visit the river and forest of her girlhood" (Cliff 171). For the journey to claim her grandmother's place, in both meanings of the term—that is, her land and her role in the community—and to see beyond the dominant constructions of black womanhood that result in a body that is, to use Griffin's phrase, "discursively scarred, ripped and mutilated" (524), Clare needs new eyes.[25] Her elite education does not provide her with the "facts" that she needs. The facts of Clare's "rational" education are simply not enough to help her understand her place in the chain of the ancestors; the facts she learns at the institute and throughout her formal schooling are turned on their face in Jamaica:

> These are the facts as I believe them. But as you are no doubt aware, there are no facts in Jamaica. Not one single fact. Nothing to join us to the real. Facts move around you. Magic moves through you. This we have been taught. This fact that there are no facts. Wait. I can call up one fact. 'The adamantine refusal of the slave-women to reproduce'—a historian report that. What of Gamesome, Lusty Ann, Counsellor's Cuba, Strumpet called Skulker—not racehorses, mi dear, women: barren. Four furious cool-dark sistren. Is nuh fact dat? Fact, yes, but magic mek it so. (92-3)

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As Clare's musings on the truck reveal, the facts she comes to learn are not the objective, cause-and-effect facts constructed and prized by the West; the facts that Cliff presents are the logical and rational facts informed by the "magic" of the *1 + 1 = 3* formula of the marasa which emerges from the creolised ground of African philosophies, slavery, and colonization. Like the facts beyond dichotomies, Clare moves in and out of the position of protagonist, in and out of the narrative, because the "discrepant temporalities" (Clifford 317) of her experience(s) and history(ies) cannot be contained within a framework based on rationality.

Clare's alienation and confusion in exile, her "liv[ing]...in borrowed countries, on borrowed time" (Cliff 193) is caught up, as Ormerod's comment on the collective experience of those from the Caribbean reveals, in the cultural confusion of the Caribbean and its legacy of economic and political entanglements with Western discourses and institutions. Yet Clare's identity is also interwoven with articulations wrested from her movement through the fabric of a collective history of struggle. The alienation she experiences before she becomes politicized and the resistance she asserts as she becomes more spiritual neither reduce to root causes nor arise purely from one factor or the other. Davies' concept of migratory subjectivity counters that reductionism and speaks instead of the multiple intersections that cut across boundaries to constitute identity:

> Migration and the fluidity of movement which it suggests or the displacement and uprootedness which is often its result, is intrinsic to New World experience, fundamental to the meaning of the (African) diaspora. Rigid compartmentalizations based on geography and national identity... are rendered meaningless.... Each movement demands another definition and redefinition of one's identity. (1994 128)

Clare's identity is a product of the "ugly-beautiful" contamination of each by the other,

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and the other is never pure but multiple and complex. Because of her personal and collective history of travelling, exile and migration across the United States. the Caribbean, England and Europe, Clare does not move between two oppositional poles, but within a nexus of multiple relations informed by the marasa.

To eradicate her spiritual dis-ease, Clare's journey must entail not only migration but also border crossing. She must learn to see beyond the packaged history that she has consumed, past the red primers that have the blood of her ancestors seeping through their white pages and beyond the rational positivist history of her PhD studies that objectify knowledge and where "*man* [is expected to be] the subject of her own research" (Cliff 133). Her Western male-centered education silences the noise of history and makes invisible Christopher's Dungle, the murder of his mother, the disrespect of his grandmother, the "plenty-plenty polio. [and] Children bent up all over the place" (187), Clare's "sister [who] was a junkie in Bed-Stuy" (89-90), Harry/ Harriet's rape and his mother's rape. These harsh realities are "Not symbol, not allegory, not something in a story or a dialogue by Plato" (130) but the "Talawa pain, missis, talawa pain" of the marginalized people of Jamaica (Cliff 187).

Colonial Girls School
For Marlene Smith MacLeish

Borrowed images
willed our skin pale
muffled our laughter
lowered our voices
let out our hems
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers
harnessed our voices to madrigals
and genteel airs

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yoked our minds to declensions in Latin
and the language of Shakespeare

Told us nothing about ourselves
There was nothing about us at all
How those pale northern eyes and
aristocratic whispers once erased us
How our loudness, our laughter
debased us

There was nothing left of ourselves
Nothing about us at all

Studying: History Ancient and Modern
Kings and Queens of England
Steppes of Russia
Wheatfields of Canada

There was nothing of our landscape there
Nothing about us at all

Marcus Garvey turned twice in his grave.
'Thirty-eight was a beacon. A flame,
They were talking of desegregation
in Little Rock, Arkansas. Lumumba
and the Congo. To us: mumbo-jumbo.
We had read Vachel Lindsay's
vision on the jungle

Feeling nothing about ourselves
There was nothing about us at all

Months, years, a childhood memorizing
Latin declensions
(For our language
'bad talking'
detentions)
Finding nothing about us there
Nothing about us at all

So, friend of my childhood years
One day we'll talk about
How the mirror broke
Who kissed us awake

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Who let Anansi from his bag
For isn't it strange how
northern eyes
in the brighter world before us now

Pale?

-- Olive Senior

Up until Clare revisions "the facts" and remembers her history, she struggles with who she is and where she belongs, but primarily she is occupied with her own needs and does not see beyond herself. She sets off on her cross-national journey because she desires personal empowerment. At this point, she does not recognize that her material comfort and ease of movement depend on the discomfort of people like Christopher and the policing of people like Harry/Harriet. She is unaware that her acceptance in dominant circles depends on the silencing of her mother's history, Christopher's mother's history, Harry/Harriet's mother's history—in other words, the history of the mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Caught in her class and light-skin privilege, Clare is detached from larger issues and from the "ghosts" of her ancestors; indeed, at first she is startled to think that the messy, violent history of Jamaica belongs to her too: "The word *homeland* startled Clare. Still, that is what it was" (Cliff 121). Clare seeks a place of belonging and a connection to the histories of her maternal ancestors, yet until she travels across various geopolitical and psychological landscapes and into the marasa and encounters Anansi, who is wandering out of his bag—that is, she encounters the guiding influence of Harry/Harriet, the cross-dressing healer and revolutionary—she does not recognize the intersections of classism, sexism, homophobia and colorism, nor the power of the ancestors.

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Clare's lack of critical awareness of power relations is blatant when she questions Harry/Harriet: "is how you know Jamaica not golden?" (Cliff 123). Observing a group of abandoned children, the "Outside children, from some of the finest families in Jamaica" who have been placed out of sight in a foundling home, Clare struggles silently, "unable to ask ... the questions in her mind." Frustrated because she can not articulate what she sees before her, she "fought tears, but could not stave them off, and was grateful for the darkness falling fast around them" (Cliff 120). Clare exclaims ruefully: "Jesus! What a miserable place this is" (Cliff 120) because she is unable to analyze the "facts" before her with the wisdom of:

> Magnanimous Warrior! She in whom the spirits come quick and hard. Hunting mother. She who forages. Who knows the ground...Warrior who sheds her skin like a snake and travels into the darkness a fire ball. Mother who catches the eidon and sees them to their rest.
> Warrior who labours in the spirit. She who plants gunga on the graves of the restless. Mother who carves the power-stone, center of the world .... She writes in her own blood across the drumhead. Obeah-woman. Myal-woman. She can cure. She can kill...She is foy-eyed. The bearer of second sight ... She burns the canefields. She is River Mother. Sky Mother. Old Hige. The Moon. Old Suck. (Cliff 163-4)

Clare's search for her mother is a search for the Mother, yet, "What has become of this warrior?" (Cliff 164). Like Christopher's mother and grandmother, and the many other women that Cliff lists, she/She has been abandoned by her children and is living in squalor, reduced to begging, is institutionalized, sick. Starving. Disrespected. "Her powers are known no longer." As Cliff sums up: "We have forgotten her" (164). Clare too has lost contact with her mothers; she has not heard the "Stories of Anansi ... Oshun ... Shango ...[has not] walked the cane...poked through the ruins...rusted machines marked Glasgow...standing as they were left. [She has not] swum underwater off the

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cays" (Cliff 193). After her mother leaves, Clare has little contact with women who could guide her and show her knowledges beyond the male-defined spaces of her father's house and the institute. Through Harry/Harriet's help, Clare re-visions not only her own history (and future) but simultaneously learns the history of the underclass of Jamaica and that of the ancestors and learns how their voices belong to the home she seeks. She learns that

> It involves me…the practice of rubbing lime and salt in the backs of whipped slaves…the ambush tactics of Cudjoe…the promised flight of Alexander Bedward in rapture back to Africa … cruelty … resistance … grace. I'm not outside this history—it's a matter of recognition … memory … emotion. When I study Tom Cringle's silk cotton tree, I wonder about the fact that I have never been able to bear a necklace around my throat…not even a scarf. (Cliff 194)

Harry/Harriet enables Clare's conscientization and her spiritual awakening. After the "Magnanimous Warrior!" chapter, Harry/Harriet's name changes to Harriet; he had explained earlier to Clare that "the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make our choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world" (131). Occupying multiple positions is not always beneficial in a world of injustices; one must be able to make informed decisions about the positions one takes up. For example, as Sethuraman explains, Mavis's hybridizing potential favours assimilation and fuels the divisiveness that threatens progressive change for the collectivity:

> Mavis's hybrid identity [is] an identity spatially figured by her migration between the mistress's wealthy home and her own "small room" next to the garage on the premises, a migration symbolic of her mistress's position at the center and of her own subject position on the periphery. Having completely internalized her subordinate position in relation to her masters, Mavis is able to see things only from the masters' point of

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> view....It is Mavis as a contradictory threshold figure, her subject position rooted in subalternity but her discourse smacking of the masters, that Christopher must obliterate or else himself stand obliterated. (265-6)

As the above passage explains, living divided in a house divided has repercussions that are not only destructive for the individual but also work against the collective health of the people. As Danny's example in *Frangipani House* shows, instead of resolving the dichotomies that structure society, hyphenated identities and cultural crossover can be problematic. Loyalties like Mavis's, which lie with the master, undermine her attachment to Christopher and to the collective. Self-reflexivity in choosing the path one takes is key, as Harriet counsels Clare. In the "Homebound" chapter that follows the "Magnanimous Warrior!" chapter, the direction that Clare and Harry decide on leads them out of the periphery and to their center. After "Magnanimous Warrior!" bursts into her life/narrative, Clare is "Homebound."

Hold we to the centre of remembrance
that forgets the never that severs
word from source
and never forgets the witness
of broken utterances that passed
before   and now
breaks the culture of silence
in the ordeal of testimony;
in the history of circles
each point lies
along the circumference
diameter or radius
each word creates a centre
circumscribed by memory...and history
waits   at rest always

still at the centre

– M. Nourbese Philip
from "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks"

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With Harriet at her side, Clare enters a place where there was "Nothing but the chaos of green—reaching across space, time too it seemed. When only Arawaks and iguanas and birds and crocodiles and snakes dwelt here. Before landfall. Before hardship" (Cliff 172), and in doing so re-imagines the past. When they arrive at the pool of water in which Clare bathed in as a young girl, the "slap-slapping of cloth" against rocks greets her: "the gossip, laughter, judgement of half-naked [washer]women, skirt hems tucked into underpants' legs, squatting, slapping, feet propped up against rock as water cascaded across their brownness" (Cliff 172). As Harriet and Clare bathe together in the river "The importance of this water came back to her. Sweet on an island surrounded by salt" (172). The healing power of "Grandma's place" was given to Clare earlier through her mother's wisdom working its way through her sister's tongue: "Few time we go down fe mango season, and fe drink and wash wid de water. She say is de purest water in de world dat" (Cliff 105). At that point, however, Clare could not hear her mother's voice speaking to her.

With Anansi leading the way, Clare goes back to the source, to the waters of "River Mother…Rambling mother. Mother who trumps and wheels counterclockwise around the power-stone, the center of the world" (164) and partakes of the spiritual / erotic ritual performed by the healing hands of "Oshun and the Merry Maids" (173): "She shut her eyes and let the cool of it wash over her naked body, reaching up into her as she opened her legs. Rebaptism" (Cliff 172). During her riverside reverie, Clare "let herself drift further" (174) and re-enters her past. She hears the voice of Miss Naomi, sees herself as a girlchild playing colonizer and claiming individual title to the river, re-enters

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the countryside and, exploring the bush with her mother, comes upon the "Unquiet ground," "the burial place of slaves... spirits, who did not rest, who had not been sung to their new home" (174). Clare's visit to "the bottomless Blue Hole" (Cliff 146) with Harriet takes her on a journey to the gap between the inner and the external, to the marasa crossroads of the past, present and future. Her bathing ritual signifies a turning away from external social space into inner realms that heal and rejuvenate her and prepare her for the revolutionary work ahead of her:

> the very ability to retreat within, to listen to oneself, to shut off the world, is what allows for the possibility of re-entering the world and existing within a community or at least contributing the conditions for a community...these temporary retreats are absolutely necessary for the communal project of healing and resistance. For the black characters created by black women writers, these moments of retreat are sometimes individual, but usually they are enacted with another human being. (Griffin 525)

Clare's healing ritual signals a shift into collective, political action and a drawing together of the multiple parts of her identity, a linking of the intellectual, political, spiritual and the erotic. Clare's "rebaptism" in the pure waters of the grand/mothers is a laying on of ancestral hands that bathes the wounds of her scarred and disjunctive psyche, her "discursively scarred, ripped and mutilated" (Griffin) body, and helps heal her conflicts so that she can go out and teach the children the history she never learned as a girlchild and do her share to help "future generations...the future of [her] homeland" (Cliff 195).

No Telephone to Heaven tells Clare's personal story of her search for her grand/mother and for a place of belonging, but it also harbours the stories of children's and grandmother's struggles. Clare's narrative is layered with stories that speak of a collective past that holds both "Unquiet ground" (174) and the "gossip [and] laughter"

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(172) of women. Clare is a multiply situated subject located in the noisy and violent history of national fragmentation and collective struggle as well as a link in the chain of the ancestors and successors. Her history is one of pain and survival in recurring moments. She is an individual indivisible from a collectivity, yet uniquely placed within it. Her search for belonging and her return to claim her buried history, "to mend ... to bury ... [her] mother" (Cliff 192), are simultaneously her personal story of healing as well as a story belonging to the Jamaican people, a story/ies that is/are simultaneously political and spiritual.

The political/spiritual collective past bleeds into the future; indeed, the blood spilt on the land through the "failed" revolution at the end of the book fertilizes the ruinate and seeps into the next generation of struggle. The end of the book simultaneously signals a beginning. Clare's death is a homecoming: "In her death she has complete identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestors 'bones'" ("Clare" 265). Like Christopher and the freedom fighters she joins, through death, Clare enters the past and the future and, like many others before her, becomes part of the ruinate and one day, with an "ignited fury," will burst forth like a "black light" from the bone ash. Through death, Clare's spirit becomes infused with the verdant land and enters a call and response medley: "At the end of No Telephone, Clare Savage is burned into the landscape of Jamaica, by gunfire, but she is also enveloped in the deep green of the hills and the delicate intricacy of birdsong" ("Clare" 266). No longer Homebound, she is Home; she leaves behind the logos of the Father and soars towards the song of the Mother.

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That body should speak
When silence is,
Limbs dance
The grief sealed in memory;
That body might become tongue
Tempered to speech
And where the latter falters
Paper with its words
The crack of silence;
That skin become
Slur   slide   susurration
Polyphony and rhythm—the drum;
The emptied skull of gourd
filled
With the potions of determine
That compel the split in bridge
Between speech and magic
Force and word;
The harp of accompaniment the ribcage
Strung with the taut in gut;
Flute or drumstick the bones.
When silence is
Abdication of word   tongue and lip
Ashes of once in what was
...Silence
song   word   speech
Might I...like Philomele...sing
continue
over
into
...pure utterance

-- M. Nourbese Philip
from "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks"

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Conclusion

> The interaction of language, culture, community, and women's voices is a widening gyre of black voices and coils them into each other until the center reflects the dark, rich, fertile, and, yes, ambivalent collage of women whose voices have both complicated the story and dared to tell it. (Holloway 36)

Holloway's words speak aptly to black women's decolonising literary strategies and their re-writing of history by signifying on the gyre and the centre. Black women dare to tell the unspeakable; to use Christine Craig's words, "[they] want it told and said and printed down / ... want it known by grey faces queuing under / greyer skies in countries waking / and sleeping with sleet and fog" (l. 4, 10-12)—and they want it "loud enough to hear [them]selves / and believe [their] own words" ("The Chain" l. 28, 29). My readings of Beryl Gilroy's and Michelle Cliff's novels show that both women participate in the critical activities of black women and break the silences of Africaribbean women's history. Mama King and Clare Savage are not individual heroines on a path to enlightenment, nor do they—or the other female characters in the novels—fit the either/or category of oppressed victim/strong black woman that underlies the controlling images of black womanhood. The plural and migratory subjectivities of the characters in *Frangipani House* and *No Telephone to Heaven* talk back to dichotomies of margin/center, the West/Third World, black/white, male/female, oppressor/oppressed, past/present, and imagination/reality and not only open up the shifting matrix of social and political relations that constitute Africaribbean peoples' lives, but also reveal the crucial links between memory, subjectivity, and community. The voices and stories of Mama King and Clare Savage tell a more complicated story than that of a bildungsroman; their stories speak of an "ambivalent collage of women" whose voices, in the call and

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response fashion of the black diaspora, disrupt progressivist, spatial and linear history and layer together to reveal the complex, divergent, and disjunctive histories of the women and their communities.

As part of the Caribbean, Mama King and Clare share creolised histories of colonisation, slavery, and African heritages, and thus belong to an "imagined community" of women, yet their positions vary as they emerge from different geopolitical locations and historical contexts and their migratory subjectivities are constituted through particular social, economic, and political conditions. Mama King and Clare Savage—the grandmother and the granddaughter—are both different and the same because their narratives open on the dialectical hinge of the marasa to reveal distinctive vistas and different horizons of meaning that are simultaneously intertwined and intertextual. Mama King and Clare Savage are pieces of each other's history and that history is multiple, hybrid, disjunctive and conflictual.

Mama King's narrative tells the story of a woman whose abandonment by her Westernized daughters and whose (dis)placement into a Western-style institution reflects the dismissal in society of poor, "uneducated," Caribbean grandmothers. Mama King is not formally educated but she possesses alternative knowledges; when the center shifts, she is in fact educated. Through the story of Mama King, Gilroy talks back to the voicelessness of aged, poor, black women who share ground with her Guyanese character. Mama King is part of the *ántillanite* and her voice can be found within the pages of *No Telephone to Heaven.* Her tongue gives voice to the anonymous grandmothers burned in the Jamaican almshouse fire. To the women who have been

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reduced to begging. Who wander the roads of the country. Who lie sick in a hospital. "Her children have left her." "She is not respected." "They are called by other names" (Cliff 164). Mama King is the Magnanimous Warrior whose story reclaims Christopher's grandmother, who abandoned in both life and death has no land to light on. By telling Mama King's story, Gilroy grounds the duppies of the grandmothers who have no place to light and simultaneously unearths Sycorax, "to say only that there should be no dead, silenced, forgotten foremothers among us" (Chancy 214). Mama King's story is part of the history that Clare never learned in her studies but one that she must come to know. Clare is formally educated but lacking in knowledge; when her center shifts, her cultural, political and spiritual illiteracy are exposed. Through the character of Mama King, Gilroy writes the grandmother into history. She turns around both the societal homelessness of disenfranchised elderly black women and the uselessness attributed to them in capitalism. She does this by finding a place for Mama King with her granddaughter, in a literal sense and, as a contributing and respected member of the family, in a productive and spiritually enhancing sense. In *Frangipani House*, the grand/mother—the mother in her multiple meanings—returns to the community.

V vi

Light passes through me lightless, sound soundless,
smoking nowhere, groaning with sudden birds. Paper
dies, flesh melts, leaving stocking and their useless vanity
in graves, bodies lie still across foolish borders.
I'm going my way, going my way gleaning shade, burnt
meridians, dropping carets, flung latitudes, inattention,
screeching looks. I'm trying to put my tongue on dawns
now, I'm busy licking dusk away, tracking deep twittering
silences. You come to this, here's the marrow of it, not
moving, not standing, it's too much to hold up, what I

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really want to say is, I don't want no fucking country, here
or there and all the way back, I don't like it, none of it,
easy as that. I'm giving up on land to light on, and why not,
I can't perfect my own shadow, my violent sorrow, my
individual wrists.

-- Dionne Brand

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the granddaughter returns to the community searching for the mother and grandmother from whom she was severed by her neo-colonial education, her father's internalisation of white supremacy, and the dissolution of community that the individualism of capitalism promotes. Throughout her journeys across America, England and Europe, a restless spirit inhabits Clare and thus she sets off for Jamaica to bury her mother(s)—although they are both dead—in order to heal her discursively scarred psyche and body. Clare's light skin, class status, and elite education have sped her along the path to assimilation and upward mobility but then, unlike Token and Cyclette, who in striving to reflect the logos of the Father get caught in the mirror of the Man, she walks into the web of Anansi, who, by disrupting the discourse of the father tongue, tangles up the network of oppression and sets Clare homebound.

Both Mama King, the abandoned daughterless mother, and Clare, the abandoned motherless daughter, find their paths towards the noisy villages in their heads by dreaming their community of women into existence. Both women enter the depths of their psyches and re-vision the "women long dead and gone—the washerwomen" (Gilroy 53)—whose noisy chatter, "gossip, laughter" (Cliff 172), and "voices singing familiar tunes" (Gilroy 18) prompt Mama King's and Clare's critical self-reflection. Through crossing into the space between magic and facts, the "Facts [that] move around [them]. [The] Magic [that] moves through [them]" (Cliff 92), each woman re-enters the past and

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thus moves forward into the future. In returning to their center, "Mother who carves the power-stone, center of the world" (Cliff 163), and joining the voices that refuse to stay silent, "The importance of this [W]ater came back to her" (Cliff 172).

The i-maginations of Gilroy and Cliff reveal a Presence, an ancestral background that is neither a romanticized black goddess of feminine fertility nor a fixed tradition of authenticity, but a mothertongue of possibilities: "the many-voiced one of one voice / ours / betrayal and birth-blood / unearthed" (Philip 1989 l. 15-18). The i-mages behind the word-symbols that Gilroy and Cliff string together reveal a plural and fluid field of shifting social, political and spiritual contexts which are rooted in specific non-western cultural traditions and philosophies yet hybridised through the struggles of black people as they negotiate their way through and move forward and backward and in-and-out of multiple spheres. The Presence that each author articulates is wrested through her particular expression of mothertongue and the narrative structure and strategies she uses. Their novels reflect the heterogeneity of Africaribbean women and Gilroy's and Cliff's unique "prismatic vision," the use of multiple linguistic codes particular to Caribbean peoples which "construe experience in sometimes unresolved pluralities" (Mordecai cited in Savory 15).

Through the stories of Mama King and Clare Savage, Gilroy and Cliff expose the shifting relations that constitute the women's existence and counter not only the fixed and static controlling images of black womanhood, but also subvert larger social and political contexts. Indeed, attending to the voices of Africaribbean women in a meaningful way by using the concepts, definitions, theories, and poelitics provided by the

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women who inhabit the discursive and material realities of "the Caribbean," not only re-writes Caribbean history and complicates our understanding of the creolised culture of the Caribbean and its configuration within hierarchies of power—such as the broader field of literary studies—but also opens the i-maginary gap between what can be figured in words and that which lies beyond/behind language.

> cutacoo, cutacoo, cutacoo
> coo, cu, cu, coo
> coo, cu, cu, coo
>
> piju, piju, piju
> cuk, cuk, cuk, cuk
> tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc
> eee-kah, eee-kah, eee-kah
> krrr
> krrr
> krrr-re-ek
> cawak, cawak, cawak
> hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo
> be be be be be be be be be be be be be be
> kut ktu ktu kut ktu ktu
> cwa cwa cwa cwaah cwaah cwaah
>
> Day broke.
>
> -- Michelle Cliff
> *No Telephone to Heaven*

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Notes

[1] See M.Baca Zinn and B. Thornton Dill's article "Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism."

[2] See Chapter 2 "Defining Black Feminist Thought" in Hill Collin's book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.*

[3] Lorde defines these as the strategies of institutional oppression that result in sexism, racism, classism, ageism and homophobia. See "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The House" in *Sister Outsider.*

[4] The term "the West" is, of course, problematic because of the relational nature of all hierarchies. The West and the Third World are not rigid dichotomies. Many black women live in the West or under the hegemony of Western ideologies, have Western educations and use parts of Western theories to construct their theories and analyses. Also, Western theories and philosophies have borrowed/appropriated from the so-called Third World. I use the term "the West" and "Western" to define the discourses, structural processes and various practices that privilege dominant epistemologies and methodologies, and, which left unexamined, reproduce unequal power relations and predominantly elite white male-defined economic, political and ideological dominance. I use the term "Third World" as a political category to define the people and the discourses which are/have been devalued and exploited by "the West."

[5] I will explain "the marasa principle" and "i-magination" in the next chapter.

[6] See chapter 2 and 3 in Mama's book *Beyond the Masks.*

[7] See "Introduction: Feminist Interventions and Locational Politics" in Ghosh's

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and Bose's book *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film.*

[8] Gilda Nassief for example was born in Haiti, educated in Canada, lived in Dominica most her adult life, and is currently stationed in India.

[9] For more on mothertongue see Philip's introduction, "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy," in *She Tries Her Tongue: her silence softly breaks.*

[10] bell hooks uses this term to refer to the speech of black women that challenges socio/political institutions and ideologies. See *Talking Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.*

[11] The etymology of "denigrate" itself points towards the racism embedded in the fathertongue, that is, English: *de-* DE- + *nigr(are)* to make black + *-atus* -ATE (Webster's).

[12] There are numerous other stereotypes such as tragic mulatto, great singer and dancer, or that of domineering woman who is unsupportive of black men. See Barbara Smith in Wade-Gayles for a comprehensive listing (p. 3).

[13] See the work of Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Jean Buffong, Merle Collins, Lucille Mathurn Mair, Stella Dadzie, Myriam J.A. Chancy.

[14] Philip explains that "macomere" is Caribbean demotic for "female confidante" (1995 7). Davies explains that "Maccomay" is French-based patois for my co-mother *(ma commere)* (1994 196).

[15] Collins explains that fluid boundaries exist between biological mothers and other women who care for children. African and African diasporic communities recognize

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the wisdom of sharing childrearing. 'Othermothers' are the women who "assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (119).

[16] See chapter 6 "Black Women and Motherhood" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.*

[17] See page 84 in Chancy's chapter "Good Enough to Stay, Good Enough to Work" for background on the "Domestic Scheme."

[18] See the critical work of Dionne Brand, Beryl Gilroy and Eudine Barriteau.

[19] "The white man is the devil" is a metaphor/political categorization that Malcolm X uses to describe western imperialism. There is, he writes, "indisputable proof that the collective white man had acted like a devil in virtually every contact he had with the world's collective non-white man" (1823).

[20] Busia states that although she scripted the poem she is not its sole author, but more of a conduit of other women's voices. She explains that the poem was "given" to her by her community of women.

[21] See pages 209-213 of Busia's article.

[22] Annecka Marshall states that the defining characteristic assigned to Sapphires is emasculator of men. See her article "Sensuous Sapphires: A Study of the Social Construction of Black Female Sexuality."

[23] The meaning of "hermetic," that is, 1. sealed as to be airtight and 2. not affected by outward influence or power; isolated, runs counter to Clare's individual identity and collective history.

[24] *Abeng* provides many of the missing fragments of *No Telephone to Heaven*

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concerning the sexual, sensual, erotic and spiritual knowledges of Clare's maternal history.

[25] Indeed, Griffin's phrase applies aptly to Mavis too. Christopher's violent attack of Mavis exposes her "discursively scarred, ripped and mutilated" body for what it is: that is, his physical scarring, ripping and mutilating make visible her silent story.

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