



The Inseparability of Origin and Identity (Historicizing and Reactivating Mother Country in *No Telephone to Heaven* by the Jamaican American Michelle Cliff)

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects Cliff's strategy in dealing with the postcolonial problem of belonging and identity. It highlights her emphasis on the responsibility of colonialism and neo-colonialism for creating a diasporan world. Cliff's viewpoint is that the place of origin is a central part of one's identity. One may live in several locations but birthplace remains a fixed point of reference. Her strategy consists in connecting with her place of origin by reinterpreting its history. She believes that the greatest tragedy is when people lose the awareness of their roots. Furthermore, Cliff questions the oppression of women and sees that political struggle is the only means for the oppressed people to affirm their identities. The paper shows how the novelist is marked by her idea of the relation between mother and motherland. With her powerful imagery of feminine Jamaica, Cliff has the audacity referring to her island, not England, as motherland.

Keywords: diaspora, identity, mother country, place of origin, postcolonialism, resistance.



Methodology

This paper is a text-based study adopting an analytic approach in unfolding Cliff's post-colonial message. The first part is an introduction providing some background information about the second-generation Anglo-Caribbean writers and their post-colonial attitude laying stress on Michelle Cliff. Relying on excerpts from the novel, the author's quotes, and those of critics, the second part presents Cliff's strategy in dealing with the post-colonial problem of belonging and search for identity epitomized in the story of her heroine. It also analyses significant incidents and situations in the novel through which Cliff highlights her vision and asserts her rejection of the neo-colonial politics. The third part is a survey of the remarkable technique Cliff follows to convey her viewpoints. A part is dedicated to a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

Introduction

Cliff belongs to the second generation of Anglo Caribbean writers who were born in the West Indies in the 1950s then brought up and /or educated in Britain or the USA. Their writings owe much to the ground- breaking first generation who arrived in England as adults and with a colonial experience. Nevertheless, they live, like their predecessors, at the borderline of – at least- two cultures. Ledent (2007) refers to this generation as the "New Diaspora". They are caught between the old and the new, home and host country. These writers exemplify the paradoxical reality of belonging and not belonging and of being inside and outside of culture. Their writings reflect an assertion of their right to belong to British or American society and a repossession of a history hidden and misrepresented. They have a past West Indian identity which they bring to bear on Britishness or Americanness. Hence, they are resistant novelists and their resistance is important for creating a black community. They have the audacity to accept their in-betweenity or multiplicity seeking practical solutions to the Caribbean problems. In their novels, they portray the migrants wandering without a fixed home. Their movement between multiple locations suggests co-belonging. The diasporan's origin haunts him, but it is elsewhere he has set his ambitions. Thus, he faces a mixture of contradictory trends: home hunting so as to create space for himself in the world and home haunting where he is motivated by a kind of nostalgia for restoring a home that has been lost.

Cliff has a particular relation to her homeland which is a direct consequence of colonial history and results in a strong personal statement on her native land and her relation to the rest of the world. Cliff's identity is first of all based on her being a Jamaican. She always insists, "I and Jamaica is who I am. No matter how far I travel-how deep the ambivalence I feel about ever returning"(qtd.in Edmondson,1998,77). Also, in the preface to *The Land of Look Behind* (1985), Cliff indicates that Jamaica forms her writing for the most part and "has formed for the most part herself too"(12). Cliff admits her Jamaican origin travelling back to the history of her



ancestors and this indicates a desire for cultural reconnection or rather a rehoming desire.

Besides, Cliff is preoccupied with the Caribbean dilemma. In her novel, she stresses the destructive effects of colonialism from the viewpoint of the Western rejection and disgust of non-whites. Despite the colonial exploitation of the Caribbean islands, people are left there immersed in abject poverty and diseases, suffering from underdevelopment and racial segregation. Cliff questions the reasons behind an unequal living in Jamaica and the Third World as well. Moreover, she exposes the many ways in which colonialism and patriarchy consort to oppress Caribbean women and men. Her migratory status enables her to examine and record the subordination and resistance of Caribbean people. Through her writings, she not only liberates herself but also stimulates West Indians to continue their struggle for liberation from all forms of domination.

Cliff's Strategy in Dealing with the problem of Identity Reflected in *No Telephone to Heaven*

Combining autobiography, history, and fiction, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) is the second novel published by Cliff as a sequel to *Abeng* (1984). Both novels, through narrators, relate the story of Clare Savage, a white Jamaican woman, in search of home and identity. She is a displaced character who experiences a feeling of homesickness and is obsessed by the absence of a definite identity. She is also torn apart by the difference between her parents being a white Creole father and a black Creole mother. Clare's mixed origin is symbolized by her name "Clare Savage". Agosto (1999) says that the irony of her last name, Savage, is that it refers to an old aristocratic family, her father's family while simultaneously signifies blackness, wildness and the African elements of her heritage, which her mother personifies (106). Clare represents the collision of two identities inside one mind and body. Cliff (1990) indicates that *No Telephone to Heaven* creates a dichotic world where things are judged upon the basis of whether they are wild or tame as a matter of identity (266). Actually, Cliff's view stresses the fact that post-colonial Jamaica still suffers from the trauma of colonialism which reveals itself in such a division of savage and civilized.

Clare's mother, Kitty, is descended from early Jamaican resistors known as the "maroons". She married Boy against great opposition from her family. While Kitty identifies closely with the Afro-Jamaican folk culture she grew up surrounded by, she hides her Afro-centricity and rarely challenges Boy's racism and his pride of his whiteness. Toland (2004) indicates that when Kitty "masks...her identification with blackness...", she denies her daughter a balancing counter-discourse"(40). Boy begins to insert inside his daughter the colonial ideology that views England, America, and whiteness as superior to Jamaica and blackness. He teaches Clare that the superiority of their class is "naturally ordained and that... socializing with those who are flawed



in irreversible way is out of the question"(Abeng 71).

Furthermore, Cliff's novel highlights women's double oppression under colonialism and patriarchy. The mother is further oppressed by her marriage to Boy Savage, whom Cliff describes as "pretentiously whitish"(NTH 127). Submitting and conforming to a patriarchal order that silences women, Kitty sacrifices speech for silence. Colonialism has forced her to become divided. While she secretly embraces blackness, she encourages her daughter Clare to strive for whiteness. No doubt that the contradictions Clare perceives and lives in her childhood have a great impact on her fragmentation. She must deal with her father's domination and her mother's silences, with his disapproval of blacks and Kitty's loyalty to him (NTH 75). By the time she is twelve, she has already developed double consciousness. She sees herself as the embodiment of dualities she seeks to reconcile (NTH 36). Though Clare's color privilege distances her from her mother's family and from the mother-daughter bond, she is emotionally drawn to the Afro-Jamaican culture with which her mother identifies. Whereas Boy wants his daughter to follow in his footsteps, it will be seen later that all his attempts to impose his worldviews on his daughter will prove unsuccessful. Laforest (2000) emphasizes the point saying, "Too intent on reclaiming the identity they taught her to despise, Cliff tends to see whiteness as invisible"(183). Laforest means that Clare Savage could have represented a syncretic identity bringing together her various heritages. But, hindered by racism, she sees wholeness in becoming one with her place of origin, Jamaica. For Clare, Jamaica is a mother, a grandmother; mother and island are one. In short, Cliff does not reject living in several places provided that place of origin is asserted and regarded as the basis of one's identity.

Throughout the novel, Cliff presents a chain of women that have been important to Jamaica's history. Those women are heroic mothers and grandmothers symbolizing the homeland with their collective resisting experiences. One of them is Nanny, the most famous of the Maroon leaders, a great political organizer standing for power and respect for African traditions. She is at the center of numerous legends and folktales and has become a Jamaican national heroine. There is also Mary Seacole, a Jamaican nurse who helped soldiers during the War. There are Miss Mattie, the heroine's grandmother and Kitty, her mother. In fact, a large section of the novel is devoted to Kitty and her strong relation to her homeland. What unites all these women is their personification of the homeland. Cliff (1990) says, "I understand the landscape of [my] island as female. For me the land is redolent of my grandmother and mother, it is a deeply personal connection. The same could be said of Clare Savage, who seeks out the landscape of her grandmother's farm as she would seek out her grandmother and mother. There is nothing left at that point but the land and it is infused with the spirit and passion of these two women" (266).

The story of *No Telephone to Heaven* is Clare's struggle to join this chain of women, share their spirit of resistance, and finally become at home in Jamaica. Clare discards



America and ceases to be a "student of the Motherland"; instead, she identifies herself through "her female lineage"(NTH 88). Cliff's novel suggests that we should not blindly accept the imperial version of history which highlights the Western dominance and the Caribbean passivity. These myths should be discarded by documenting the untold resistance of the colonized. Accordingly, Cliff records the everyday acts of resistance practiced by the characters in her novel. This justifies reading the text as an example of what Barbara Harlow (1987) has called "resistance literature", writing that gives voice to the struggle for liberation in the Third World and awakens us to the fact that knowledge has been used by people in power to create a distorted history. Resistance narratives emphasize the alternate historical facts and interpretations taken as essential modification of official history (15).

In fact, the heroine's journeys and the racism she faces in America and England have a distinct impact on her search for identity. It is only after she realizes that England is not the paradise that it seemed when she was in school that she can return to Jamaica. Only after the myth of England as the center of the world is shattered, can she realize that Jamaica is in fact the center of her world. Her powerful imagery of feminine Jamaica contrasts with the colonial motherland. The rebellion against the imperial "motherland" is symbolized by a rewriting of the term "mother country" in the connection of black women and mothers to their homeland. Insisting on the term "mother country" empowers West Indian women and reevaluate their status and capabilities. Like her mother and grandmother, Clare Savage defines herself through her place of origin. She includes herself as another resisting woman defending and unfolding the true history of Jamaica. Clare's feminized country becomes a surrogate for her mother who had died too early. She finds solace and home place in her mother's land. She is able to return and hold in her hands her mother's possessions though she was not able to hold her hand when she died. Feeling at home in Jamaica means reconnecting with her long-lost mother and with all her female ancestors.

Clare joins a revolutionary group seeking to damage the filming of the history of the maroons. The film is expected to distort the historical facts. But the revolutionaries' organized attempt is hindered by the ex-colonizers and their agents and Clare dies in the struggle. She sacrifices herself while trying to help some of the revolutionaries to escape. For Cliff, struggle and resistance against imperialism is the only available track to be followed. Clare lives in suffering and fragmentation along the many journeys she undertakes in her life to attain a solution only through death. In Clare's journey, both hope and hopelessness are expressed through the words "No Telephone to Heaven": "Heaven" suggests home, triumph, dignity, and assertion of one's identity. Having no telephone suggests a disconnection to Heaven. Cliff refers to the continual attempts of the ex-colonizers to manipulate the history of the ex-colonized people and stand against any efforts exerted for asserting and maintaining a true account of the past.



Nevertheless, the novel shows further signs of hope when immediately after Clare's death, the forest comes alive with the chirping of birds and the novel ends with the words "Day Broke". Clare's death does not mean the end of the story of female struggle. There is still hope; resistance will continue and it is imperialism that must be controlled and hindered. Clare has lived the struggle and then died in a way that is courageous. Her flesh combines with the Jamaican soil and with bodies of her brave female ancestors to nourish the land on which others like her may live, thrive and start a new resistance. Furthermore, Clare transcends her self-division, her liminal space between whites and blacks. Her soul has found its way to the heart of her mother's land and she has become a truly Jamaican. Commenting on the novel's ending, Cliff (1990) says, "Though essentially tragic, for her life has been so, I envisioned it, as an ending that completes the... triangle of the character's life. 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 (265). Clare's movement towards "homeland and wholeness", as Cliff says, cannot be achieved in any other way. This ending completes the triangle of Clare's life: she was born in Jamaica, moving to the United States then to England and returning once again to her birthplace where she died.

An Analytic Approach to The Text

Boy Savage, Clare's father, decides that since he is "white", the family will simply pass. The narrator describes him as "streamlining himself for America, becoming a new man". He is "making himself at home. Settling in. Branching out"(NTH 57). In addition to absorbing her father's colonial ideology, Clare is also influenced by the "nationalist" ideology of the Freemans who represent her maternal lineage. Miss Mattie, the grandmother and Kitty, the mother, have implanted the seeds of ladyhood in her since childhood. Miss Mattie's lifestyle contradicts the view that only men have authority. Young Clare sees that the practices of her grandmother and mother contradict the notion that women's place is at home. Cliff (1990) indicates that in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the Afro Caribbean grandmother is an archetypal figure whose power and spiritual authority are celebrated: "At her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practices, and food... She is an inheritor of African languages...the responsibility to mete out justice"(NTH 267). She has passed much of her values and knowledge on to Kitty. But this knowledge has not been shared by Clare. Kitty and Miss Mattie assume that as her father's daughter, Clare is not interested in such things.

Fear of degeneracy justifies the grandmother's reaction when Clare "borrows" her gun and mistakenly kills the bull. Miss Mattie regards her as a "wicked, wicked girl" and banishes her from her home. She believes that Clare had inherited the "degeneracy" of the Creole Savages, her father's family: "Misbegotten people and misbegotten girl" (Abeng134). The novel tells that the Savages were known all over Jamaica for their corruption and devilish ways. Banishment from her grandmother's



farm is a profound loss for Clare, for in banishing her, Miss Mattie denies her access to her folk roots and to indigenous culture. She will grow up ignorant of her mother's heritage. Clare's mother prepares her daughter for the advantages of the white world; she sees this as Clare's destiny. She also gives her up perhaps to save Clare from the world of blacks which Kitty thinks worse for a light-skinned daughter to follow than the world of whites. She wants to steer Clare in one direction. As a person of color migrating to the United States during the early 1960's, Kitty is treated as inferior by the white people she encounters. Hence, she constantly refers to her home, longing to return to Jamaica and trying to find "home away from home"(NTH 75). She embraces her culture, goes to Jamaican shops, and talks in Creole with the shopkeepers (NTH 78).

Clare Savage, first contemplates racial injustice while reading about the Holocaust, the mass destruction of European Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Boy argues that "they should have known better than to antagonize Adolf Hitler" (NTH 72). He further tells her that he feels that "Jews...are nothing but trouble sometimes- for themselves and for Christians. I wonder why God created them. Perhaps for that very reason. So, they could test us" (NTH 74). The narrator says, "She was struggling in her twelve year- old mind, trying to meet her father across the ethics he professed"(NTH 74). But the Holocaust influences Clare to the extent that she begins to disadopt her father's view regarding them.

However, Boy Savage tries in turn to protect Clare from her own contemplations that may lead her to favor her African heritage. He begins to talk with her about Calvinism.; he tells Clare that the "elect" are those who are the only saved souls on earth; their names were recorded before time. Whites are the ones who had been chosen while blacks are the poor bastards who were not. Nevertheless, it will be seen later that Clare never adopts her father's outlook. She can't seal her fate in Boy's Calvinistic paradise because she will not be white enough to win salvation in his own way. Rather, she will identify with her black origin. Actually, Boy Savage has erased his cultural memory, deliberately denying his black history, hiding the planters' immorality, instability, drinking and gambling and replacing all these with a mythology of wealth, nobility and salvation.

Assuming that Clare will pass as white, Boy continually gives her lessons on "invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage"(NTH 100). Agosto (1999) indicates that whereas in Jamaica Clare's light skin signified class privileges, in the United States she is redefined as black and unprivileged (115). The high school principal tells Clare and her father that any person who looks white but has black blood is classified as black and so Clare is inscribed as black on a card. Actually, the principal's words "we have no place for in-betweens" transforms the father's identification with whites into a delusion and generates a sense of placelessness within Clare.



The mother's departure shortly before this interview has its influence on the fragmentation of the family. Then comes this high school situation to separate Clare from her father and his white world. It is the starting point that leads her to think of her problem: whether to identify with blackness or deny part of her identity by passing as white. Toland (2004) contends that Cliff depicts in her novel the powerful impact that the black consciousness and Black power movements of the late sixties has on Clare's sense of self when she attends school in the States during that time. The Civil Rights Movement has a great influence on reinforcing her sense of connection to the black community (46). In fact, her new insight prepares her to condemn racial violence and to break with her father's ruling ideology. Davies (1994) indicates that "Clare Savage comes to conceptualize whiteness as not primarily in skin color but in the connection of whiteness with the acceptance of and participation in the domination of others"(6). Passing as white really requires complicity with the dominant society's racism.

Gifford (2003) argues that "Clare's worldview progresses from deconstruction to construction, from learning others' worldviews to clearing space for building her own worldview"(51). Clare resists colonial and patriarchal domination and refuses to acknowledge her father's racism and his adoption of an American home-place. She rids herself of paternal influence to explore new possibilities. That is why early on in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the narrator stops mentioning Boy Savage handing him over to silence.

Clare goes through a gradual process in openly claiming a black identity. As soon as she has finished school in the United States, she has left to London. During one of her private day trips in London, she visits the grave of Pocahontas, a resisting African young woman who underlines the continuity of female resistance. Reading the epitaph, "friend of the earliest colonists, whom she nobly rescued, protected and helped", she knows as her mother had known regarding Marcus's grave that "something was wrong"(NTH 137). Like Marcus, Pocahontas's heroism has been modified and tamed by the colonists who had kidnapped her. The epitaphs distort and destroy their resistance. Cliff (1990) discusses this grave scene saying, "When Clare Savage recognizes Pocahontas in that graveyard in Gravesend, she...begins a series of choices which will take her from the mother country, England, back to the country of her grandmother, her own"(268).

In fact, Clare's purpose for going to England is to engage in graduate studies on Renaissance art and history. Her discovery of a vast and rich treasure of knowledge makes her embrace that part of her view represented in European thought and culture. Clare admits, at this temporary stage in her journey to selfhood, that African and European blood can simultaneously flow in her veins at the same time. She, then, can recognize the advantage of her plurality. Like many other colonials, she goes to England seeking the refuge she has been promised. Nevertheless, she notices the same racism she has felt in America (NTH 112). Clare's light skin and good accent give her the right to be favored, to be above other immigrants as long as she denies her duality. But she detects the racism hidden in the compliment that "she is not at all like our



Jamaicans" and decides she does not want to be differentiated from blacks (NTH 117-139). She realizes that passing means self-denial and silence. When told by a friend not to take racial insults personally because "[her] blood has thinned", Clare replies sharply, "You mean I'm presentable. That I'm somehow lower down the tree, Higher up the scale"(NTH 139). Clare, to the contrary, rejects the identity fixed in her, that of "the soft-spoken little Sambo, Creole, invisible neger...blending into the majority with ease"(NTH 152). Clare decides to make herself visible; she sees passing as a betrayal of her black family and friends. Schwartz (1996) claims that Clare is becoming increasingly conscious that passing "places her in exile from herself"(298). By the time Clare comes back to Jamaica, she clearly recognizes herself as a black person with white skin. Clare says, "I explored the country. First with my mother. She felt about this place...it was where she was alive, came alive, I think. She knew every bush...its danger and its cure. She should have stayed here. In America she was lost...I was fortunate I knew her here. I heard her voice, clipped, distant-suddenly...Her passion of place. Her sense of the people. Here is her"(NTH 173- 74). Clare's words convey the intense relationship between her mother and the island. They also show the extent to which Clare aligns herself with her mother's view as regards her love and adherence to her homeland. Edmondson (1998) indicates "it is her mother's hidden self as a black warrior that Clare seeks to reclaim when she returns to Jamaica" (79). Before her death, Kitty had written to her daughter saying, "I hope someday, you make something of yourself, and someday help your people. A reminder, daughter, never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself "(NTH 103). Clare, indeed acts according to her mother's values resisting ladyhood, adoring the countryside, and acting rebelliously. Agosto (1999) says that *No Telephone to Heaven* proposes "historicizing memory "that is writing the history of African leaders and rebels that have been omitted. Although slave resistance was common in England, the United States and the Caribbean, accounts of uprisings were deliberately erased from history (2). Actually, the novel illustrates that those leaders particularly female rebels served as a weapon against slavery and if their memory is kept alive, it may continue to encourage resistance against other types of oppression. Hence, Clare gets more determined to understand and regain the memory of Jamaica's heroic past and this, in turn, urges her to join a revolutionary group. She wants to obtain justice for those who "cannot get through to heaven" and sees revolution as the embodiment of her political awareness (NTH 17). Clare adopts the African customs and deals with their artifacts. She descends to the laboring class and gives up her individuality. She returns to Jamaica first for personal reasons, because "there was nowhere else and because she needed to heal", that is to put an end to her fragmentation (NTH 192). But attaining her subjectivity and homeliness demands merging herself with others to form a collective self. Her name becomes less important than her role as "one of the members of the band"(NTH 8). She begins teaching the Jamaicans and her teaching becomes a learning experience for her. She supplements her prestigious Eurocentric education with the memory of Jamaican heroism. She and her students focus on the history of their homeland, an



education "connected with their lives" (NTH 193). Clare says "it is the best thing I have done; it is the only thing I have done"(NTH 194). By giving the land to "her people", Clare becomes like her mother who "helped her people"(NTH 173). Now, fulfilling her dream of devoting her life to fight oppression, Clare faces the enemy, i.e., the American and the English film makers.

Before signaling the arrival of the moment to attack the enemy, Clare confronts the past and then buries it. In her grandmother's house, she searches thoroughly in a box containing relics of her mother. She lives with her mother through physical objects. Threatened by a scorpion "readying its sting", Clare uses one of her mother's books to kill the invader and the "ooze of the scorpion stains the already rat-bitten book (NTH 199). Though damaged, the book can still crush the enemy. She then gathers "her mother's girlhood" into a sack and buries them (NTH 200). This act relieved Clare and compensated for her inability to bury her mother who died while she was away.

Davies (1994) states that Clare has "no possibility of direct connection to her African identification" (123). It is not possible for the light skinned Clare to return and easily claim a black identity because people in Jamaica will not believe her rejection of white identity. Clare gives her life in the struggle to create the community she aspires, a community of all Jamaicans, whites and blacks, poor and privileged; a home void of racism and patriarchal oppression. Actually, Clare's death seems fatalist; it is her only way to assert her belonging to Jamaica and the necessity for erasing discrimination on the basis of race, class and gender.

The tragic outcome of Clare's revolutionary group is foreshadowed from the beginning of the novel in the section entitled "No Telephone to Heaven": the truck that transports Clare and her rebel friends to her grandmother's land, their new communal home, bears the message on its side: "No Telephone to Heaven". This message affirms how unbelievable it is for the oppressed Jamaicans to get rid of the hell they suffer. The narrator tells that the message further implies "No voice to God. A waste to try. Cut off. No way of reaching out or up. May be only one way. Not God's way...Him not gwan like dis one lickle bit...No miracles" (NTH 15-16). Cliff sees the island's unresolved problems and permanent suffering in fatalistic terms. Getting the oppressed out of their hell is just an attempt always hindered. The hell of Jamaica exists as long as imperial injustice and oppression exist. Lima (1993) acknowledges the writer's tackling of social transformation in Jamaica as a tragic impossibility (52). Gifford (2003) as well, states that Cliff excludes any hope that Caribbean problems can be solved by an appeal to an elusive "metanarrative", namely, the coming of a supernatural power beyond the domain of our existence to rid Jamaica and the other colonies of their hell (39-40). The title implies that there is no hasty solution to this dilemma and it cannot be imagined that all suffering ends overnight and everything is put in its place.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff attacks what Barnes (1992) calls "Cultural cannibalism", the newest form of neo-colonialism in the Caribbean (23). In fact,



Maroon history is cannibalized by a foreign film company: it produces a love story between Nanny and Cudjoe, leaders of the two main rebel settlements at their time. The fierceness of the two rebels is softened by phrases of love that devalue their heroism (NTH 206). Agosto (1999) indicates that maroon history is trivialized by having the great African warrior made a Jane to Cudjoe's Tarzan (99). Nanny is to be attacked by a monster so that Cudjoe can rescue her. The role of the fire-eyed monster is played by the black servant Christopher "who spent his days and nights getting old in the street". Ironically, he is the only one, among the film actors suited to his role because his existence has been that of a monster, a dehumanized social outcast. The film producer instructs him saying, "howl! howl! I want you to bellow as loud as you can. Try to wake the dead...Remember, you are not human" (NTH 207). Actually, his howling condemns the ex-colonizers who deny the poor and the sons of the slums the possibility of growing up with dignity. Christopher always resents being treated as a monster and resentment is a manifestation of resistance.

A Survey of Michelle Cliff 's Technique in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

Cliff presents her postcolonial experience in a center-versus margin pattern and resists the authority of colonialist models. She, among others, participates in validating the silenced histories of the ex-colonized people and bringing into view their world and their culture. She highlights the practices of obeah and spiritual beliefs of the oppressed people in Jamaica against those of the oppressors (NTH 66-71-104).

There is also the subversive quality of using hybrid languages to give voice to West Indians. Agosto (1999) says that the ex-slaves' entering of African words, rhythm, intonation, and syntax into the master's language, has formed Creole as an oral language in the ex-colonies. The survival of Creole or rather Patois, as a distinct speech, is a sign of resistance (12). Through the use of Patois, she protests the exclusion of Caribbean voices and themes from Western art forms. Patois breaks in the midst of ideas begun in English and this deliberately weakens the authority of the dominant language. Lima (1993) states that Cliff's decision to rely primarily on standard English and only superficially to employ Patios signals the primary audience for whom the novel is written (37). In fact, Cliff addresses the West and wants to present standard English disrupted and hybridized as a means of resistance.

Cliff's use of epigraphs includes Yoruban hymns of the Yoruba people of coastal West Africa, Victorian poetry, twentieth century poetry and prose, and Jamaican proverbs. They are placed into a transnational context, a combination of opposing elements that need reconciliation. The series implies the heroine's production of an identity that resists choosing to be only white and indicates how she struggles with coming to terms with her multiplicity as an African, Jamaican, English, American character.



Moreover, Cliff, in her epigraphs, focuses on the inclusion of women's voices. This appears in her reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of the most celebrated Victorian women poets. She changes the meaning of her Poem Aurora Leigh, a strategy that opposes the colonial ideology and makes Western culture appear impure and syncretized. The part of the poem included in Cliff's text describes a moment in which a child begs for emancipation from a mother in order to become a more independent person. In fact, Clare's migration to England represents an attempt to connect to the English-educated, white part of her identity. When she arrives in England, she realizes how oppressive it is to her and, like the child, wants to be free of the colonizers' influence. Instead of the original poem, the mother represents England and the colonizer. Also, she begins chapter IV with an extract from *Autre Saison*, a poem about a maroon woman written by the Caribbean writer Aime Cesaire. Besides, she opens chapter VIII with an excerpt from *Primitive Offensive*, by the Caribbean woman writer, Dionne Brand.

Cliff draws an epigraph from a descriptive passage in more scientific than poetic language of the Jamaican phenomenon "ruinate". The extract is taken from B. Floyd's *Jamaica: An Island's Microcosm*. Hornung (1998) mentions Cliff's definition of "ruination" as signifying "the disruption of cultivation by the uncontrollable forest"(96). Hence, ruinate is a metaphor of decolonization, where the natural landscape gets rid, step by step, of the marks of the imperial invasion. Finally, Cliff includes in the last chapter a Jamaican proverb "No one black dies a natural death" which suggests the fierceness of colonialism towards the ex-colonized people. It remains to say that though Cliff expresses a need for a syncretic identity through Clare's journey across the Caribbean, America and England and through her epigraphs; she also stresses a need for belonging to a specific place. It is Jamaica where she belongs even though she may leave it temporarily and go somewhere.

In addition to the epigraphs, *No Telephone to Heaven* refers to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Passing as white in England, the temptation to be like Jane is strong. The narrator says about her, "The fiction had tricked her. Drawn her in so that she became Jane" (NTH 116). This in fact, is her first response. Then comes her second response in favor of the Caribbean side. The narrator adds, "Then, with a sharpness, reprimanded herself. No, she told herself. No, she could not be Jane...English. No, my girl, try Bertha. Wild- maned Bertha...Yes, Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican...All Bertha. All Clare"(NTH 116). The words indicate that she is inclined to identify herself with the West Indian Bertha whose circumstances are similar to hers. Indeed, *Wide Sargasso Sea* encourages Clare and the West Indian reader to take as central what is marginal in *Jane Eyre*.



Furthermore, Cliff, through the technique of intertextuality presents her counter argument. This appears in her rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in an attempt to change this master text. Zabuz (1985) says, "The adaptation and reinterpretation of the earlier Old-World literature of colonization, as literature of decolonization is at its best superior in effectiveness to an anti-colonial argument. It constitutes one of the most forceful and convincing strategies of decolonization in literature"(49). Actually, works like *The Tempest*, *Jane Eyre*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Heart of Darkness* tackle the relationship of colonizer and colonized in oppositional terms. Thus, the postcolonial writer uses these literary works to fight his or her battle at the level of discourse and deconstruct the Western forms. What postcolonial writers and critics decide to do is a process of decentering that makes the central imperial texts seen as marginal or as Cartelli (1995) calls "merely historical prior, in the context of the successive rewritings"(82). This means that they will be prior only in date but not in value.

In her rewriting of *The Tempest*, Cliff identifies Shakespeare's Caliban with the West Indians. Cartelli (1995) indicates that Cliff has referred to *The Tempest* and remarked that Caliban's famous response to Prospero (the colonizer) is: "You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse" (84). Cliff (1990) indicates that Caliban's words in *The Tempest* along with Bertha's reaction in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* suggest the awakening of West Indians and their rejection of subjugation (264). Unlike Shakespeare's Miranda, Clare Savage refuses to use the advantage of white skin and privileged class in order to pass as white and deny the Caliban within her. Donaldson (1988) says that Cliff has Clare reject her role as a participant in a Prospero-Miranda racial complex by having her choose to become black (70).

Agosto (1999) clarifies that the fragmentation, flashbacks, and the absence of the linearity of plot, time and place, make Cliff's text challenge the standard forms that reflect the Western traditions. Furthermore, the novel begins from where it ends, foregrounding Clare's return to her place of origin. It opens with a group of guerilla soldiers and a much older Clare Savage among them, traveling through Jamaica. Toland (2004) indicates that it is to the point that the novel opens with a depiction of such a group of young revolutionaries, a scene that puts the narrative into a frame emphasizing Cliff's concept of home and her theme of resistance (43). Finally, Agosto (1999) sees that though classified as a novel, *No Telephone to Heaven* reads as autobiography, history and sometimes as poetry. She adds that all the previously mentioned characteristics of her technique may be labeled postmodernist but her Caribbean enthusiasm and revolutionary impulse distances her from that movement (14).

Conclusion and Discussion

Cliff (1990) sums up Clare's story of migration and return saying, "She is a light skinned female who has been removed from her homeland in a variety of ways and



whose life is a movement back, ragged, interrupted, uncertain, to that homeland. She is fragmented, damaged, incomplete...No Telephone to Heaven describe[s] her fragmentation as well as her movement toward homeland and wholeness" (265). It has been seen how Clare Savage has tried to synthesize and reconcile her African heritage with her European one. But she is hindered by the necessity to deny her black origin if she wants to embrace her white roots. Passing, as Cliff (1985) says, "demands...[a] ghost-life, [an] ignorance of connections"(22). In fact, violence, racism, and the distortion of Caribbean resistance make Clare's synthesis lean to her African maternal side.

The novel reveals Cliff's concept that connection to home means one's identity. Origin and identity are inseparable, each implies the other. Writing about ancestry is her strategy of rehoming: she rebuilds her identity through a dialogue between the past and the present. Agosto (1999) states that Cliff "makes the personal story collective by transforming it into historical narrative"(10). In addition to asserting that Jamaica is the land of resisting mothers, the place of origin seems essential to the author's definition of self: just as women provide the womb to the creation of human beings, land provides the nutrients and fertilization to all nature and its inhabitants. Cliff (1990) states that she understands the landscape of her island as female: "it is like a mother's womb, the source of our identity and who we become as human beings" (266). Clare is not only a child of her mother but also a child of Jamaica, the land of her mother. For Cliff, it makes sense that people put the female gender on the place where they grew up; she sees the feminization of land as important because the identities of people are rooted in the motherlands. Cliff's awareness of the importance of one's place of origin demands her choosing to fight for the empowerment of the Jamaican society. To find acceptance in society, Cliff writes about resistance and shows that female struggle is necessary in order that women may free themselves of patriarchal authority. Fanon (1968) describes this trend saying "Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all ...the motto 'look out for yourself'... is in this text forbidden" (74).

Accordingly, place of origin should be promoted and defended. It is the source of one's power in the face of the world's evolutions. The ex-colonized people have to entrench themselves in their communities with the help of their ancestral traditions. Ethnic and minority groups should maintain their identities and their sense of home without conflicting with the dominant culture. There should be no racial segregation, there should be an acceptance of the other. In this context, Spivak (1994), an Indian post-colonial theorist, criticizes those who ignore the cultural others, the subalterns. She speaks on behalf of the marginalized groups conveying the essence of their cultural attitudes and presenting a clear image of their identity to fight opposition (90-91). Also, Hooks (1989) applies this approach addressing the white academic reader on behalf of the subalterns. She says, "This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power...where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality is the space of



resistance. Enter that space... We greet you as liberators"(22).

Findings

Cliff participates in a tremendous literary revolution carried out by postcolonial writers and theorists. They attempt to counter the imperial ideology with its false notion of the "universal" which means that the Western views apply across time and place and are unchangeable. *No Telephone to Heaven* has reflected the racist idea that there is no place for Creoles on the Western lands. Back to history, it has to be said that colonialism was originally responsible for initiating Creoles' communities. The West ignores the fact that miscegenation was grounded a long time ago in the immoral acts of white planters with black women which Cliff names, "the rape of our grandmothers"(NTH). The question posed is why then those Creoles are lowered, and to the Western eye, appear as if trying to steal privileges from whites. Furthermore, Bhabha (1994), with his theory of Hybridity and Syncretism, deconstructs the binary oppositions of center/periphery, master/slave, and civilization/savagery. Hybridity is meant to exclude and attack the forms of purity inherent in imperial theories. Bhabha has tried to reveal the contradictions in Western views stressing the colonizer's ambivalence as regards his attitude towards the colonized other. He argues that hybridity destroys the narrative of colonial power and dominant culture: the fact that the West includes the pure white race and excludes all other races is deconstructed by the entry of the formerly excluded colonials into the imperial discourse (85). Post-colonial writers and theorists aim at informing the ex-colonizers how the world can move beyond the period of colonialism towards a place of mutual respect.

Complying with Cliff's concern with Creoles' existence and culture, the following picture should be traced. The article "People, Locations, Episodes"(n.d.) has mentioned that in the 1990 Southern US, precisely in southwest Louisiana, the preservation group, C.R.E.O.L.E., Inc. (Cultural Resourceful Educational Opportunities toward Linguistic Enrichment) began to publish Creole Magazine which contains articles by and about the region's creoles called Cajuns. They are descendants of early French and Spanish settlers in Louisiana and they basically come from Acadia in Canada. There is an interaction between those Cajuns and Creoles of African descent; they have influenced one another in music, foodways, religious practices, and other aspects of culture. Today this bond among Creoles nationwide gets stronger. The Creole Heritage Center is "committed to the challenge of correcting the wrongs and misconceptions associated with Creoles representing them in a true light. Their culture, rarely acknowledged in spite of its uniqueness, is worthy of preservation. Hence, the Center serves those who seek an understanding and appreciation of Creoles' heritage.

Further Research

For further research, handling works of other second-generation Caribbean writers is recommended. Doing research on Caryl Phillips, as an example, may help detect a



different concept in dealing with the problem of home and identity. Moreover, research dedicated to their predecessors like Jean Rhys and V.S. Naipaul traces the former perspectives and to what extent the younger generation has shifted in mood and changed in thought.

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