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Home and Abroad:
Identifications and Identities in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

Faculdade de Letras
Universidade de Minas Gerais
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Home and Abroad:
Identifications and Identities in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of “Mestre em
Literaturas de Expressão Inglesa”

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ABSTRACT

This work analyzes Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) with a view to investigating the growing awareness of the pluralistic identity formations of the main character, Clare Savage. The character's growing perception of her selfhood and her heritage leads her back to her home country, Jamaica. As a consequence, this decision also paves the way for her process of identification with her African matrilineal legacy. In the attempt to reconstruct Clare's notions of what home means and how this concept is intertwined with her discovery of her personal and family histories, Cliff uses historical data to reconstruct a fictional text. To better understand how the discussion of home and identity construction is juxtaposed in *No Telephone to Heaven*, I also mention some parts of the novel *Abeng* (1984), the work in which Cliff first presents Clare and her family. In order to support my discussion, I refer to some other female characters such as, Kitty, Clare's mother; Miss Mattie, Clare's grandmother; and the transvestite Harry/Harriet. They play a meaningful role in Clare's quest to better situate herself in the midst of many cultural heritages that comprise her identity formation. Through Clare's journeys—which in the novel are not displayed in a chronological order—to the USA, England and then back to Jamaica, Cliff tries to build a narrative of resistance (Moynagh 114) in which she criticizes the social, political and racial predicaments of Jamaican society. Along the narrative, Cliff also attempts to bring to light the injustices of the slave trade and its legacy of anguish and suffering in a once colonized Jamaica. Through issues related to race, ethnicity, gender identification and political confrontation, the author manages to give voice to historically marginalized groups in Jamaica. By doing so, Cliff creates a narrative that highlights the need to revise and revisit history through multiple perspectives and interpretations.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho analisa o romance *No Telephone to Heaven* de Michelle Cliff com o objetivo de investigar como a personagem principal, Clare Savage, desenvolve paulatinamente uma aguda percepção de sua múltipla personalidade. Esse processo de autoconhecimento experimentado por Clare a conduz de volta a sua terra natal, Jamaica. Conseqüentemente, esta decisão também a leva a se identificar com o legado Africano de sua mãe. Na tentativa de reconstruir as noções da personagem principal sobre o sentido do vocábulo *lar* e como essas noções estão interligadas com a descoberta da sua trajetória pessoal e familiar, Cliff emprega dados históricos para reconstruir essa narrativa ficcional. Para melhor compreender a problemática da interpretação da expressão *lar* e a construção da identidade da Clare, discuto partes do romance *Abeng*. Com o intuito de dar suporte à minha discussão, faço referências a algumas personagens femininas como Kitty, senhora Mattie, e o travesti Harry/Harriet. No romance, cuja narrativa não segue uma ordem cronológica, Cliff tenta construir uma literatura de resistência contra o regime imperial que governa a Jamaica (Moynagh 114). Cliff também realça as injustiças do comércio de escravos e o subseqüente legado de agonia e sofrimento deixado em uma Jamaica anteriormente colonizada. Através de questões relacionadas à raça, etnia, gênero e confrontos políticos, a autora dá voz a grupos historicamente marginalizados nesse país. Dessa forma, Cliff cria uma narrativa na qual destaca a necessidade de revisar e revisitar a história através de múltiplas perspectivas e interpretações.

INTRODUCTION

A Triple Heritage of Journeying

When I think of home

When I think of 'home' I think of cherry pies
When I think of 'home' I think of mulberry trees
When I think of 'home' I think of butterflies
When I think of 'home' I think of bumble bees

When I think of 'home' I think of hummingbirds
When I think of 'home' I think of sun brewed tea
When I think of 'home' I think of morning walks
When I think of 'home' I think of Grandma and me

When I think of 'home' I think of hidden trails
When I think of 'home' I think of lullabies
When I think of 'home' I think of signs of spring
When I think of 'home' I think of pumpkin pies

When I think of 'home' I think of bedtime stories
When I think of 'home' I think of honeysuckle
When I think of 'home' I think of roses blooming
When I think of 'home' I can't help but chuckle

Because when I think of 'home' I think Heaven
When I think of 'home' I think of all that's kind
When I think of 'home' I think of dancing
When I think of 'home' Grandma comes to mind

Catlin L. Crawford

Michelle Cliff is an Afro-Caribbean writer who was born in Jamaica in November 1946, when her country was still under British rule. When she was only three years old her family decided to move to the USA but while living there, she frequently went back to Jamaica. In 1969 she got her Bachelor's degree at Wagner College in New York, in 1974 she got her Master's degree in Philosophy and, later on, she went to London to finish her Ph.D. on Italian Renaissance at Warburg Institution. Cliff is a light-skinned daughter of both dark and light-skinned parents and she has experienced the emotional, social and cultural complexities for having lived in continuous geographical movement in Jamaica, in the USA and in England.

Cliff often writes about Jamaica, her homeland, and the devastating emotional and historical consequences caused by the British colonialism on the island and its people. As in the poem quoted above, in her writings, Cliff usually points out the strong quest for the homeland that is connected to an understanding and revisioning of the African past and heritage brought to Jamaica by the slaves during colonization and the slave trade. Another common theme in her work is the exploration of the racial and ethnic aspects. Cliff's characters are often forced to face prejudice and look for a way of positioning themselves within the system of power relations and color identification that is very strong in Jamaica. Cliff is the author of several novels, including *Abeng* (1984), a narrative in which she first presents the character of Clare Savage and Clare Savage's family; *If I Could Write this in Fire* (2008); *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant* (2004); *The Land of Look Behind: Prose and Poetry* (1985); *Everything is Now: New and Collected Stories* (2009); *Bodies of Water* (1995); *The Store of a Million Items* (1998). She also writes poetry as in the publication of *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980), and she also writes essays that have been published in many anthologies.

The novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), which is the focus of this thesis, is often considered to be an autobiographical work in which Cliff shows her strong criticism towards colonialism through a rewriting of her people's history and, consequently, a recovering of their filiations, which is also hers. In this sense, *No Telephone to Heaven* can be analyzed as a text in the context of post-colonial literature. According to Boehmer, the term post-colonial literature refers to "a literature which identified itself with the broad movement of resistance to, and transformation of, colonial societies" (184). In this regard, *No Telephone to Heaven* fits her definition as this novel is related to an attempt to offer resistance against the authoritarian ruling

regime in Jamaica. Buell also mentions that postcolonial narrative “have plots which are based on history” (195). Both *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Abeng* are novels that rescue the historical facts that surround the construction of the Caribbean region and question the consequences of colonialism for their present situation.

To present my analyses of Clare, I will, many times, refer to the novel *Abeng*. This novel presents Clare as a young twelve-year-old girl. As Toland-Dix states, “[i]n both novels, Cliff combines fiction, history, and autobiography in the third person to recount Clare’s quest for a place of belonging” (38). The narrative voice, in *Abeng*, presents many aspects of Clare’s life that I believe are essential to mention to have a better understanding of Clare’s emotional and physical complexities presented in the novel I will focus on primarily, *No Telephone to Heaven*.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the physical and psychological traces left by the colonizer in a post-colonial nation such as Jamaica are described through the struggles of the main characters, Kitty, Clare Savage and also the transvestite Harry/Harriet. In my dissertation I will focus specifically on Clare and the process she goes through to become more aware of her identity formation and the several cultural influences she has inherited. This process of self-consciousness leads her to a reconnection with her homeland, Jamaica in this novel, and consequently to her maternal ancestry.

Clare’s quest for the homeland/(mother)land and the growing consciousness of the construction of her identity rotate around three elements: the complexities of racial and ethnic inequality, which she experiences in Jamaica, in the USA and in Britain; her choice to identify herself with her mother and her matrilineal heritage; and the question of her political identification with members of an underprivileged social class through her involvement with the guerrilla movement she decides to join. Clare’s decision to join the members of this group brings some consequences to the narrative and to Clare’s

attempt to leave behind her feelings of being in that in-between situation that is highlighted throughout the narrative.

Although Clare is the central focus of my analyses I will discuss other characters such as Harry/Harriet, Kitty and Boy (Clare's parents), and Miss Mattie (Clare's grandmother) to offer support for the development of my thesis and provide the necessary background knowledge to understand Clare's life, choices and affiliations. Boy, Clare's father, is light-skinned and, Kitty, her mother, is dark-skinned as well as Jennie, their younger daughter, and Clare's only sister. Boy and Kitty are representative of two clashing worlds: the European tradition and the African past. Within this environment in which several cultural traits coexist and collide, Clare faces difficulties in sorting out the maternal and paternal cultural influences she inherits. Clare starts to see how strikingly her parents' cultural legacy influences her since the beginning of *Abeng*.

In *Abeng*, the narrative voice displays to the reader but not to Clare the two versions of the official and unofficial histories of the Caribbean region. The official history is the one that is influenced by the imperial European tradition. This official history is transmitted and felt in the lives of those who live in the once colonized Jamaica. The unofficial one, according to the narrative voice, is the one that shows the suffering aspects of the slave trade and the subsequent anguish and grief felt by their descendants in Jamaica in special. However, the unofficial history is not told to the Jamaican people, especially to the students. In this novel, the narrative voice depicts a Clare that is completely unaware of the hidden aspects of the Jamaican history and also of part of her family history in this country. The reader is made aware that Clare has acquired knowledge of the unofficial history in *No Telephone to Heaven*, during an interview she has with the leader of the guerrilla movement she decides to connect with.

Clare's story of personal dislocation starts since her very birthday. Her family, that only in the first parts of *No Telephone to Heaven* live in Jamaica, is forced, by the father, Boy, to leave Jamaica behind and head to the USA in search of a better life. As Kitty feels displaced throughout their stay in the USA, she decides to head back to Jamaica, which is the place she identifies as her homeland, taking along Clare's younger and dark-skinned sister Jennie, who disappears from the narrative the moment both of them arrive in Jamaica.

Clare, who has the father's light skin color, stays in the USA with her father and struggles to come to terms with her sense of belonging and eventually heads towards a self-journey back to the unveiling of her story, of her sense of home. Clare, who is left behind in the USA, continues to occupy that "in-between" space and gap derived from the clashes between two totally different cultures and histories, the European and the "native" one from Jamaica. Clare is, in fact, the product of two different processes of dislocation. The one from the slaves who came from Africa to the Caribbean – the African Diaspora - and the one related to the continuous dislocation of Europeans to Jamaica, which is represented by her father. These dislocations have brought along the complexities of power, social and cultural relations connected with the question of ethnicity and race which is presented in *No Telephone to Heaven*. This history of migration and dislocation brings along a quest for a sense of belonging, a need to relocate oneself in the midst of so much cultural diversity and an attempt to reconstruct a sense of selfhood that has been lost in time.

Clare is a crossbred character and a descendent of the African diaspora, and in her journeys to the USA, England and also back to Jamaica, she goes through a process of constant unfolding of history, her mother's ancestors' history, which is also hers, and with which she decides to identify. In that sense, Clare also becomes aware of her

“Caribbeaness” as she distances herself from her homeland. By the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, the connection established with her homeland leads her to a continuous understanding and discovery of a personal meaning. As a consequence, these discoveries lead Clare to a reconnection with her mother and her maternal ancestry.

As the narrative progresses, Clare’s consciousness of her crossbred physical and cultural traits becomes even more noticeable. As the narrative voice states, Clare “is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveler. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer” (91). She experiences an ever-present feeling of being in turmoil when she comes to think about the several cultural influences she carries.

No Telephone to Heaven is a novel in which the narrative is not presented in a chronological order. The scenes are presented as if the novel were a mosaic. In his analysis of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Buell comments on the structure of this novel by saying that: “The hybrid form of the novel—it is one-third North American immigrant literature, one-third British bildungsroman, and one-third nativist lyric of attempted return to roots—mirrors a hybrid Jamaica set in a hybrid (and hybridizing) world” (102). In this light, all the passages presented come to make sense when we get to the end of this novel and are able to put together all the stories that structure the plot of this narrative.

Although the novel *No Telephone to Heaven* depicts a narrative of resistance and social and political transformation, the narrative voice seems to stress that the attempt, by the guerrilla members, to subvert the ruling government and eventually change the social and political structures in Jamaica society, seems to be doomed to fail since the very beginning of their enterprise.

In order to provide a reading of *No Telephone to Heaven*, with a view to discuss the process of awareness Clare goes through, I structure my discussion into three chapters.

The first chapter is entitled “Racial and Ethnic Allegiances: Social Context as a Means of Identification.” In this part I discuss how Clare’s growing perception of her racial and ethnic awareness change depending on how she sees herself in different social contexts, and how she is seen by others in different societies as well. In this part I will stress her wanderings around the USA, England and also when she is back in Jamaica. As the narrative voice states, in Jamaica “everyone is Black, it’s just that some are blacker than others...It’s a question of degree...from ace of spades to white cockroach” (153). By admitting the “blackness” of Jamaican people, Clare is also acknowledging her black ancestry which is an inherent part of her mother’s family. Along the narrative, she develops her perception on how, racially and ethnically speaking, she is close to her mother, as Gifford states: “In leaning toward her mother’s worldview, Clare develops something like a racial consciousness” (102). The system of color identification and stratification in Jamaica is very visible in *No Telephone to Heaven* and Clare sees herself racially and ethnically in different ways, according to the spaces and social contexts she occupies. Gifford, analyzing Clare in both novels, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, states that “[o]nce Clare acknowledges that African and European blood can flow in her veins simultaneously she can recognize and accept her pluralistic vantage point” (101). This complex situation of having mixed blood and heritage becomes visible when Clare journeys to the USA and to England. She sees herself split into two worlds but she chooses to side with her maternal African ancestry.

The second chapter is entitled “Gendered Context: Renegotiating Identities Issues through the Maternal Bloodline.” In this part of my discussion I focus on how

Clare's growing consciousness about her personal and family background leads her to identify with her maternal bloodline. In this part, the female characters – Kitty, Miss Mattie and also the transvestite character Harry/Harriet - play a strong influence on Clare's choices and decisions. Clare chooses to identify with the life and memories of her maternal African past and cultural heritage which has a strong impact on the construction of her identity and this connection brings to the narrative also the question of gender identification.

Kitty, Miss Mattie and the transvestite Harry/Harriet are the ones who raise in Clare a hopefully ever-lasting connection with their homeland. Clare's lack of cultural and historical identification is what, in addition, causes her to start fighting for her own past in order to (re)construct her self-image, feelings and identity. Reaching this level of self-consciousness may provide her with more tools to reconsider her position in and affiliation to the society she eventually becomes part of.

In this chapter I discuss how Harry/Harriet's role is essential to help Clare in her search for her self-consciousness and a better understanding of who she is. Harry/Harriet does not travel around as Clare, but "stays put." As a boy, he/she is sexually abused by an officer but this fact, according to him/her, does not play any influence on his/her sexual orientation as he/she tells Clare: "No darling, I was born this way, that I know. Not just sun, but sun and moon" (128). Although Harry/Harriet is biologically a man, from now on I am going to refer to this character as "she" and "Harriet" (her female name). I will do it because, along the narrative, Harriet favors her feminine self over her masculine one and decides to be called Harriet instead of Harry. When she makes this decision, the narrative voice starts to address this character by using the personal pronoun she instead of he/she.

In the third chapter, entitled “Home: A Quest for Relocation and Identification,” I discuss Clare’s decision to join the guerrilla group. The members of this group belong to a social class which is different from the one Clare, in Jamaica, belongs to. In her homeland, Jamaica, Clare is not part of the underprivileged and neglected social class she comes to defend. She joins this group and tries to fight the ruling regime in order to subvert it and achieve a more egalitarian society.

In this chapter, I discuss how Clare’s decision of joining a guerrilla movement may translate how she understands her cultural identity and heritage. When Clare comes back to Jamaica, she starts teaching kids and in this interest, I believe that it is through the acquisition of a better education that she hopes to develop and perpetuate, among the children who represent the new generation, a better understanding of their cultural heritage. By doing so, I discuss how she intends to minimize their loss of cultural identification, as well as hers, so that they are able to evolve and perpetuate themselves as a group. Boyce Davies emphasizes the lack of cultural identification felt by Caribbean people and their need to reconnect to a home lost back in time: “Because we were/are products of separations and dislocations and dismembering, people of African descent in the Americas historically have sought reconnection” (17). This process of reconnection leads, consequently, to a process of self-definition and self-assessment.

The recovering of a cultural identity rescues a desire for the rewriting of home. According to George, “[t]he discourses that construct ‘home’ in the contexts of colonialism and postcolonialism suggest that ultimately both affiliations and filiations are learned, created, recalled and/or forgotten in everyday history” (17). This is what happens with Clare as she learns how to create and understand her personal history and the history of her home country. The construction, in the narrative, of what home means, goes along with the narrative of the construction of the character’s identity.

As a final point, I try to show that the topics of race and ethnicity developed in the first chapter; the question of gender identification discussed in the second; and the question of political affiliation favoring the underprivileged social class in Jamaica developed in the last one are all juxtaposed with a discussion related to a better understanding of the concept of home and also with the question of the characters' identity formation.

Chapter 1

Racial and Ethnic Allegiances: Social Context as a Means of Identification.

Enslaved

Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,
 For weary centuries despised, oppressed,
 Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
 In the great life line of the Christian West;
 And in the Black Land disinherited,
 Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,
 My heart grows sick with hate, becomes as lead,
 For this my race that has no home on earth.
 Then from the dark depths of my soul I cry
 To the avenging angel to consume
 The white man's world of wonders utterly:
 Let it be swallowed up in earth's vast womb,
 Or upward roll as sacrificial smoke
 To liberate my people from its yoke!

Claude Mckay

Michelle Cliff's narrative often brings together both fictional and non-fictional elements and her writing tends to focus on her homeland, Jamaica. Cliff has a great interest in historical events and it is through fictionalizing history, combined with her personal story, that she presents her main character, Clare Savage, in the novel *No Telephone to Heaven*. As Almeida says, "Michelle Cliff's fictional works focus primarily on the displaced experiences of female characters in a movement that mirrors much of her own life-story" ("Transcultural Fictions" 170). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff explores the damages colonization has inflicted on those who lived or are still living in countries that used to be colonies, such as Jamaica, one of the places in which

the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven* happens. Cliff also discusses the distress caused to societies that were once under colonial hegemonic power.

Because of the process of colonization that triggered the encounter between the European white civilization, with their power to subjugate and control the indigenous peoples, and the African diaspora in the Caribbean area, this place has suffered the influence of several cultural and social traits. These traits have contributed to make the Caribbean a mixture of different peoples and ideas populating this piece of land in Central America. The outcome of this encounter of different civilizations has had the power to affect the way people behave and also how they think about themselves in the societies in which they live. Clare, the central character in *No Telephone to Heaven*, embodies tensions and contradictions that are the results, among other reasons, of the encounter of these different cultural and social forces in Jamaica. In order to show the complexities of the question related to where one belongs to in post-colonial Jamaica, Cliff portrays Clare as a character who, along the narrative, engages in a search for her self, a search for a better understanding of who she is. This search involves also a better understanding of how her self and her identity have been constituted in time. In her attempt to unveil the history of her family and her people, she also discovers the plurality of cultural influences she has inherited.

The construction of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven* resembles a patchwork in which several pieces are sewed together. The in-between spaces surrounding the composition of this narrative represent the site for the formation of new relations and new alliances for the construction of Clare's growing perception of her identity.

The quest for a place to be called home is a central issue in Clare's journeys, who undergoes a process of displacement, moving to the USA, England and then back

to Jamaica. She does so in order to understand who she is and also with whom she desires to identify. This act of crossing boundaries leads Clare to experience deep changes throughout the narrative. Clare's growing perception of how her racial and ethnic identity signifies differently in each space she occupies leads her back to Jamaica, her motherland, and helps her to identify with her mother's people and her African heritage.

Clare, like so many Jamaicans, can be seen as the result of two major geopolitical dislocations to the Caribbean area: the European migration to the West Indies and also the African migration as a result of slave trade. Clare is the light-skinned daughter of Boy Savage and Kitty Freeman. Boy is light-skinned and identifies himself with the white European culture and its ruling regime, and along the narrative he makes sure to stress that his ancestors come from England. On the other hand, Kitty is dark-skinned and her ancestry is linked to the history of the African slaves. Clare shows, physically, the traces of this miscegenation as it is stated: "Kitty's mother was both Black and white, and her father's origins were unknown-but both had brown skin and a wave to their hair" (*Abeng* 54). Therefore, since the beginning of the narrative, Clare is portrayed as a person who has to learn to live with a history of loss of identity and with a feeling of displacement for having to inhabit an in-between world.

The omnipresent influence of the British Empire, something Clare and Harriet fight against in *No Telephone to Heaven*, is first presented in the very beginning of the narrative in *Abeng*. In this novel, the narrative voice stresses how the power of the British queen is spread all over Jamaica: "The portrait of the white queen hung in banks, department stores, grocery stores, schools, government buildings, and homes-from countryside shanties to the split-levels on the hills above Kingston Harbor" (5). The queen's portrait is supposed to represent power and the need for obedience and as it is

spread all over Jamaica, from the lower class up to the higher one, it turns out to be almost impossible to move away from its symbolic gaze and meaning. As Gifford states, “the Queen’s whiteness is a haunting presence for all dark-skinned islanders by exuding control over many social spaces with the help of its mostly white administrators and through manipulation of the people by means of falsehood and patronizing” (41). The pictures of the Queen hanging everywhere around Jamaica, symbolizes the omnipresence of the white power over the local population. Although the queen does not travel around the colonies to impose obedience and respect, she has her constant gaze symbolically set upon the population and with so, her image seems to influence and manipulate people’s attitudes.

The development of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven* revolves around Clare’s character, who, since her birth, is deeply marked by the multiple influences that derive from her journey around Jamaica, the USA and England. Savage, a word which refers to uncivilized people and behaviors, is also Clare’s family name, which is highly symbolic in the context of *No Telephone to Heaven*. In this novel, the word “savage” is not related to the romantic myth of the “noble savage,” since this concept depicts the idea that human beings are essentially pure, cast and honest without the bounds of civilization. This connotation seems to be unrealistic and does not fit the reading of *No Telephone to Heaven*. The connotation the word savage carries in the novel is the one related to the bloodthirsty, violent, irrational and brutal nature of the savage. Along the narrative, in every single passage, the narrative voice makes clear that the people from the colonies, in this case Jamaica, are seen as if they were inferior and uncivilized, as if they were “savages.” There is a passage, among many others, in which this idea becomes clear. It happens when Clare is taken, by her father, to be enrolled in an American school and the principal of this school makes a distinction between children

who come from the colonies and the American ones: “Children from underdeveloped countries develop at a different rate than American children” (98).

In an attempt to leave behind their supposedly “inferior” African heritage, Boy makes sure to highlight their Englishness and good manners that he believes come from the European tradition. As a result, he teaches Clare to identify only with one side of her heritage, that is, to identify her country, Jamaica, as a mere slave society and to favor England as the mother country. Consequently, since early childhood, Clare is led to see herself as a member of a country that occupies a subordinate position in relation to England or the USA, the place to which they immigrate later.

Jamaica, both in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, is described as carrying this negative connotation, as we can see in the following quote:

England was their mother country. *Everyone* there was white, her teachers told her. Jamaica was the ‘prizest’ possession of the Crown, she had read in her history book. And she had been told that there was a special bond between this still-wild island and that perfect place across the sea. (*Abeng* 36)

Here, the narrative voice comments, in an ironic tone, how they were taught to see Jamaica as inferior and England as the perfect idyllic place. Consequently, the meaningfulness of being white and powerful is made noticeable since Clare’s early life. England is shown as a distant place, not only geographically speaking, but also socially and culturally. Clare’s teachers, at school and also at university, make sure to highlight the border that traces a clear-cut division between the people from “there,” England, from the ones from “here,” Jamaica. Yet, for Clare, this line is not so clear-cut because she carries in her soul, and also shows in her appearance, the blending of the Caribbean, the African and European cultures.

The issue of race and ethnicity becomes significant to analyze how power relations take place within this narrative. There are several situations in which Clare is faced with prejudice, therefore considering herself, and being considered by others, as an outsider because of the multiple influences she carries. This multiplicity of influences, of which Clare slowly becomes aware, comes also from the historical formation of the Caribbean region. This place has been deeply characterized by the plurality of its cultural heritages. The Caribbean region has suffered the influence of many cultures such as French, English, Spanish and Dutch that have brought along their different languages and customs.

In “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diasporas Studies,” Braziel and Mannur mention Stuart Hall’s ideas about the formation of the Caribbean region and the plurality of the influences it receives:

For Hall, the Caribbean is triply traversed by a *Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne*, and a *Présence Américaine*, as well as the multiple cultural striations of Indian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern influences and the erased presences (through decimation and genocide) of the Arawak, the Carib, and other indigenous Amedindians. (8)

I believe this definition fits into the trajectory Clare goes through. She is involved in a process in which she tries to decipher where she belongs. She tries to trace a better knowledge of her ancestry. Yet, in her quest, she constantly finds herself trapped in her split world, divided by the memories of her past and in conflict regarding her racial alliances, as her skin color does not clearly show her African heritage.

The characteristic of Jamaica as being a fragmented society, which is culturally multi-faceted, can be traced back in time. According to Chaliand and Rageau, the slave

owners took good care of mixing up the slaves, who came from different tribes, races and ethnicities so that any sign of upheaval could be diminished. They state:

But the blacks taken from Africa were not a people, a homogeneous population, unlike other groups that form a diaspora, which have more in common than their misfortune and the color of their skin. They came from tribes with different languages and traditions, whom the slavers generally took care to mix up, to reduce the group cohesion of their cargo. (xiv)

This breaking down of the group cohesion among the black population can be seen as one of the factors that made possible the subjugation and exploitation of the black, African population by the European colonialism and imperialism. As part of the Savage family is linked to the African diaspora, they end up embodying the complexities of self-representation that is visible in the social and historical context in Jamaica.

To better understand the question of self-representation for the Savage family, it is necessary to trace back Boy's ancestry so that we become aware of the complexities between the English and African traits for these family members. The narrative voice in *Abeng* tells the reader when and why Boy's ancestor, who is from England, comes to live in Jamaica: "His great-grandfather had been sent to the island by the Crown in 1829, to be a puisne (pronounced puny) justice in the parish of St. Ann on the North Coast" (22). Once in the island, Boy's family becomes the owners of huge sugar plantations and one of the richest families there. Yet, the family loses all their properties and Boy's grandfather starts to live "by selling off the property piece by piece" (*Abeng* 31). Therefore, when Boy is born, his family does not possess good financial means any longer. However, the Savages seem to consider themselves quite apart and superior from those other people living in Jamaica:

The Savages were possessed of an arrogance which seem to grow in relation to their losses – no longer threatening, when they became poor, their arrogance became to some, pathetic – like a man panhandling in an evening suit. (*Abeng* 29)

Although they are not a wealthy family anymore, the Savages persist on drawing a line between them and the others in Jamaica.

The narrative voice in *Abeng* says that Boy's mother, Caroline, dies young and that he inherits his mother's physical appearance: "He had inherited his mother's beauty – black, almost blue, hair. Curly hair. And green-green eyes. He had a large, distinguished nose, the mark of the iceman" (42). The word "iceman" brings up images of whiteness, and his nose being described as distinguished evokes a sense of superiority. Although Boy considers himself more English than Jamaican, his physical constitution shows that he has also inherited a crossbred physical appearance. The narrative voice also mentions the origin of Boy's name by saying that his first name is James and that his middle name is Arthur but that:

in the family and among friends he kept from school he was called 'Boy', sometimes Boy-Boy, a common enough nickname among a certain class of Jamaicans, an imitation of England, like so many aspects of their lives. (*Abeng* 22)

It happens that Boy, throughout the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven*, shows a clear-cut tendency to highlight his "Englishness" and hide away the African influence that he tries to convince himself that only his wife brings to the family.

When adult, Boy decides to run away from Jamaica, to the USA, because of his "bad debts and racetrack losses, misfortunes" (54) and also because he wants to leave behind the "bad blood" (54) of his wife's family. When he is in the USA, with his

family, Boy is faced with the rigid American race system. This fact is visible when he tries to book an apartment in a motel in Georgia and the motel keeper tells him: “Niggers! He made a horrible harsh sound. Because if you’re niggers you ain’t welcome. It ain’t legal” (55). The rigid American system of power relations, regarding one’s race, becomes visible right at the beginning of their stay in the USA. From this moment on, Boy engages himself in trying to hide and camouflage himself and his family, feeling “[g]lad that the black car with his slightly darker wife and mango and guava daughters was parked out of sight” (55).

The race system in the United States is represented by several different terminologies. Most commonly, people who are not officially considered white are often mixed together within the racialized group of people. The category to establish if one is black or not varies greatly as well. According to Charles Mills, some of these categories could be regarded as “bodily appearance, ancestry, self-awareness of ancestry, public awareness of ancestry, culture, experience, and self-identification” (50). This process of categorizing people into races has also served the purpose of colonialism in its attempt to conquer and keep the population of the colonies under its power and will. Mills observes that “the motivation for using the one-drop rule to determine black racial membership is to maintain the subordination of the products of ‘miscegenation’” (48). But, how is one considered black in the United States? To answer this question, James Davis analyzes how one can be regarded as black within the boundaries of the United States. He states that the answer to this question has long been that “a black is any person with *any* known African black ancestry” (5). He also says that “in the South it became known as the ‘one-drop rule,’ meaning that a single drop of ‘black blood’ makes a person a black” (5).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Boy is also affected by this inclination to catalog people into races. He learns it with the Jesuits from an early age as we can see it when he is talking to this motel keeper: “These Aristotelian categories taught by a Jesuit determined they should know where they were—and fortunate at that” (56). When Boy is checking into this motel and the motel keeper accuses him of being a “nigger,” he transports himself to a lesson he was given about the history of Jamaica, as the narrative voice tells the reader: “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” (56). Boy keeps trying to locate himself in the miscellaneous taxonomies used to classify people in racial terms. Boy also says that “in the Spanish colonies there were 128 categories to be mentioned” (56). Because of his focus on his European ancestry, Boy develops this tendency to classify people according to races. These taxonomies Boy remembers to have been taught at school establish a clear-cut border between those who are the colonizers and those who are the sons of miscegenation.

Race is regarded as a slippery term and it is impossible to provide a concise and precise description to it. However, to analyze the character of Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, I will make use of the definition of race stated by Cornell and Hartmann in *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, in which they state that race is “a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent. A race is a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics” (24). This definition shares similarities with the definition of race proposed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, who state that race “is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups” (198). Therefore, most critics seem to

agree that the term race is mostly related to a way of categorizing and dividing people through an association with their physical description. This description of the term race makes Clare's self-positioning a complex matter because she has, in terms of skin color, inherited Boy's lighter complexion, but she ends up identifying with her maternal African world and culture.

To analyze the term race, it is important to highlight that it is a very debatable topic which has changed its meaning over the years. Racial theories have varied since the term race has been used to categorize and distinguish people from different societies, tribes and countries. In "The Meaning of 'Race' and 'Ethnicity'," Peter Wade provides us with an analysis about the changing approaches to race. He says that the use of this term, in the European languages, dates back from the sixteenth century, a fact that is also stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

'Race' is first used in the English language in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar, and through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it remained essentially a literary word denoting a class of persons or things. It was only in the late eighteenth century that the term came to mean a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent. (Wade 199)

In his article, Wade analyzes how people have used this term since the nineteenth century. He refers to Michael Banton for whom, the word "lineage" is central to understand how the term race is used until the 1800. For Banton, lineage means "a stock of descendants linked to a common ancestor; such a group of people shared a certain ancestry which might give them more or less common qualities" (6). Wade states that, according to this understanding, one's appearance plays a less meaningful role to categorize people into groups.

To illustrate his idea, Wade refers to the Bible, giving us the example of Abraham's descendants. He refers to Moses, who had two wives. One of them "was a Midianite (descendant of Midian, a son of Abraham); the other was a black Ethiopian woman. All the sons of Moses by these two women would be of 'his race', whatever their appearance" (7). He also states that, according to Banton, the discrimination and inferiority of people because of their race was not so visible between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Yet, Wade shows us that there was a twist in the concept of the term race in the nineteenth century. Under the new approach to race,

everyone (or thing) that was alike in nature and appearance was thought to have descended from a common ancestor. Moses' sons, in this view, would not belong to the stock and race of Abraham: some would be considered to belong to the black race, while others might be mixed race, Semites or perhaps Caucasians. (10)

Then, Wade moves on to give us an idea of how the term race was seen in the twentieth century. According to him, this century witnessed the height of eugenics which influenced the Nazi policy in the 1930s, but he also says that this tendency started to loose ground in many places during this time. The twentieth century was also the time for Darwin's theories of evolution that affirms that racial types should not be considered permanent, but rather in a process of constant change. The social context, within this panorama, was also varied. There was the development of imperialism; the strong racial segregation in the USA; the rise of the women's movement and also the black civil rights movement in the USA. According to Wade, in the middle of all these movements, there were the declarations, by UNESCO, about race stating that "humans

were fundamentally the same and that differences of appearance were just that and did not indicate essential differences in, say, intellect” (13).

Wade concludes by saying that the “natural sciences and the vast majority of social scientists agree that races are *social constructions*” (13). It is a construction that has, historically speaking, served enormously for the development of the European colonization and imperialism throughout the world. This idea is also shared by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin who state that:

Race is particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism, because the division of human society in this way is inextricable from the need of colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject peoples and hence justify the imperial enterprise. Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetus to draw a **binary** distinction between “civilized” and “primitive” and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types. (198)

In this interest, the concept of race, since the nineteenth century, has served the purpose of subjugating and dominating those considered “inferior” sons of miscegenation in many of the European colonies. The phenotypical taxonomies have served to shape the European colonial encounters with others (Wade 15). As a consequence, power relations in the USA are strongly influenced and constructed alongside racial and ethnic lines.

In the USA, which becomes the adopted country for Clare and her family for a while, power relations are constantly felt to be tense and apprehensive, mainly for Clare and her mother, who feel as if they were outsiders and invaders in this adopted society. Kitty constantly feels that she is not part of this society and that because she is a dark-skinned Jamaican she would never be accepted. She carries an accent that most of the

time unsettles people around as Mr. B., the owner of the laundry where she finds a job, tells her: “By now people are used to certain sounds...it confuses them when there are new ones...especially from exotic places...you know what I mean...” (74). Feeling segregated and distant from her husband who “had no visible problem with declaring himself white” (62) and also from the American society, Kitty decides to head back to Jamaica, which, according to her, would always be “[h]er point of reference—the place which explained the world to her—would always be her island” (66).

From the moment Kitty decides to fly back to Jamaica, taking along Jennie, her darker-skinned daughter, Clare is left under the care of her father who introduces her into the art of camouflage: “Through all this—this new life—he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage” (100). Clare feels she has been left adrift, motherless, lacking a support for reference and guidance.

This feeling of abandonment is visible not only in the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven* but also in *Abeng*. As Clare is born light-skinned, Kitty feels she should hand her to Boy, hoping that he could better look after their “white” daughter, as the narrative voice in *Abeng* shows the reader: “she had been handed over to Boy the day she was born” (128). Being in the USA, feeling abandoned, again, by her mother, she becomes more conscious of the meaningfulness of one’s race, appearance and origin.

The significance of one’s race becomes more noticeable as the narrative voice, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, presents us with a passage in which Clare is taken, by her father, to be enrolled into a high school. The principal of this school asks Boy to fill out a form and when he expects to be asked about name, address or telephone number, he is actually questioned about Clare’s race. In reply to the principal’s inquiry and in a way to reassure their whiteness and consequently the privileges Boy is sure comes with this

identification, he states: “White... of course” (98). Not convinced, the principal dismisses his attempt to blend into the “white world” by saying that instead of white they would be called “white chocolate” (99) and that within the system there is “[n]o place for in-betweens” (99).

According to Charles Mills, the manner in which the categorization of race is viewed varies according to how meaningful this issue is for the country in analysis, as he states: “Many of those categorized as blacks in the United States would be categorized as browns/mulattoes or even whites in the Caribbean and Latin America” (46). Clare falls exactly into this category. As Gifford affirms, “Clare mostly keeps her feelings about possessing a mixed identity and belonging to a mixed society to herself” (16). She is considered white in the social context in Jamaica but in the United States, she is not pale enough to pass as one. In relation to the meaningfulness of this issue related to race in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Toland-Dix states that:

Through depicting Clare’s migrations from Jamaica to the United States to England through Europe and back to Jamaica, Cliff emphasizes both how fluid racial categories can be for a biracial person like Clare, and at the same time, how deadly serious they are. (38-39)

This in-between situation Clare experiences fits into Orlando Patterson’s analyses of the social context in Jamaica and how it influences one’s ethnic identity. In “Context and Choice in Ethnic Allegiance: A Theoretical Framework and Caribbean Case Study,” Patterson provides an analyses of how one sees oneself and is seen differently by others according to the place(s) one occupies. Patterson presents a case study of a Jamaican who works in the USA most part of the year but who also, every year, travels back to Jamaica. According to Patterson, this Jamaican is part of a minority

ethnic group in the USA. But, back in Jamaica, which is his home country, he belongs to the “demographically dominant group” (564). Therefore, he is not considered from the standpoint of a minority group member, as 95 percent of the population of Jamaica is black. This Jamaican is conscious that, in the USA, he belongs to a minority ethnic group and he is aware that he is regarded by others as such. According to Patterson, this Jamaican changes his “ethnic identity four times each year. He does so by changing his social context” (564).

I believe his analyzes fits into Clare’s situation. For the principal, in the high school, who regards her as a “white chocolate,” there would be no room for Clare to be accepted in the American society. She would constantly be seen as a member of a minority group, always an outsider. She would always be in-between, not dark as chocolate, nor white either. Toland-Dix also mentions the complexities which are displayed throughout Clare’s trajectory because of the social context: “An added complication and challenge for Clare is that within each space, her racial identity signifies differently” (39). Therefore, being conscious of what group she belongs to plays a crucial role on how Clare decides to present herself to the country she moves to.

Clare is not, at first, conscious of what group she owes her alliance to. Her father is always enticing her to blend into the American white world and to adopt America as her homeland, as Boy tells her: “You are an American now. You need to realize what that means” (102). Yet, Clare does not receive the same encouragement from her mother, who does not accept the way Clare’s father tries to blend into the American world. For Boy, his attempt to blend into the American society seems natural because he “had descended from slave masters” (Gifford 15) and for that reason, he feels and tries to convince himself that he is not part of the colonial society back in Jamaica, but a member of the so called “first, ruling world.”

As race, the expression “ethnic group” is also another controversial term and critics have not reached a consensus in terms of its definition. In order to analyze the character of Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, I will again use the definition proposed by Cornell and Hartmann. For them, an ethnic group is “a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peopledhood” (19).

The term ethnicity is also meaningful to analyze power relations among the different groups that constitute a nation, as mentioned by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

The term “ethnicity,” however, really only achieves wide currency when these “national” groups find themselves as minorities within a larger national grouping, as occurs in the aftermath of colonization, either through immigration to settled colonies such as USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or by the migration of colonized peoples to the colonizing centre. (81)

One way that the concept of ethnicity differs from the one about race is that race is often related to one’s physical appearance. The term ethnicity holds several definitions, as stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin: “Indeed, few terms are used in such a variety of ways nor with such a variety of definitions – Isajaw (1974) deals with twenty-seven definitions of ethnicity in the United States alone” (80). These authors present the following definition for the term: it is “[a] group that is socially distinguished or set apart, by others and/or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or national characteristics” (81). This definition shares similar traits with the definition presented by Cornell and Hartman.

According to Cornell and Hartman's definition of ethnicity, Clare would have to associate with and be part of a collectivity, sharing memories with its members of their African historical past. Yet, where is this group she could have established relations and a friendship with? Along the narrative, Boy takes good care to cut relations with Kitty's maternal relations in the USA, as the narrative voice states:

A few months later, in an apartment in Brooklyn, Boy picked up the telephone and it was Grace, asking to stop by on their day off to spend time and see how Boy and them was doing. Boy hemmed and hawed and Grace understood. She said she would make it another time but never called again, and the Savages were not asked back to Queens for evenings of rice and peas and curry chicken and fast games of dominoes and playing mento on electric guitars and marimbas and congas and claves. (62)

Boy wants to leave behind any African heritage. Instead, he wishes to establish connection with this new world, the United States, which, according to him, represents his and Clare's new home.

But back in Jamaica, Kitty works to undo this strong negative influence Boy has on Clare. She does not abandon them completely as she keeps writing letters to them. She attempts to stimulate in Clare a feeling for her homeland/motherland, Jamaica. Kitty addresses Clare, in one of the letters, and tells her how she hopes that Clare will never forget her/their people:

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. There is a space between
who you are and who you will become. Fill it. (103)

I believe Kitty is trying to awake in Clare those “memories of a shared historical past” mentioned previously by Cornell and Hartmann in their definition of an ethnic group. In addition, Kitty tries to tell Clare about the place she belongs to and where her homeland is. Right after this letter, Boy and Clare receive the news that Kitty has died. In the conversation between Boy and Clare that follows next, the narrative voice tells the reader, for the first time, that Clare is willing to side with her mother’s blacker African ancestry as Clare tells her father: “‘My mother was a nigger’—speaking the word at him. His five long fingers came at her, as she had expected, marking her cheekbone, making her weep in shock. ‘And so am I’” (104).

From this moment on, Clare makes the decision to embrace her mother’s maternal African heritage. Moynagh states that “[i]n the course of the novel, Clare’s development takes the form of a movement away from the white, imperial, patriarchal authority her father represents and toward an embrace of the black matrilineal legacy of her mother” (117). Just after her mother’s death, Clare begins to feel strong enough to resist and question her paternal influence and control. Clare starts to feel that “[l]ight skin signifies collaboration and complicity with the colonizer” (Toland-Dix 42), which is a bond she begins to break with.

Along *No Telephone to Heaven*, the narrative voice tends to make Clare’s light skin color more visible, an element which brings her closer to her father. However, in some distinct parts of both narratives, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, the reader is made aware that Clare has actually inherited more of her mother’s characteristics than those of her father. There is a passage, in *Abeng*, in which young Clare goes to her grandmother’s house to spend some days while she is on vacation. There, she meets her

poor, darker friend called Zoe. Both of them sneak over to the forest, with Clare's grandmother's rifle, in order to have some adventure. By accident Clare shoots Old Joe, a pig, which belongs to Miss Mattie, Clare's grandmother. Alarmed by the shooting, one cane-cutter, who is nearby, goes up the hill to check what is going on. When Clare sees him, she is afraid and also shoots at him. Yet, she does not know if she shoots for fear of being hurt by that stranger, or for fear of being recognized as the granddaughter of such a respected lady as Miss Mattie, as she and Zoe are caught in such an unusual place. However, the intriguing point in this passage is that the narrative voice tells us that the stranger would never have hurt her because "[h]e would soon enough have recognized by her skin and by her face that she was the granddaughter of Miss Mattie and the daughter of Kitty, whose 'dead stamp' the country people said she was" (*Abeng* 124). It is to this very same place and forest that Clare, as a grown-up, comes back to reclaim her history and her heritage. The feeling of love and passion Kitty has for Jamaica is the feeling that will develop in Clare's soul and consequently bring her back to her mother's place.

There is a passage, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, in which the narrative voice highlights Clare's physical appearance with her mother when she is back, from England, to visit her maternal relatives in Jamaica. While they are having a get-together, the reader is made aware that Clare's "mother's name was barely spoken except when Aunt Violet commented to some friends gathered for high tea, pouring the blind earl pattern, that Clare's face was the dead-stamp of Kitty, lightening her sister-in-law in death" (118). Thus, although the narrative voice depicts how intense, up to the middle of the narrative, Boy's influence upon Clare is, it also demystifies his power and guidance as the narrative unfolds.

When alive, Kitty offers no counter-argument on how Boy intends to raise their light-skinned daughter. Kitty leaves Clare, almost completely, under the care of Boy, who has no problem to pass as white and tries to teach the same “art” to Clare. Yet, after Kitty’s death, Clare starts to question her father, something that neither herself nor her mother used to do, offering, then, a counter-discourse to Boy’s domineering attitudes.

Feeling unable to accept Boy’s terms and attempts to make her internalize American values and lifestyle, Clare heads towards England that, within her history of loss of identity, is the country she had been taught to identify as her motherland, as the narrative voice states: “Clare Savage began her life-alone. Choosing London with the logic of a creole. This was the mother-country” (109). From this moment on, when she sets off for England, Boy is completely erased from the narrative and has no more influence on Clare. Now she is left by herself, again, in a new world and on her way to restoration.

Throughout Clare’s journeys back and forth to Jamaica, the USA and England she lives her life in an “unreal” time. Her memories of her homeland, of what her mother and grandmother have left follows her everywhere signaling that she has also a very important role to play in the construction of the history of Jamaica.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie sees a picture which triggers his memories of the far away Bombay of his childhood, which is actually the starting point for him to begin writing his novel *Midnight’s Children*. He says that he only started this new novel because he felt the need to go back in time and restore the past to himself (10). To Rushdie, it could have been more difficult to visualize his hometown through his fading memories because he had lost physical contact with his homeland. Memories, as we all know, can be very deceiving. Yet, in relation to Clare, her memories are constantly being fed because she does not cut relations with her remaining family members back in

Jamaica. Her relatives are always inducing her to go back to her homeland. Moving away from her father, Clare unlocks the doors of her memories and feeds on them as they provide her with a chance of picking up the pieces of her life, gluing them up and heading to the exciting, but no less painful, discovery of her story, her identity.

In *Abeng*, Clare is already portrayed as a young girl who knows that a choice would be required from her. She knows about the contrasting worlds in which her parents' marriage is encircled, as the narrative voice states:

Her father told her she was white. But she knew that her mother was not. Who would she choose were she given the choice: Miss Havisham or Abel Magwitch? She was of both dark and light. Pale and deeply colored. (*Abeng* 36)

The name Clare is also very symbolic in the context of *No Telephone to Heaven*. This name denotes luminosity or something that is light in color. Light is here clearly the opposite of dark – a word which, in the narrative, is often associated with Kitty and her African ancestry –, which represents a trait that Boy desires so much to erase from his and Clare's lives. This lightness, which is brought along with the name Clare, could also be associated with transparency. The act of passing as white, which Boy tries to engage Clare in, requires the need to have light-skin in order to try to be successful and mingle into the American society.

The awareness of being light-skinned and the meaningfulness of this “privilege,” that is associated with the European tradition, and which goes against her African cultural heritage, develop into a crescendo, in Clare's consciousness, from *Abeng* to *No Telephone to Heaven*, as Gifford states:

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, which features Clare Savage between the ages of twelve and thirty-six, Clare begins to embrace her black heritage and the historical and political realities that had not been part of Clare's experience in *Abeng*. (2)

As Clare grows aware of her past, the matter about the meaningfulness of race and the ethnic alliances to specific groups becomes more noticeable. This issue is clear in the narrative of both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. Yet, Boy's attempts to initiate Clare into the art of blending in and camouflaging prove to be unprofitable because the concept of home and the notion of belonging, for Clare, acquire a strong meaning, as she moves away from Boy and from his influences.

This break of connection between Clare and her father is very symbolic. The narrative voice at this moment disqualifies Clare's "father as a useful source for the construction of her worldview" (Gifford 85). Previously to this moment in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare does not seem to grasp her mother's message about the feelings she should develop towards their people back in Jamaica. But now, we may say that Clare breaks, for the first time, with the patriarchal ruling model established for her and for society in general. In a sense, Clare breaks down and questions the patriarchal hierarchy that is taken for granted in these societies. As she eliminates the influence of her father, she opens a new path in which a new approach to history and to her past can be taken. At this moment, she sets off on a path to reconnect with her mother and her motherland.

Clare's search for a better understanding of the several influences she has inherited begins to appear more accurately in England as she starts thinking "of her, her youth, her color, her strangeness, her unbearable loneliness" (137). She engages in an

attempt to understand the English people so that she could better understand herself. In “Exile, Nomadism and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon,” Peters states that “[i]f we believe Hegel or Lacan the self always confronts itself first as a fantastic other; thereafter, all identity passes through otherness. Constructing others will always be part of construction the self” (37). So, observing the life of English people and going to the university as Clare does contribute towards her growing awareness of the boundaries that separate her “strangeness” from the English people.

I believe Stuart Hall’s idea about the multiplicity of influences in the Caribbean sheds some light to better understand how Clare’s world is fragmented and how she feels lost, embodying tensions and contradictions in relation to her historical past. Within this system, that also involves race and ethnic identification, I believe that Clare’s identity formation follows Stuart Hall’s view about it. According to him:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.
(“Cultural Identity” 222)

In this sense, Clare follows a process, throughout the narrative, that is never complete. She engages in an endless process of trying to put together the several pieces that shape her self. Considering that the formation of one’s identity is constructed through one’s interaction between one’s self, the society and others, Clare sees her self under a continuous mutation.

Since the construction of one's identity is constantly incomplete, this process reflects Clare's constant attempt to locate her self and fulfill this empty space she feels inside. She does so through a growing consciousness of her past in order to construct a more transparent present, as we can understand it from what is stated by Stuart Hall:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. ("Cultural Identity" 225)

Then, from this passage, we gather that there is no original point or place of departure in which Clare goes back to rescue her long lost "essential" and "fixed" identity or the "core" of her identity. Rather than heading into her past to find her supposed essence, she plunges into her past and transforms it in order to become a person with a clearer understanding of the multiple layers that structure her selfhood.

We could also say that the term identity, in the Caribbean region, needs to be understood in terms of similarity/continuity and of difference/rupture, with its own history, as Stuart Hall states:

If identity does not proceed, in a straight, unbroken line, from one fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation? We might think of black Caribbean identities as 'framed' by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture. Caribbean identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. ("Cultural Identity" 226-227)

In this interest, we could say that, on the one hand, Clare's quest for digging into her past signals a way of continuing with the history of her maternal, African past. On the other hand, this return to her past points towards a necessity to reconstruct history from a different perspective. We could say that her life is an example of a discontinuity with her past. She is one of the daughters of the miscegenation process that followed the coming of the African slaves to the Caribbean area. In fact, we could say that she is invited to understand the break with her ancestors in order to revive and reclaim her African legacy.

To go in search of her heritages, Clare engages in a quest for knowledge, which is supposed to take her out of a state of "ignorance" about herself and others. Acknowledging her position is the turning point to reverse this state of unawareness about her self, as Harry/Harriet, a transvestite in *No Telephone to Heaven*, tells her in Jamaica: "For we have taken the master's past as our own. That is the danger" (127). This is a danger that can no longer persist. This empty space can no longer be occupied only by the physical presence, but requires the reshape of the self and of society for the rewriting of history.

There is a growing debate about the relevance of applying the term subjectivity rather than identity when we talk about the search for one's self. However, in the development of my writing I opt for the word identity instead of subjectivity especially because I am working with a definition of identity according to Stuart Hall's theorization and also because there is a difference between these terms. In *Subjectivity*, Donald Hall analyzes the difference between the concepts of identity and subjectivity stating that:

For our purposes one's identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short - or

long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity. Subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control. (3-4)

I believe that according to Donald Hall's description, the understanding of one's subjectivity is more profound and goes beyond the understanding of one's identity as he states that "subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity," as stated above. Therefore, the understanding of one's subjectivity is one step ahead of the understanding about one's identity. In fact, I believe that, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare is in search of the "traits, beliefs and allegiances" Donald Hall mentions in his definition of identity. Clare does not clearly understand at first the several layers that structure her identity formation. Consequently, before developing a broader perception of her subjectivity, Clare needs to undergo a process to unveil the layers of her identity configuration.

When in England, while Clare is attending a seminar, "a march of the National Front" (137) walks along the street right in front of the institute in which Clare is having classes. The members of this march are engaged in a fight against all "not welcome" foreigners in Britain as they shout: "KAFFIRS! NIGGERS! WOGS! PAKIS! GET OUT! A banner- white bedsheet with black paint-went past. KEEP BRITAIN WHITE!" (137). Again, discrimination, which is here based on race and color identification,

seems to play a very important role when the question of whether or not one will be accepted in the adopted country is raised.

The day after this march, and in response to this “threat,” a poster is seen with the following reply: “WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE” (137). That seems to apply to Clare. The route opened by the British colonizers in Jamaica proves to be the same one that brings the colony back to the center. This migratory movement of going back to England, a country which is constantly portrayed as the mother country in most colonial literature, could be associated with the metaphor of the ships proposed by Paul Gilroy, as he states:

Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (4)

The ships that transported the African slaves also bring together the slaves’ diasporic experience of being uprooted from their homelands. The route taken, by the slave traders, to carry the Africans slaves to the American continent has also been the path to transport a narrative of displacement, dislocation and disarticulation that accompanied the slaves. This narrative of displacement is still faced by their subsequent generations in the new land as we can verify through the scene of the march of the National Front, witnessed by Clare.

People in Jamaica have always been taught to identify England as the mother country and have always been made aware that England is a more important and influential country than any other in the world. Therefore, what could be more natural or even more expected from a person whose imagination, about the “distant” mother

country, had always been portrayed as being incredibly appealing? The natural path would be to head to this country and because, in the colonial imagery, it is supposed to be the “mother” country, it would be expected to treat its “offspring” more gently and nurturing. Yet, there a twist in this expected “natural” behavior. The conflicting relationship between those who come from the colonies and those who belong to the so-called mother country turns out to be more destabilizing. Although they try hard to fit in, those who come from the colonies face a continuous isolation and segregation from the mainstream in this supposed homeland, England.

While in school in England, Clare engages in a conversation with Liz, a classmate, in the cafeteria. Clare refers to how she felt uneasy with all those open insults she heard from the members of the National Front. That is how the narrative voice puts it:

I mean, to me it felt ... dangerous.

Oh ... I’m sorry. But you needn’t take it personally, you know.

Why do you say that?

I mean, you’re hardly the sort they were ranting on about.

That doesn’t make it at all better ... Besides, I can never be sure about that ... and I’m not sure I should want ... ah, exclusion.

But you are who you are ... Look, Hogg-Hunter’s words weren’t directed at you ... Surely you didn’t think they were?

Liz, you are missing my point.

Which is?

Which is that I am ... by blood ... the sort they, and she,
were ranting on about. (139)

Through this dialogue, we can see that Clare not only shows a strong concern about the dangerous ground she is stepping on, in England, but she also shows distress about how her friend misses the point that, despite her physical appearance, she is a black person from the colonies—precisely one of those people the National Front refers to. She is aware of the complex situation she faces in terms of what she shows to be, physically speaking, because of her light-skinned complexion, and how her black, African, maternal blood and heritage, in fact, influences her.

In “Recovered Histories: Memories of an Immigrant,” Islam, from Bangladesh, describes his first experiences when he comes to live in England. He mentions that, for a long time, he was locked inside the flat with some of his relatives. It happened because he felt afraid of meeting ordinary English people, and not being able to reply to the simplest comments. But, one day, as he was walking along Kingsland High Street, a car went by him and stopped right away. A white man walked out of the car and as Islam states, this white man “just jutted his face at me from less than a meter away and spat in my face as he grunted two harsh syllables – Paki – and left” (449). In Islam’s view, this situation with the white man disturbed him profoundly not only because of the white man’s disrespectful behavior but because Islam was called a Paki, as he states: “For a person who had just come to England after a bloody civil war with Pakistan, in which so many of my friends and relatives perished, being called a Pakistani was the ultimate insult” (449).

As Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Islam also suffered the consequences of being unwanted and of being segregated as being “the other.” Therefore, he also suffered because of the oppression, discrimination and exclusion within the adopted

country. Although Clare and Islam come from colonial countries with different histories and are seen differently in England, there is a striking issue that places both of them on two different poles. Clare, in her quest to better understand herself and her historical past, is unable to make a home in England and decides to head back to Jamaica, but on the other hand, Islam takes just the opposite path and decides to consider England his newly accepted home.

Carole Davies analyzes the question of reconnection to one's home. She states that "[b]ecause we were/are products of separations and dis-locations and dis-memberings, people of African descent in the Americas historically have sought reconnection" (3-4). This statement sheds some light on why Clare swings back to her home country. She is also a member of the African diaspora, but the reconnection to one's home is not literally going back to the geographical African territory.

In his essay, "The Dialect between Diasporas and Homelands," Skinner discusses the question of the African diaspora and how it is interweaved with the desire, by those involved in this diaspora, to reconnect with their home land. According to him, many descendants of the later generation of African slaves worked hard to pursue a reconnection with their ancestral home country. Yet, this reconnection has not always been the desire to go back, literally, to the African continent as he states: "[t]he vast majority of Africans abroad never seriously considered returning to African" (440). The reason why it happens, according to him is

that the later generation of exiles had adapted to their environment. True, they continued to be persecuted, and even killed, but they had become members of the societies in which they lived; they had a niche in their economies; and they often

symbolically served as contrast figures, which enabled their hosts to define the insiders and the outsiders. (440)

In Jamaica, the great majority of the population is made of black people that are the descendants of the slave trade. The later generations were no more deprived of their rights to leave and go back to the continent that represents the home of their ancestors. However, the physical return has now been transformed into a spiritual desire to rescue their cultural legacy. As Skinner states: “Uppermost in the minds of those who wished to return was the desire to achieve true human dignity; to help or liberate their home communities; and by extension to aid their compatriots still in the diaspora” (434).

In terms of what Cornell and Hartmann tells us about race, which involves physical characteristics, Clare might not be regarded as a black person, as a person who should leave England immediately in order to leave it white as the march is demanding. But if we consider what Cornell and Hartmann state about an ethnic group, Clare fits into this category because she shares, together with her mother and grandmother, memories of a history of migration, slavery, transportation, separation and, consequently, of a history of loss of identity. Then, Clare feels that she fits into the group that the march is asking to leave England so that this country becomes “whiter.”

According to Eriksen, “[t]he first fact of ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between Us and Them” (18). Clare becomes, as time goes by, well aware that her home, her country, her people are set, not in England as she used to think, not in the US either, but back in Jamaica, which is the place of her mother, grandmother and also hers. Jamaica represents the location that does not place her “there,” that does not consider her as “them,” as the British people do.

Harry/Harriet, the transvestite who becomes Clare's best friend in *No Telephone to Heaven*, plays a meaningful role in Clare's return to Jamaica. Harry/Harriet guides Clare and induces her to go after a possibility to reconcile with her historical legacy. When Clare comes back, once and for all, to Jamaica, she does the same route that, back in time, was traced by the slaves. This fact is mentioned by Edmondson as she says that "in *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare Savage returns to Jamaica after moving first to the United States and then to London, thereby retracing the 'triangle' of the slave trade, only the other way around" (185). This migratory movement is also analyzed by Almeida who states "that the characters in *No Telephone to Heaven* make an unpredictable movement back to the home country. Diaspora space for them is not a "home away from home," but rather an endless search for one" ("Transcultural Fictions" 167).

Following this return process, Harry/Harriet becomes the guiding light in Clare's life on her way back to Jamaica. He/she insists that Clare has to make a choice as he/she states: "I mean the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make the choice. Cast our lot. Cyann live split. Not in this world" (131). Place, for Clare, becomes a very meaningful matter because it is by returning to Jamaica and her roots that she will be able to try to reach the level of restoration she is looking for.

The meaningfulness of this place to belong to, to be called one's home that Clare so much goes after is analyzed by Rosemary George in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. George states that "the search for the location in which the self is 'at home' is one of the primary projects of twentieth-century fiction in English" (3). Yet, I believe that the discussion of this most wanted place to be identified as home does not carry the romanticized notion of being a safe and protected place. According to Carole Davies,

[t]he mystified notions of home and family are removed from their romantic, idealized moorings, to speak of pain, movement, difficulty, learning and love in complex ways. Thus, the complicated notion of home mirrors the problematizing of community/nation/identity that one finds in Black women's writing from a variety of communities. (21)

This analysis by Carole Davies fits the reading of Clare's journeys throughout the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven*. She does not face a peaceful place to be called home in any country she travels to, not even in Jamaica. This space to be called home turns out to be a problematic question on her attempts to better understand the implications of this notion.

We could say that home is also associated with notions of inclusion and exclusion, as “[h]ome is a way of establishing difference” (George 2). This place, within a community, houses a multiplicity of identities that “collide and/or renegotiate space” (Davies 66). Clare searches for this space where she can better understand her multi-layered heritage—a place that can shelter and accept her multiplicity without excluding her from the others in her community. The discussion of home involves the dialogue among several spaces occupied by different people within the same community. Different people and the different positions they occupy lead to diverse notions and feelings about what home means. However, this place to be called home does not necessarily mean one should go back to the place one was born.

Davies states that Kincaid, in *A Small Place*, “seems to be asserting that the relationship to home is not innocent and idyllic; it is fraught with conflict, tension, bitterness and struggle” (126). This interpretation of what home means seems to fit perfectly in an analysis of Jamaica as a home for Clare. I believe the narrative, in *No*

Telephone to Heaven, breaks down with the common saying in which home is related to a sweet, nurturing and peaceful environment. *No Telephone to Heaven* develops a narrative of resistance and offers a counter-discourse to the dominant and official history of the island. Consequently, home could not acquire this romanticized description of being close to a paradise. George asserts that “[h]omes and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered ‘not-home,’ with the foreign, with distance” (4). While away, Clare’s history is attached to her memories. Her past is constantly reminding her of her relevant role as a possible agent to help transform Jamaica into a more egalitarian society. Kitty’s words that stress the fact that Clare has a place to fulfill, permeate her decisions and choices along the narrative. As Stuart Hall affirms, “[e]veryone in the Caribbean, of whatever ethnic background, must sooner or later come to terms with this African presence” (“Cultural Identity” 231). Returning home represents an attempt to let a door open to accept and transform her multi-complex heritage. By doing so, Clare goes into a process of unfolding the layers of her past in order to revise her African history of migration, slavery, transportation, separation from her African people, culture and land. Therefore, she is (re)starting her attempt to understand and transform the ongoing process of loss of identity she has been going through.

The question of the multiple subaltern voices that occupy the margins of society, in their attempt to be heard and consequently build a place to be called home, is a key issue throughout the development of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven*. According to Almeida, the transnational dialogues relating to the contemporary dialogues discuss not only the question of colonial and post-colonial literature but also the growing presence of a hybrid and diasporic element in the contemporary literary critic scene (“A nova diaspora” 192). Clare is part of this transnational movement and

dialogue as she moves back and forth to the USA, England and back to Jamaica. She is the one who keeps trying to (re)negotiate her relationship with herself and with the others whom she encounters along her journey. Clare moves on trying to balance her conflicting realities of being a product of miscegenation and colonization. She engages in an attempt to create spaces that could bring to her life a feeling of belonging which has long been lost. Then, identity and space are terms that are juxtaposed and that contribute to the construction of Clare's self.

In chapter seven of *No Telephone to Heaven*, entitled "Magnanimous Warrior," a picture of Jamaica is presented as a hunting mother, as an obeah-woman, a woman who can cure, kill, give jobs, a woman who is foy-eyed (164). However, this woman/mother has turned into an ill, suffering woman/mother as the narrative voice describes her:

What has become of this warrior? Now that we need her more than ever. She has been burned up in an almshouse fire in Kingston. She has starved to death. She wanders the roads of the country with swollen feet. She has cancer. Her children have left her. Her powers are known no longer. They are called by other names. She is not respected. (164)

This woman/mother who is referred to as a restless warrior, who wants to conquer her own space, turns into a sick figure, bleeding all over and begging for restoration, as Clare does. She suffers, is abandoned, feels lost and does not know exactly what path to take to return home. Yet, she is still there longing for a feeling of belonging and of identification.

When Clare decides to go back to Jamaica, the narrative voice describes this passage making reference to those slaves who were once forced to leave their lands,

tribes, family and home behind: “She had arrived in Kingston with a high fever, in pain, entering the city on the sea as her ancestors had once done” (168). Yet, this time she is not a slave, she does not represent someone else’s possession, as the slaves used to be. She is not coming back because she is, literally, forced to do so. Clare comes back in an attempt to relocate herself in the multi-ethnic and multi-racial country she believes she belongs to. Toland-Dix shows us how Clare’s return to her homeland and motherland may be analyzed: “Clare’s return to Jamaica is figured as the result of an intense need to reconnect with the land and with her Afro-Jamaican peasant matrilineage so that she can be whole” (48).

Boehmer states that “[a]fter empire, it was clear, the history of the colonized needed repair” (194). Back in Jamaica, Clare leaves behind a previous conception that England is her mother country. It is a new moment for Clare to face and understand history from a different standpoint, a new perspective, in which the “center” becomes diminished by the new meaningfulness acquired by Jamaica and its history, which is also Clare’s history. From this moment on that she is back in Jamaica, Clare is more in control of her personal history, her past, present and future. Boehmer states that

First, as we have noted, for the colonized to tell a history meant assuming control-taking charge of the past, of self-definition, or of political destiny. No longer was history something that came only from outside. (196)

This is actually what is taking place with Clare at this moment in the narrative. She is finally (re)starting her journey towards restoration in an attempt to better understand her fragmented self.

During a time when Clare is having a picnic with Harry/Harriet, she goes into the river where she used to swim in her childhood, and “shut her eyes and let the cool of

it wash over her naked body, reaching up into her as she opened her legs. Rebaptism” (172). This rebaptism works as if it were a bridge transporting Clare from an age of great turmoil to a choice of affiliation with those she decides to side with. As having chosen to assimilate and accept her mother’s maternal ancestry, I believe Clare grows more sympathetically towards a better understanding about her mother’s absence in her life as well. At this moment, Kitty has long been dead and this (re)baptism can also signify a blessed reunion with the land that, for Clare, also represents Kitty.

Clare tries to imitate her mother by loving her country and also acting quite defiantly. Kitty denies the life Boy tried to give to her and the whole hypocrisy of the American way of life and its supposedly “ideal” white and “clean” society. As Kitty, Clare refuses to live outside her country, outside her history. At this moment Clare tries to sort out the cultural influences, both African and British, she has inherited. Toland-Dix states: “As in many postcolonial novels, Clare’s sojourn in the ‘mother country’ is an essential part of her journey to selfhood” (47). Therefore, Clare keeps trying to relocate herself but eventually she does so favoring her African past over her European one. According to Patterson,

[t]he Afro-Caribbean societies are characterized by the overwhelming presence of people of African descent, by a common colonial experience, by the prolonged historical experience of slavery on a large scale, by their relatively small size, and their continued economic dependence on the former European colonizing powers. (571)

This African presence is the one that, in fact, guides and nurtures Clare. She has been left alone twice: the moment Kitty goes back to Jamaica leaving her in Brooklyn with her father and when Kitty dies in Jamaica, far away and cut from Clare’s presence. In

this very same river that Clare (re)baptizes herself, she remembers that “[h]er mother had told her of the slaves. Her people” (174). Although favoring her maternal African ancestry, I think that Clare internalizes her multiple heritages more clearly and is now able to dialogue with them in order to better construct her sense of identity and of selfhood. Clare does not erase, or wash away any of her racial, ethnic and cultural influences. They are all there, juxtaposed, constructing and putting together parts of her self, of her identity. As the narrative voice states: “There are many bits and pieces to her, for she is composed of fragments. In this journey, she hopes is her restoration” (87).

Considering the endless process of one’s identity formation, Kearney states that:

Such identities escape in part from either-or classification and become defined more by a logic of “both-and-and” in which the subject shares partial, overlapping identities with other similarly constituted decentered subjects that inhabit reticular social forms.
(531)

This is how Clare goes on constructing a growing perception of who she is and the plurality of influences she carries within her self. Towards the end of the novel, in that truck where she is in the company of the guerrilla members, she is part of a group that may not, at first, seem to identify with her because, as Cornell and Hartmann state, race is shown from the outside but ethnicity is shown from the inside, as we can see from their description of race and ethnic group presented previously. Clare shares, with those in the truck, memories of a past of slavery and brutality, not physical likeness. She decides to favor her ethnic alliance over her more conflictual racial one.

At the very end of the narrative, Clare and the members of the guerrilla movement she joins are betrayed and killed in the middle of the forest. This end seems to be fatalist if we consider that *No Telephone to Heaven* is a narrative of resistance and

questioning of the process of colonization and all the atrocities committed by the white male authority. According to Toland-Dix:

In the end, Cliff decides that it is not possible for Clare to return and occupy a different space, in large part because others will not accept her rejection of white identity. The home Clare longs for does not exist. (50)

Yet, along the narrative, Clare is successful when using her past to make sense of her present. She is able to reach a higher perception of the meaningfulness of her African past in her present life. As the narrative progresses, she does her best to live up to her mother's expectations to do something for herself and for their people in Jamaica. As Gifford states:

But as with many arrivals, by the time one gets there one no longer needs to be there; as with many Holy Grails, once one finds it – or constructs it as in this case – one no longer needs it: the journey itself has bestowed the treasure. (103)

Maybe this is how Clare's wandering and quest could be analyzed. Her journeys around the USA, England and then finally back to Jamaica provides her with enough input to make her notice how different, racially and ethnically, she is from the people she encounters in the so called "first world." Being aware that she is segregated from those whom she meets, in England and in the United States, she decides to go back to her mother country, Jamaica, to claim her African identity and her matrilineal ancestry. She goes back to rescue her history and not the one she had been taught to accept. She dies at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, but she does not lose connection with her historical past, with her matrilineage. She follows the same destiny of her mother. Her

body becomes united with her mother's through the land. This land, in the mother country, finally and eternally blends mother's and daughter's souls together.

Chapter 2

Gendered Context: Renegotiating Identities Issues through the Maternal Bloodline.

Is She Found?

Yesterday we walked apart

Separate and cold and mortal.

Now the sacred kiss has joined us,

Now we stand inside the portal

That permits of no returning

And my heart is burning, burning.

I know not what the word may be,

Or what the charm, or what the token

That has filled us with this glory,

But never let the spell be broken;

Let it stay a mystery

For all times to be.

Yesterday, with lighter joys

We wantoned at the outer portal.

Now, with love's old alchemy

We have made ourselves immortal.

Elsa Gidlow

The search for the construction of one's identity permeates the development of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven* as Clare, the major character, journeys along the unfolding story of her personal development. Place, in this narrative, acquires a central and meaningful connotation because the return to Jamaica is strongly associated with the return to the matrilineal ancestry.

Clare's return to Jamaica is triggered firstly by her mother, Kitty, who induces her to do something for her land and her people. But, another character that has a strong

influence on Clare's life and her return to Jamaica is the transvestite Harry/Harriet. Harry/Harriet is a man who wants to be woman, and for this matter he/she behaves and dresses as if he/she were one. This character is described at first as a person who has a double gender. However, by the middle of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Harry/Harriet decides to adopt and favor his/her feminine self over the masculine one. He/she tells Clare that although he/she does not have money to undergo a surgery to change his/her sex, he/she has made up his/her mind and has chosen to be only Harriet, and not Harry anymore. From this moment on, the narrative voice refers to Harry/Harriet as Harriet and uses the personal pronoun she to refer to this character. So, for the sake of a clear and easy reading, from now on I will refer to this character as Harriet and I will use the personal pronoun "she" to address this character.

Harriet is one of the characters who has a strong influence on Clare, on her return to Jamaica and also on her reconnection to her matrilineal family. The narrative voice first presents Harriet at a party at Buster Said's house and emphasizes the dualities that Harriet embodies and the traits related to what it means to be a man or a woman: "Then Harry/Harriet, boy-girl, Buster's brother-sister, half-brother-sister actually, who was always strange, since childhood, they say, but everyone tolerates him, as if measuring their normalness against her strangeness" (21). From the start, Harriet seems to draw people's attention to her strangeness, to her uniqueness that differentiates her from the others who are at Buster Said's house. Harriet is put on the spot and seems to question the traditional feminine/masculine roles in society and to draw "attention to the artificiality of what we think of as 'natural' behavior" (Glover and Kaplan ix).

Harriet is the character who is greatly responsible for a big twist in the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven* and also in Clare's life. Although she has such a power, Harriet is, since the very beginning of the narrative, portrayed as a person who is not

supposed to be taken seriously as she seems to perform a specific role rather than being herself. Elia, on her analyzes about Harriet, states that:

Performance, a practice ever present in queerness, characterizes Harry/Harriet from our very encounter with him/her, and becomes critical for her survival towards the end. Our first encounter with Harry/Harriet already introduces her/him as a conscious performer, inviting people to her/his show. In this scene, s/he is a guest at a poolside party. (355)

The scene that Elia mentions is the following: “Harry/Harriet puts on a bikini—bra stretched across his hairy, delicately mounded chest, panties cradling his cock and balls—and starts to dance to ‘Hey, Jude’. People laugh but nobody takes Harry/Harriet to heart” (21). The narrative voice warns the reader to the fact that Harriet is there to subvert, consciously, the “natural” or even the “traditional” modes of behavior related to what is expected as a behavior for a man or a woman. Harriet seems to question what is considered the “normality” of social rules and behavior. The narrative voice describes the party as a “true wildness” (20) and being so, this party would not fit into what could be classified as a “traditional” and “acceptable” kind of party. But, I believe the narrative voice wants the reader to be attentive to what is often viewed as normal or acceptable behavior in society and what diverges from it. Harriet is the character who is highlighted at the party and becomes conspicuous for her unique and strange behavior. Harriet occupies not only a singular position at this party but also along the development of the narrative. The narrative voice seems to foreshadow the power exercised by Harriet to question and demystify social modes of behavior.

Harriet is also a character who questions traditional ways of thinking about gender, sex, sexuality, class and race. She is the one who does not fit and does not seem

to mix with the others at the party in Buster Said's house. This party is for people who belong to the high, white social class in Jamaica. Harriet is placed right among them. However, she does not blend in with them and her act works to destabilize the established order.

This party is the setting in which Clare and Harriet meet each other for the first time. After having a sexual intercourse with Paul H., one of the boys from a high social class in Jamaica, Clare pours herself some champagne and goes to sit, alone, next to the pool. Harriet comes up to her because Clare starts throwing up into the pool. Their immediate complicity shows that there is a strong connection that brings Clare and Harriet together while, at the same time, sets both of them apart from the rest of the group at this party. However, while they are put together to symbolize some sort of connection, they are also distinguished from one another. This is how Elia analyzes their differences:

At first encounter, Clare and Harry/Harriet are worlds apart. She is the light-skinned prized daughter of a middle-class couple; he is the dark-skinned product of the rape of a black servant by her white master. He is initiated at a very early age into the world of Jamaican injustice, of rejection. (362)

Although the narrative voice in *No Telephone to Heaven* displays several situations that make evident the differences between them, it also describes how Clare and Harriet share similarities since their birthdays.

Clare is born from a light-skinned father, Boy, and a dark-skinned mother, Kitty. Clare's parents have complete different backgrounds and so does Harriet's. There is a scene in *No Telephone to Heaven*, in one of the moments that Clare is visiting Jamaica, in which Harriet tells Clare about her origins and upbringing: "Don't forget, mi mumma

was a maid, and my father, her employer. And dem keep me and let she go” (124). Then, Clare inquires Harriet if she knew this when she was a boy. And this is how Harriet replies: “Don’t know when I knew ... but I knew soon enough that in that house I was an odd quantity ... outside” (124). Therefore, they share, although in different terms, this strange feeling of being outsiders, of not fitting, of not belonging.

This sensation of not fitting in is experienced by Clare who feels she is in that in-between space because of the cultural background her parents bring to her life. In Jamaica, she does not belong to the subaltern and disadvantaged group. She comes from a family of land owners and this fact gives her some social privileges which are denied to those who do not possess any land. Besides, she is light-skinned, which distinguishes her from the great majority of the population in Jamaica that is composed mostly of black people. Harriet, on the other hand, descends from a maid who is raped by a white land owner. While she is the product of rape and of aggression towards a black, underprivileged woman, Clare belongs to the privileged group in Jamaican society. Therefore, their quest for a place to be called home and their search for a better understanding of their identities start right within their own families.

As a boy, Harriet suffers another act of violence, as she is raped by an officer. She opens a door to overcome this traumatic experience as she tells Clare how it happened:

He found me sitting on the steps of the library one morning, one Saturday. My weekly ration of stories, my contact with the outside world, beside me ‘pon the steps. I was sitting for the bus to come. The man came over. Said something about what a sweet lickle t’ing I was . . . expect he said ‘monkey,’ sweet lickle monkey. Afterwards I worried about the books. For I had lost

them. I was afraid to return to the library after that, afraid they would punish me for losing the books, or accuse me of teefing dem. Afraid they would tell my father and he would find out what happened. So, for a time, I lost my contact with the outside world.
(129)

Harriet, then, is the product of sexual abuse and also a victim of it. She, as well as her mother, have deeply been affected and marked by the cruel exploration of their bodies and consequently their selfhood. The scene of rape can also be seen as a metaphor for colonial exploration. Ania Loomba analyzes the intersection of gender and sexuality within the boundaries of colonial discourse. She mentions that the “colonial sexual encounters, both heterosexual and homosexual, often exploited inequalities of class, gender, race and power” (134). Her analysis sheds some light on the situation of sexual exploitation of Harriet by this officer. In a way it can be argued that Harriet’s mother and herself here emblematically reenact the colonial encounter in which the colonial subjects – in Harriet’s case, the post-colonial subject -, embody the land and are explored and taken over by the conqueror by means of force and the suppression of the disadvantaged and deprived marginalized body.

The land and their bodies, Harriet’s and her mother’s, blend together in the process of turning into commodities in the prejudiced social structure in the Jamaican society. Loomba draws a parallel between the female bodies and the colonial land in which both of them become elements that need to be dominated and taken over, from the colonizer’s perspective. She argues that:

A long pictorial tradition in which the four continents were represented as women now generated images of America or Africa that positioned these continents as available for plunder,

possession, discovery and conquest. Conversely, native women and their bodies are described in terms of the promise and the fear of the colonial land, as in the much later description of “a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman” whom the narrator in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* encounters on the shores of the Congo river. (128)

In this interest, Harriet’s story mixes with the land of Jamaica that has also been abused and invaded by the colonizers who have used it according to their own will.

Paradoxically, although she was raped and abused, Harriet comes to be for Clare a good representation of the land and of a matrilineal character that she needs to pursue. However, the most intriguing fact is that Harriet is not the traditional figure of a woman or a mother. The role she embodies is a clear attempt to subvert and deconstruct the ideal and traditional model of the mother figure. Clare, contrary to expectations, naturally accepts Harriet’s guidance and influence.

Harriet is locked in her world because she is not allowed to voice her feminine self to people around her. If she dared to do so, she would be doubly subjugated, as the narrative voice states: “Had they known about Harriet, they would have indulged in elaborate name-calling, possibly stoning, in the end harrying her to the labor—perhaps” (171). Therefore, she is unable to reveal her feminine spirit and her life as a transvestite, but to Clare.

Harriet is locked within a world of dualities because of her state of being a transvestite and for this reason she can be seen as a good representation of Judith Butler’s performance of gender. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler develops Simone de Beauviour’s known statement that one is not born but becomes a woman. Butler makes a distinction between gender and sex. According to her analysis, gender is a social,

historical and cultural construction. She states that “if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in one way” (6). Her theory questions the common assumption that gender and sexuality are defined through one’s biological sex. It throws light on Harriet’s character and how she constructs her feminine presence, as a performance, throughout the narrative.

Butler analyzes the claim that one is not born but becomes a woman, by stating that “[i]f there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (33). Butler claims that the category of “woman” also undergoes constant change. Consequently, this woman, Butler talks about, has her identity, her selfhood under constant construction and transformation. In this sense, Harriet is constantly (re)constructing her notion of identity, favoring a feminine gender although she was born with a male sex.

According to Butler, the category of gender is socially and culturally constructed. Gender identity does not refer to a fixed and permanent category but rather it is always being constructed through a regular and constant repetition of acts as she states: “Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (140). Analyzing her arguments, Leitch states that, in Butler’s work, she attempts to demonstrate “how gendered identity is socially produced through repetitions of ordinary daily activities” (2485). Through this repetition, one manages to enact specific gender traits.

Butler also stresses the fact that sex is dissociated from gender. A person, who was born a man, does not necessarily have to behave or become a man. The same happens to a woman who does not have to become one just because she carries the

anatomy of the female body. In her essay “Performance, Performativity, Parody and Politics,” Nikki Sullivan interpreters Butler’s theory by saying that: “Judith Butler argues that gender is neither natural or innate, but rather, is a social construct which serves particular purposes and institutions. Gender, she says, is the performative effect of reiterative acts, that is, acts that can be, and are, repeated” (82). So, it means that one can create and generate one’s gender by behaving and repeating actions that shape his/her gender identity as such. Gender is, then, socially and culturally constructed.

In this regard, we could say that Butler’s theory works towards dismembering the rigid structures that have shaped the binary approach to gender roles and it does so by also highlighting the question of the transvestites and their roles in society. According to Wolfreys:

The historical struggle for meaning is an indication that gender identity is irreducible to any fixed semantic or ideological horizon. That there is no one stable gender identity does not mean that there is no meaning for gender but rather gender identities are open to transformation, to reading and rewriting, an openness most visibly foregrounded through the matter of trans-sexualism” (78).

I believe this rewriting process may be seen as an invitation to, if not erase, at least diminish and weaken the binary division of gender identities by blurring these fixed and conventional definitions.

Sullivan analyzes how society exercises its power to constrain and limit the actions of those called “deviant” from its previously established rules of what is normal and accepted from what is not conventional within its members. She states that “[t]he punishment or stigmatization of so-called ‘unnatural’ actions and identities is

everywhere apparent in our society, and functions to reaffirm or naturalize that which is held to be ‘normal’” (84). In her article “Performance Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler also works with this idea of a society establishing power and limitations over its members. She does so by saying that “gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite on stage can compel pleasure and applause, while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence” (161).

Although Harriet is born a man biologically, she does not assume her masculine gender. She attempts to construct her feminine gender over her masculine one along the narrative. So, her sex is separate from her gender, following Butler’s analysis. Because Harriet favors her feminine self and often performs her gender choice, she faces several confining situations in Jamaica, as I will show later on. As Elia states, Harriet “is not the norm, but the extremely rare exception. As a non-operative, transgendered biologically male queer, her/his very life depends on camouflage, and the silence of people in the know” (360).

Glover and Kaplan discuss how gender is a much contested word and how its meaning has changed over the years. According to them, terms which are common in literature today such as gender role or gender identity did not exist previous to the Second World War. These terms basically have become widespread since the beginning of the 1980s. They mention that: “*The Oxford English Dictionary* did not begin recording these linguistic innovations until as late as 1989, though its entry for *gender* includes examples that date back at least to the day of Chaucer” (x). They also say that the word gender appears in Dr. Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1785) under two definitions: one related to the classification of gender as masculine,

feminine or neuter, and the other as a reference to sex in the sense that the verb *to gender* would be related *to produce* and *to breed* (xi).

Glover and Kaplan present a case study of a nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite called Herculine Barbin. They say that this person was raised as a woman, with feminine traits that identified her as such. Yet, as an adult she was put under medical examination which proved Barbin to be a man not a woman. They say that she was forced to dress as a man and was also to leave the town she had always lived in. The result was that she committed suicide for not being able to live as if she were, according to them, “a sad disinherited creature” (xiv). After the verdict that caused the death of Herculine Barbin, notions about human sexuality in general started to change and people began to demand new ways of approaching these issues. Glover and Kaplan state that:

Thus the growing willingness to put ‘sex’ into question, even to search for the scientific truth about sexual behavior, gradually opened up new ways in which the entire field of sexual possibilities and sexual identities could be imagined, permanently transforming people’s most intimate sense of their sexual selves. (xv)

They affirm that Freud’s contribution to the studies of sex and desire has led to the problematization of “the relationship between desire and the body” (xviii).

According to Glover and Kaplan “no one knows precisely when and where the word gender was initially used to refer to the social and cultural aspects of sexual difference, but it is clear that the term was already current in sexology by the early 1960s” (xix). In this period a study was published theorizing the distinction between sex

and gender that can be found in *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity*, by Robert. J. Stroller, which came out in 1968 (xx).

This discussion about gender sheds light on how Harriet is portrayed in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Harriet was born a boy but denies not only her male physical attributes but also the supposed “natural,” masculine roles that are expected from a man in patriarchal societies. These characteristics include: the exercise of power, aggression, coldness, and ambition. Men, in these societies, are also supposed to embody the role of the provider, the authority in public life. Yet, Harriet is born a man but denies the “privileges” that accompany such position. We could say that Harriet questions traditional modes of behavior about what it is to be a man or a woman. She manages to dismantle the apparent traditional ways of viewing gender and sex as the same categories. With her behavior and performance, she stresses and criticizes the social constraint of gender roles.

Harriet suffers, physically and emotionally, for being a transvestite. She chooses her feminine self over her masculine one and tries, along the narrative, to stand by her beliefs and decisions. There is a scene in a bar, in one of the several moments when Clare is back to visit her home country, in which the narrative voice states that “[t]hey were in a nightclub at the Pegasus, tables around them filled with coconut husks and hollowed pineapples and pale visitors. The surroundings intended to suggest a galleon on the Spanish Main” (121). This description evokes the image of Jamaica as a stage prepared for a performance to suit the white visitors’ expectation to find an exotic, paradisiacal place. Everything around this bar seems to suggest that Jamaica has been turned upside down to accommodate an idealized new and exotic place to convey, especially to foreigners, how Jamaica is seen as a land of imagination and fantasy. Harriet comments with Clare that “if they were really imaginative, girlfriend, they

would hang some whips and chains on the wall, dress the waiters in loincloths, have the barmaid bare her breasts, and call the whole mess the Middle Passage” (121). From this ironic comment, we can notice that Harriet is conscious of the role this episode is playing as the reenactment of the colonial mode of exploration. But here it is done for the sake of amusing the foreigners, since that is what they expect to find as that is the place that Jamaica still occupies in their imaginary.

While Clare and Harriet are having a conversation in this bar, Clare sees a “large whiteman, cast across their table” (124). This man approaches them but could barely conceal “his shock at the man/woman’s painted visage” (124-25). The white man becomes shocked by his vision of a male/female character who, although he/she looks exotic as the decoration of the bar, he/she is still portrayed as a figure that generates surprising and unsettling emotions.

For Elia, this scene triggers the idea of Harriet as the African warrior. After all, she is a “[b]iracial, bisexual, a survivor of sexual abuse, s/he cannot be a model of purity, only self-empowerment” (356). This moment is mockingly presented through the foreigner’s view as a confrontation between the “beauty” - the white man-, representing the civilized society, and the “beast” - Harriet -, representing the wild, the savage creature, in its uncivilized habitat. Harriet is dressed like a man but has her face covered by make-up which makes her look neither like a man nor like a woman. She is there in a genderless, in-between space. According to the narrative voice, “[f]rom the distance, where the visitor had been sitting, only the back of Harry/Harriet’s head and his dignified dinner jacket had been visible” (125). Therefore, the white man could not grasp that behind that “masculine” look, he would find the feminine face of a transvestite.

In his article “What is Performance?,” Marvin Carlson analyzes the concept of performance seen from a theatrical perspective. He states that:

The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as ‘performance,’ or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself. The difference between doing and performing, according to this way of thinking, would seem to be not in the frame of theatre versus real life but in attitude – we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance. (70)

Carlson’s analysis sheds some light on Harriet’s behavior. Harriet is totally conscious that she is playing a role, aware that she is performing as if she were on a stage. In this scene, Harriet is a man/woman who constructs, consciously, her gender identity. According to Butler, “[t]his radical formulation of the sex/gender distinction suggests that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two” (*Gender Trouble* 112). In this scene, Harriet mixes both masculine and feminine looks and by doing so, she does not necessarily add another category of classification. Here, she mixes the physical traits of both men and women.

In a way, Harriet’s look in this passage can be seen as a parody that makes visible the artificiality and the constraints of gender roles. Wolfreys analyzes the term “gender parody” by saying that it “has been deployed by Judith Butler and refers to the manner in which transvestism or ‘drag’ can expose the inevitably artificial and

restrictive nature of gender identity” (75). By performing an act in this part of the narrative, Harriet exposes the problematic issue of gender construction.

What happens from this moment on, in the bar, is that both Clare and Harriet play with the situation, turning upside down their positions in relation to this white foreigner. At the beginning of the conversation that Clare and Harriet establish with this white man, Clare shifts the way she makes use of the English language. She turns from a local use of the language to a more proper, formal, British English to address this man in mockery, as if she needed to do so to level herself with a “higher authority.” She starts by saying that the man sitting right in front of her, Harriet, is actually her husband, a warrior, who is a prince in a country called Benin located in Africa and that both of them are also visitors to that country. As Elia states, “in a country ‘turned to stage,’ at a bar set up to look like a Spanish galleon, with Clare and Harry/Harriet ‘passing’ for a foreign, patriarchal heterosexual couple—this scene explodes the idea of the African warrior Harry/Harriet claims to be” (356).

The narrative voice shifts the reader’s attention to Clare and Harriet because now Harriet does not only portray an exotic being, but she is also supposed to be a “guest” and not a citizen of this unusual but interesting and exotic country. Harriet, who immediately picks up Clare’s joke, carries on her performance, as she replies:

Yes, extending his hand, rising slightly from his seat, only as far as he imagined a prince of Africa would rise to greet a stranger, I am Prince Badnigga, and this is my consort, Princess Cunnilinga; we are here for the International Festival of Practitioners of Obeah, my dear chap. (125)

In this scene, the narrative voice does not employ the usual “he/she” to refer to Harriet; it uses “his” instead. Here, although Harriet has an ambiguous gender identity, the

narrative voice decides to highlight her masculine traits in order to make her fit into her performance of a prince from a faraway place in Africa. I believe the word “stranger” in this passage is also highly symbolic. In post-colonial societies the strange character is almost never the white man who is constantly seen as the master, as the one who sets the rules. Yet, in this passage, the master type has shifted position with the supposedly subaltern one and becomes almost an intruder, facing such a supposedly powerful “prince” from such a distant country in Africa. The white man is portrayed as being only a white man with no credentials to distinguish him from his opponent who is supposed to be a ruler, a governor of a country.

The reference to a Festival of Practitioners of Obeah taking place in Jamaica also seems suitable. This country, which is constantly portrayed as being an exotic site in the world, seems to be fit to hold such a culturally specific practice. Obeah refers to a practice that is originally brought to America by means of the slave trade. Its practice is, therefore, connected to the diasporic movement of Africans to many parts of the world, especially to the American continent. In this passage, the ironic reference to a Festival of Practitioners of Obeah might also symbolize that the subaltern has finally acquired some power to face the white conqueror. Obeah is a practice that the colonizer or the white people do not often have any knowledge about as it is not part of their culture, of their traditions. As a result, they cannot exercise any power, any control over its practice. Its management escapes their capability to understand and consequently dominate its dynamic. Thus, we may say that, symbolically, the practice of obeah works as a barrier, a wall, and as such works to disconnect, to separate the apprehensive white man from those of African descent who pursue the knowledge of how to operate and manipulate this ancient practice.

In the historical formation of the colonial world, the colonizers have persistently made use of force to subjugate and oppress the black, African population that could offer no counter resistance. But now, the situation is ironically reversed in this mock performance played by Harriet and Clare. For this reason, the white man might be the one who should fear being caught and trapped by an unknown force. This man feels frightened and alarmed as he hears the word obeah and the narrative voice states that this white man “seemed eager to depart, but Harry/Harriet held on” (125).

The white man is again astonished by Harriet’s comments and their satirical performance that make sure to strengthen the supposedly superior position of Harriet as a warrior:

I see you have noticed my eyelids ... these are the colors of our national flag ... At the first sign of manhood each young warrior in our country must do the same ... like most ancient customs it has a practical basis ... going back to the days when we devoured our enemies ... I mean, we needed the means to distinguish, didn’t we? (125).

In this scene, Harriet tries, through the performance of her acts and her discourse, to exercise a certain degree of power. Her performance has the potential to criticize the dynamics of power relations in Jamaica, but it does not have the authority to change the real situation. This scene also refers, ironically, to the practice of cannibalism, which is often attributed to colonized people. The act of human beings eating and devouring others from the same species could be here understood from a symbolic perspective. This act of devouring, literally, the other, is here used mockingly against the foreigner as a means of parodying the colonial stories of cannibals in the Caribbean region.

When Harriet finally lets go of this visitor, and allows him to go back to his seat, the narrative voice tells the reader, jokingly, that this white man “took the whole story back to his table to tell his wife he had spoken with African royalty, and, oh, dear, they are as we feared” (126). Through this scene, the narrative voice exposes and plays with the stereotype, with the exoticism and the cannibalism that are expected, from the foreigner’s standpoint, to come together with stories about the African land. Harriet delivers, consciously and mockingly, an unusual story that she knows is exactly what the foreigners come for:

‘God, Harry’—Clare dabbed at her eye corner—‘what a poor t’ing . . . how he could believe that?’

Poor t’ing nothing . . . we have given him a story he will tell and tell and tell. The sort of t’ing they all want. Exotic. Af-ri-can. Hot nights and mystery. He will return to him lickle business or town or office or country club where everybody is exactly the same and tell them all. (126)

Harriet is, once more, portrayed as a character that is fully aware of her subaltern position but makes use of it to destabilize power relations. The whiteness portrayed by this man could, symbolically, represent the dominance, oppression and cruelty that have been exercised by people who come from outside. This outside presence that seems to exercise an ubiquitous gaze towards the exotic representation of Jamaica and its people is, therefore, unveiled and questioned by Harriet’s act of performance.

Harriet develops her consciousness of her identity along the narrative but she never travels around as Clare does. Yet, Harriet seems to hold a stronger perception of who she is and seems to have more power to make her choices more freely than Clare does. Actually, she acts as a teacher or a nurturing mother to Clare. Along the narrative,

Harriet is the one who keeps reminding Clare of her responsibilities towards herself and her people, as her mother, Kitty, used to do. Also, Harriet draws Clare's attention to the notion of home, emphasizing that Clare's place is there, in Jamaica, among her people. Harriet openly shows how important Clare is for the construction of their past, their origin: "Then, girlfriend, that is the solution. Come back. I'll be here. Come back to us, once your studies are finished" (127). The home, which Harriet invites Clare to come back to, is not the home that carries a strong colonial influence. She invites Clare to rescue their historical past and through this action construct a home, "their" home. Harriet is aware, more consistently than Clare, of her position in her community. She is aware of her situation and how she influences her community. She is conscious of her position as a transvestite and how she could manipulate it through her gender performance to impose her presence and will and to destabilize the accepted order.

Harriet takes advantage of her position as she feels confident to play with the language of the colonizer. As she inverts her position and the white man's in the bar scene, she also alters the style of English she uses to face that white foreigner. During the whole conversation Harriet lets go of her patois to adopt the standard English to convey her supposed superiority facing the white man. However, as soon as she faces Clare, Harriet uses her patois as if there was no more need to pretend. A specific performance of both gender and racial issues is what Harriet tries to achieve when facing this white man and, for a moment, she is able to reverse their positions and play with stereotypical and exotic notions. This passage becomes an act of performance that characterizes Harriet's presence along the narrative, a kind of mimicry. Therefore, we can see that the excess and the difference in this passage come in a form of parody, of mockery. Mimicry here is also a form of performance itself, a process that demonstrates a questioning of both gender and race.

Chapter eight, entitled “Homebound,” relates Clare’s permanent return to Jamaica. Here, Clare comes to face Jamaica as a homeland, a motherland. Being motherless, she turns to her country in search for answers that could, if not heal her wounds, at least provide her with a clearer sense of belonging. It is also relevant that, Clare, who begins her return back to her mother and her homeland, comes back to Jamaica infertile due to a “raging infection in her womb” (169). The fact that she is now barren makes Clare uncertain about “her future as a woman” (170). When a woman gives birth she is contributing, with this new baby that represents the next generation, not only to the development and continuation of one’s family, tradition and values but also to the maintenance of societal structure. As Clare becomes unable to have a baby, she feels she cannot perform the role that is expected from a woman in this society. Her role as a woman, in the traditional sense, is at stake if we consider that in most patriarchal societies the woman is mainly taken into consideration regarding her natural ability to breed babies and to become a mother. In this sense, in gender terms she feels as displaced as Harriet. At this point, the narrative voice tells the reader that Clare is now required to adjust to a new perspective in terms of what it means to be a woman.

In this same chapter, the narrative voice lets us know about two surprising twists in Clare’s and Harriet’s lives. When Clare is still in hospital trying to recover from her sickness, Harriet comes to visit her. In this visit, Harriet tells Clare that she has made the decision to be a woman:

Harry?

Harriet, now, girlfriend . . . finally.

Then you have it done?

No, man. Cyaan afford it. Maybe when de revolution come . . . but the choice is mine, man, is made. Harriet live and Harry be no more. (168)

Harriet decides now to become Harriet, and not her male counterpart Harry, and this is how Elia analyzes Harriet's decision: "This is a truly subversive act, as it allows her/him to deconstruct dominant ideas of race, sex, and class without substituting new ones that would merely have the effect of creating additional divisive boundaries" (353). By making such a decision, Harriet questions a system which is fraught with binary divisions. In fact, Harriet tries to make explicit the inability of this system to "accommodate multiplicity" (Elia 353).

Both of them, Clare and Harriet, are, from now on, open to embrace the several influences and multiplicities that permeate their lives. The two of them will engage more deeply in a continuous unfolding of their stories which will lead them to a continuous discovery of possibilities of actions. This moment of the narrative is one of the most important acts of crossing boundaries which will bring deep changes to both of them.

This same chapter is marked by an episode in which Harriet takes Clare to visit Clare's grandmother's place which she had not visit for the last twenty years. Doing so, Clare goes back to the river and forest of her childhood. Harriet warns Clare that she has to start her new life somewhere and this place to start turns out to be the decaying and hidden house of Clare's grandmother. The narrative voice seems to foreshadow that although she is now in her mother country, Clare's attempt to claim back her matrilineal heritage is not going to be an easy process as we can see through the description of this house:

The house could not be seen at all. The house so hidden it seemed to exist no longer. Once the center of their life in this place. The structure which held her grandmother's stern church. Her grandfather's senility. Her mother's schoolbooks, wormed, yellow, handed down. The building where it was, where she remembered it as being, screened by green. Nothing but the chaos of the green—reaching across space, time too it seemed. When only Arawaks and iguanas and birds and crocodiles and snakes dwelt here. (172)

The sense and feeling of abandonment, presented in this description, is very symbolic in the context of the whole narrative. The structure of the house is there but its essence of being the point of reference and security to the long gone family, including Clare, has also succumbed to the power of the forest, of nature. This rotten place will turn out to be the shelter that Clare searches for. The abandonment felt by Clare because of her mother's absence leads her to search for a maternal nurturing place. The protection that her mother in a way denied her during their time together in Jamaica and also in the USA is the one she comes back to reclaim. The feeling of reconnection starts to arise intensely on her from the moment she visits her grandmother's place. As Carole Davies states, “[m]uch of the identification with ‘home’ comes from the rural grandmother who maintains continuity with homeland and whose entire being conveys the multifaceted composition of Caribbean society” (122). The multilayered composition of Clare's selfhood will blend and merge with the multifaceted legacy of the Caribbean society. Clare starts to understand that her restoration is connected and intertwined with the restoration of her grandmother's place.

According to Toland-Dix, St. Elizabeth, the place where Clare's grandmother's house is located, has a great impact on her life. She states that:

Clare's most cherished memories are of the trips she has taken with her mother to her grandmother's farm in rural St. Elizabeth, for this is where Kitty is most at ease and where Clare has felt the deepest connection with her. Consequently, St. Elizabeth is the place where Clare longs to be affirmed, where she desperately wants to belong. (41)

St. Elizabeth, then, turns out to be the place that triggers a new start in Clare's life.

Clare, on her way to restoration, claims back her history and visualizes that "identity is not a singular thing" (Davies 122). She is a mix of several cultural influences. She is multifaceted, multi-layered and longs for a reconciliation with her diversity. As Davies states,

The creoleness that is essentially Caribbean identity is the necessity of accepting all facets of experience, history and personhood in the definition of the self. Here, Cliff integrates these into a consciousness of her own identities. Personal history, family history and a people's history and culture all converge. (122-23)

This time Clare is on the right track, moving towards her home, her maternal lineage, her country that she now identifies as being Jamaica. The title "Homebound" is also very symbolic because it conveys the journey, the search for a place to be called home that Clare has been longing for throughout the whole narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven*. Being at her grandmother's place, Clare goes through the rebaptism scene mentioned earlier in the same river of her childhood. The feeling of restoration and

preservation are intertwined in Clare's life. She, from now on, will engage in a strong attempt to really rescue and preserve the memories of her matrilineal ancestry.

In terms of land reference, the reconnection in *No Telephone to Heaven* is meant to be with the country Jamaica and with the memories and cultural heritage left by Clare's maternal African ancestry. The moment after Clare's rebaptism, Harriet, meaningfully, triggers Clare's past memories by asking her what she used to do in the place they are now. Once more, the narrative voice informs the reader that Clare's dearest memories refer back to her mother and the time the two of them spent together:

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 . . . the tree with the sweetest mango seemed her cherished goal . . . and she always managed to find it in deep bush. (173)

Even though Clare's upbringing was left under the care of her father, Clare does not seem to recall her father's presence in her life. Her memories and feeling seem to be directed only towards her mother and the meaningfulness Kitty has played in her life.

From the moment she settles down in St. Elizabeth in order to reclaim her story, her language and her land, she begins teaching History to local children because she believes that doing so is a way of contributing to develop the population's awareness of their history and not the master's. In the essay "Essentialism and Experience," bell hooks analyzes the black, feminist writing in which she recognizes the power of a teacher over the students' lives. She stresses how the students, from marginalized societies, are kept unheard within their school environment: "As a teacher, I recognize that students from marginalized groups enter their classrooms within institutions where

their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed, whether these students discuss facts – those which any of us might know – or personal experience” (177). As Clare becomes a teacher, I believe she engages in an attempt to break down with this rigid structure in classrooms in which the pedagogical practices are used to privileging certain voices over others. I believe she tries to make use of a pedagogy that aims at highlighting the relevance of the voices from the marginalized groups that had been silenced. By doing so, she helps to value diversity and inclusion in the building of the history of the country and struggles to undo the damages that the process of acculturation has inflicted upon the local population. As a consequence, Clare begins to question the rigid, well structured relations of power in which the patriarchal society, in Jamaica, has been constructed over the years.

In terms of teaching, Clare follows her mother’s path to try to destabilize the oppressing learning system in Jamaica. Kitty, as presented in *Abeng*, has a strong desire to become a school teacher, as it is mentioned in the narrative: “She was determined to become a school teacher and to build her own school in St. Elizabeth, where she would teach children not from the manuals sent by the colonial office, but from manuals she herself would write” (129). Clare, recovering her mother’s dream, engages in an attempt to empower the new generation to fight back, and offer a counter-discourse against the the so-called official history, which is still tainted with colonialist practices. Overcoming the marginalized people’s illiteracy is one way to make this population fight for their rights and their self-representation.

In the article “From Three Worlds to One: Two Decades of Rapid Globalization,” Buell analyzes Clare’s character in *No Telephone to Heaven*, by stating that “[i]n a later attempt to repatriate what has been internationalized and dispersed, Clare works as a teacher, trying to uncover/recover Jamaican resistance history effaced

from official books” (105). Therefore, the recovering of their past is also a reconstruction of her origins, and diving deep into their roots and acknowledging them, comes to be the only way out of a situation of powerlessness. For Clare, identifying how the neglected population of Jamaica get contaminated by a “history effaced from official books” and the undermining of this process become the central point for the construction of a better homeland.

The narrative voice explains that while Clare was wandering around the USA and England, Harriet was building her powerful ability to heal people’s wounds through her studies about healing practices. Elia mentions that

[a]s the narrative unfolds, Harry/Harriet evolves from a youth who had somehow always accepted his/her strangeness into a care-giver and root-worker who daily performs her difference and self-chosen multivalent identity, her queerness, as she tends to the various ills of her beloved community. (354)

Harriet, then, becomes knowledgeable in this area as she learns this ability “with old women in the country, women who knew the properties of roots and leaves and how to apply spells effectively” (171). Healing is primarily an activity traditionally related to a woman’s job and it is associated to a process of regeneration, renewal, rebirth, and restoration. In this regard, in this narrative it is also associated to a sense of restoration related to the reinterpretation of a veiled past long forgotten in the history of Jamaica. The process of trying to cure and heal wounds, physical and emotional ones, demands commitment and dedication. Harriet is thoroughly committed to the healing of her wounds as well as Clare’s. This search for cure based on the practices of ancient customs is also the means for Harriet to turn to the past to make sense of her present.

Harriet's attempt to cure other people's diseases in her country turns out to be a need to heal her own wounds as well. She, who is often presented in a tone of mockery in the beginning of the narrative, turns out to be the one who holds the power to cure and heal people, spiritually and physically, as she becomes a nurse working at a hospital. Portrayed as healer, Harriet has the function of nurturing and helping people in Jamaica but mostly important she is "the" healer who helps Clare to claim back her maternal matrilineage. By embodying that role, Harriet possesses power—a power to cure and transform not only the body but also the spirit. She attempts to heal the spirit that has been affected by the continuous practice of colonization which thwarted the possibility of the local population to exercise their agency, their right to exist, as a community, with their own African cultural legacy.

As a transvestite, Harriet dresses up as a female nurse to do her job. She puts on the nurse's uniform, a skirt and not a pair of pants, as a man would do. As the narrative voice states, "[n]one of her people downtown let on if they knew a male organ swung gently under her bleached and starched skirt" (171).

In chapter X, which is entitled "The Great Beast," Clare sees that, unfortunately, her country has been left to deteriorate, and she sees how her mother's people, which is also her people, have been left to follow a trajectory of despair and agony. In this chapter, while Clare is walking around the places of her childhood, with Harriet, she meets one of her old mother's acquaintances, Miss Cherry, who Clare had not seen since she had left Jamaica as a young girl. Clare greets Miss Cherry and identifies "herself through her female line, as was custom, and Miss Cherry nodded at her" (185). In this scene, one's identification is clearly linked to one's maternal ancestry. This passage seems to be foreseeing that the feminine aspect in the narrative will acquire a new meaning, a new significance. This new home for Clare, surrounded by the

memories of her mother and grandmother, will turn into the woman-centered space that will nurture and comfort her in her deepest hopes and aspirations for the longed reconnection with her matrilineal heritage.

At the same time that the narrative voice favors the female heritage, it also highlights the distressing and agonizing situation of the marginalized Jamaican society as Miss Cherry mentions to Clare: “You see the despair you people lef’ it to?” (186). Although she is now at home, Clare is made aware that she is about to face a home with hundreds of striking problems. Jamaica is now a place in which the basic products to feed the population are scarce and expensive. While Clare is walking with Harriet around the streets of her community, she stops at a shop which has the following announcement: “GOODS WE DO NOT HAVE AT THE MOMENT” (185) and the leading item on the list comes to be sugar, what can be seen as an irony or absurdity, as Jamaica is a great producer of sugar. The way the narrative voice describes the poor community, which houses the marginalized people, seems to be very close to the description of Clare’s grandmother’s family house. The needy population is then left adrift, with no guiding hand as a sign of hope.

In this chapter Clare decides to join a guerrilla movement. As *No Telephone to Heaven* favors a narrative of resistance and social transformation, Clare, together with Harriet, will try to accomplish this change through a more politicized attempt to subvert the government’s authority. Their decision to join this guerrilla movement will bring deep changes to their lives and can be understood as their attempt to better understand their selves, their desire to identify Jamaica as a place to be called home, and their effort to try to do something meaningful for the country.

Clare joins this group that is guided by another woman and at the end of the interview Clare has with this leader, “[t]he two women shook hands” (196) as a sign of

agreement. In *No Telephone to Heaven* women start and lead the revolution. They are responsible for presenting a counter-discourse against the white hegemonic ruling regime. The narrative voice presents the leader of the revolutionaries as a knowledgeable person, when she tells Clare: “You speak of the knowledge of resistance . . . the loss of this knowledge. I ask you to think of Bishop. Rodney. Fanon. Lumumba. Malcolm. First. Luthuli. Garvey. Mxembe. Marley. Moloise. Think of these who are gone—and ask yourself how, why . . .?” (196). These names have been the names of people involved with revolution, with resistance, with struggle against colonialism. They will join this list on behalf of their land, of their culture, of their selves, and of the next generation, the kids in Jamaica, as the leader expresses: “We—neither of us—want for these children a harsh, unnatural end” (196). Again, as Clare’s mother had warned her, they try to do something for their people and the future generation. As Gifford states, “[i]n *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare acquires a discriminatory filter that will enable her to defend the oppressed against the oppressors. This is especially evident in her involvement with the band of guerrillas whose primary mission is to eradicate vestiges of empire” (46).

Clare, during her sojourn in Jamaica, is given the chance to learn about the history of the country, about the Maroons, the escape ex-slaves who settled in the mountains of Jamaica, and the meaningfulness of the mythological figure of Nanny, as she displays during the interview. The first encounter the readers have with Nanny is when the narrative voice in *Abeng* describes this woman by saying that: “In 1733, the sorceress, the *obeah*-woman, was killed by a *quashee*-a slave faithful to the white planters-at the height of the War of the Maroons” (14). The narrative voice adds that the Maroons rebelled against the white man’s regime and that “[t]hey waged war from 1655-1740. Nanny was the magician of this revolution—she used her skill to unite her

people and to consecrate their battles” (*Abeng* 14). Boehmer observes that “colonized women were, as it is called, doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and, in some cases, religion and caste” (224). The image of Nanny, however, against all odds subverts this view and she becomes a powerful presence in the history of Jamaica and a strong reference for women. This indomitable woman becomes, for Clare, another feminine reference, besides her mother and grandmother, in her fight for a better Jamaica. Following Nanny’s steps, Clare will also declare war against the white ruling regime in her country.

In the article “Transcultural Fictions,” Almeida states that “Michelle Cliff in *No Telephone to Heaven* builds a multi-layered and ambiguous narrative in which stories of feminine subjects in dislocation are intertwined” (171). The stories of Nanny, Miss Mattie, Clare’s grandmother and Kitty, her mother, are all interrelated. Nanny is seen as a true representation against the domineering regime, and her name becomes the inspiration for the rebels in an attempt to free Jamaica from neocolonial influences:

The people around her [Clare] had a deep bitterness to contend with. Dressed as they were, they might move closer. Sleeping on the ground, squatting at the roadside, evoking the name of Nanny, in whose memory they were engaged in this, they might move closer. (5)

Even though the guerrilla group, in the truck, displays a great diversity among its members, Clare does not really match with any of them. She is not a member of the social class she decides to represent in this episode. However, she knows that she has a role to fulfill. This feeling becomes evident from what she learns from Harriet and from

the history of this powerful heroine, Nanny, from Jamaica. She knows also that she has to carry on the heritage she has inherited from her maternal lineage.

The alliance with this guerilla group and the following changes it brings to the narrative and to Harriet and Clare's lives will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Home: A Quest for Relocation and Identification.

third world views

(for Grenada)

for me
 no empty bagasse pages
 of their lies
 no hammered voices
 falsetto smooth
 covering war cries
 but
 the salt sea spray
 of an island's tears
 that burn me
 acid
 and the wind
 the wind that sings in echoes of their bombs
 the wind that sings contralto tremors
 of their bombs

would that nutmeg
 choke their obeah
 and the dust of cinnamon
 lift their prints
 as evidence
 for babes now growing
 in an island's belly

how third world my blues
 of oceans bending backwards
 to make ends meet
 of mountains rising up to misty tears
 of mothers
 patching pieces of sky
 to cover the winded bellies
 of their babies cry
 how third world my blues

Jean Binta Breeze

This chapter will focus on a discussion on how Clare's personal story of constant dislocations contributes to her joining and her identification with members of a guerrilla movement in an attempt to relocate and renegotiate her sense of belonging in her quest for her homeland/motherland. Clare's political decision to join a guerrilla movement in *No Telephone to Heaven* is strongly related to some historical information that surround

the discovery and construction of the Caribbean region, which is presented in the novel *Abeng*.

In *Abeng*, the progress of the narrative accommodates the telling of two levels of history: the “official” and the “unofficial” ones. The official history is the one transmitted by the imperial power, mainly through the teachers in Jamaica, and the unofficial one is the one told by the narrative voice, not to Clare, but to the reader, as Gifford points out:

Besides chronicling Clare’s story, *Abeng*’s narrator recounts a detailed historical past almost completely separate from Clare’s conscious experience. The nature of that historical past is quite different from the one presented to the young Clare through her father and through her education. That other history is an ‘alternative’ history: a history other than and sometimes contrary to what Clare learns as history. That alternative history is also an ‘unofficial’ history since it deviates from the agenda of the ‘official’ history presented by Clare’s teachers at the St. Catherine School for Girls and by her father-as-teacher whose agenda supports colonial values. (63)

Therefore, the official history seems to discourage her and the other children to gain knowledge of their own culture. Instead, they are taught about the English culture through the manuals that come from England so that the teachers, in Jamaica, make use of them to start the process of acculturation, as follows:

The manuals also contained instructions for teaching literature: Mr. Powell was told to have the younger children read poems by Tennyson, the older ones, poems by Keats –‘supplied herewith.’

To see that all in the school memorized the ‘Daffodils’ poem of William Wordsworth, ‘spoken with as little accent as possible; here as elsewhere, the use of pidgin is to be severely discouraged.’ (*Abeng* 84)

Through the teaching of English literature, among many other issues, the socialization of the Jamaican children to the norms of English culture is imposed gradually but continually and consistently. Yet, this process of acculturation is not perceptible by Clare during the entire narrative in *Abeng*. In this novel, Clare is portrayed as a twelve-year-old girl who is fully guided by the white ruling regime in Jamaica as “her father and teachers had exposed her to a whitewashed version of it from an early age” (Gifford 78).

To exemplify the telling and showing of the unofficial history in Jamaica, the narrative of *Abeng* displays a great deal of historical facts. The unofficial history is one of the several layers that structure the plot of this novel. Time and again the critical narrative voice invites the reader to acknowledge this unauthorized history by telling historical facts that are not revealed to the Jamaican students by the teachers or by anyone else:

Christopher Columbus discovered—strange verb—discovered Jamaica in 1494, while on his second journey across the curve of the globe for Isabella and Ferdinand, los Reyes Católicos, the Catholic Monarchs. The series of his voyages began in 1492, the year he sighted Cuba and made a landfall on the island which became known as Hispaniola—later divided into the colonies of Haiti and Santo Domingo—the year the Jews were officially driven out of Spain, following centuries of persecution. Los Reyes

Católicos are credited with unifying the Spanish realm on the Iberian peninsula, financing the discovery of America, enforcing the expulsion of the Jews, and soon after, the Moors, and initiating the slave trade between Africa and the Americas. In 1494 they negotiated the Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the 'non-Christian' world between Portugal and Spain: Portugal got India, Africa and Brazil; Spain got everything else. The treaty followed a bull issued by Pope Alexander VI. (*Abeng* 66)

Later on, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, these two sides of the Caribbean historical formation will help Clare make her decision to identify with her mother's African legacy.

Back in *Abeng*, while the narrative voice tells the story of Clare's life, it also makes the reader aware of the taking over of Jamaica by England. Yet, this fact is not mentioned to Clare or to any other children at school, as it is mentioned directly to the reader:

The capture of the island from the Spanish had been an afterthought. The British fleet, under the command of Penn and Venables, following the orders of the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, was unable to take Santo Domingo, and so moved on Jamaica. This took place in 1655. Over the course of the next 180 years, until freedom was obtained in 1834, there was armed, sustained guerrilla warfare against the forces of enslavement. A complex intelligence system between the rebels and the plantation slaves. A network of towns and farms and camps independent from the white planters. An army of thousands—literally

thousands—called the Maroons. And this army had moved over the mountains now shadowed at the back of the Tabernacle.
(*Abeng* 20)

The ancient forces of resistance in Jamaica, which are clearly portrayed in this passage, are never mentioned to Clare while she is growing up. She is never put in contact with the world of the Maroons and how meaningful their fight to keep Jamaica an independent country is for the political, cultural and social structure of the country. Assimilation of these facts will come together later on during the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven*, but by now readers can only “anticipate a future Clare who will embody that history contained in the first half of *Abeng*” (Gifford 64).

However, by putting together and displaying these two histories together to the reader, the narrative voice seems to warn this reader that a taking of action will be required of Clare when time comes in *No Telephone to Heaven*. As Gifford states, “[h]ere the narrator puts the two stories together. However, by telling the reader directly what Clare does not know, the two stories do not yet come together for Clare Savage. Only the reader envisions that merging” (77). The absence of knowledge, by Clare, in *Abeng*, and also in the initial parts of the narrative in *No Telephone to Heaven*, when she is still an adolescent under the care of her father, can be seen as a result of the action of her father and teachers.

In this context of historical unawareness, Kitty has a substantial role to play in Clare’s lack of understanding of who she is. The narrative voice, in both novels, does not present any passages in which Kitty is concerned about passing on, to Clare, historical details from a different standpoint other than the ones transmitted by her father and teachers. Kitty knows that her place is in Jamaica but, unfortunately, she tries to make Clare believe, as Boy does, that her place is not in Jamaica but someplace else

as she states: “Jamaica is just a tiny little place. There are no opportunities for someone like you here. I don’t want to leave Jamaica because my place is here. But you don’t have to be confined by this sad little island” (*Abeng* 150). Therefore, Kitty is also responsible for the historical blindness that, at first, informs Clare’s life.

In a sense, Kitty’s attitude will become an apparent paradox. While growing up, Clare does not have any incentive from her mother to be in Jamaica or even to get acquainted with the story of her maternal ancestry. Yet, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Kitty becomes concerned about encouraging Clare to fight for and claim back a love for Jamaica and its people that she has always been taught to despise. Subsequently, she comes back to her home country and takes her mother’s advice to heart and tries to do something for her people by joining a guerrilla movement. In this group, Clare and Harriet, together with the other revolutionaries, attempt to rewrite history from a different perspective, as the narrative voice states, when they are at the back of the truck that transports them around Jamaica:

This dripping group of pale and dark people standing in the back of a rickety, noisy old truck was little more than a band. But their survival dress could make them feel, seem to be, an army. So they hoped. ‘It is no mystery/ We making history,’ someone hummed in dub. Yes. (5)

They try to write a history of resistance and thus create a space in which they will have a chance to reconstruct the silenced African legacy of their historical past.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, as Clare grows older and mature with the moving to inhospitable countries such as the USA and England and with the death of her mother, she begins to inquire about the official history that has been transmitted to her and while she does so, she also starts to search for the silenced, unofficial history that has been

hidden away from her. She starts her investigation by instructing herself through the reading of loads of books in England and “[t]o come to terms with that part of herself that represents empire in all its manifestations, Clare pursues her postgraduate studies in England. Like a patient undergoing psychotherapy, Clare can only expunge her demons by fully and intimately facing them” (Gifford 35). After being familiarized with the unofficial history, she becomes aware that her place is not outside Jamaica and she has an important role to play as a history teacher back in her homeland. By exercising this position, she feels she has a chance to undo or at least weaken and undermine the imperialistic influence in her home country.

Clare’s process of awareness comes at first from the intellect. As a history teacher she feeds the children with the understanding of their own history and not the colonial one. Clare teaches the children their positions and responsibilities towards the construction of a new place that could be freer from others’ domination. As Edmondson states, “[i]n colonial and much of post-colonial Jamaica, Jamaicans lived without knowledge of their past—they lived with absence” (187). I believe that when Clare starts teaching history, she attempts to erase this absence with more concrete histories of their lives. Doing so, she attempts to unveil to the children the unofficial history that was denied to her while she was a child and adolescent. Taking this action, she contributes for the new generation to engage in a more politicized way in a fight for a freer country. As Davies states, “each movement demands another definition and redefinition of one’s identity” (129). This movement of going back to Jamaica will require, from Clare, a rewriting of her self, of her notion of what home means and of how she faces herself within her community.

The discovery Clare undergoes in *No Telephone to Heaven* resembles that of an archaeologist. She tries to rescue the bits and pieces of what has been lost in time. As

Boehmer states, “for the colonized to tell a history meant *assuming control*—taking charge of the past, of self-definition, or of political destiny. No longer was history something that came only from the outside” (196). Her analysis fits into Clare’s growing consciousness of her self and of the history of her country. She struggles to take control of her life by learning the history of her past. Therefore, Clare excavates into ancient times and it is through this process of research and discovery that she realizes how much closer to her matrilineal ancestry she becomes.

In Jamaica, Clare is, in fact, part of the privileged social class. One element that contributes to this belonging is the fact that she is, physically speaking, light-skinned. She is not part of the large number of population that is mainly constituted by poor and disadvantaged blacks. In Jamaica, she descends from families that possess land and being land-owners in Jamaica is already a sign of superiority not granted to most part of the population. These two elements favor her position in her country where “[c]olor and lineage cannot be as easily renounced, though theoretically the meaning ascribed to them can be transformed over time” (Toland-Dix 49).

However, when Clare is in Jamaica, she intentionally tries to come closer to a social class she is not part of. This group that she sides with is constituted by the dispossessed, unfortunate, deprived and underprivileged ones. As Toland-Dix states,

Return is a difficult choice, for Clare goes back to a place with a color cast system that Cliff consistently describes as ‘insane.’ However, Clare returns as a resistor and revolutionary rather than as a collaborator, consciously aligning herself with the legacy of Nanny.” (48)

In this light, Clare makes explicit, as she joins the guerilla group, the distorted modes of relations that take place among the social classes in Jamaica. She decides to side with

them in favor of this forgotten and silenced group in the social structure of Jamaican society. When Clare, already back in Jamaica and in Harriet's company, strolls around the community in which she grew up, she becomes astonished by how much her community has been left adrift to their own destiny. This is how the narrative voice presents the decaying atmosphere of the country:

There was new government. One party. And shortages—severe. Petrol at ten dollars a gallon—like salt, on the rise. And the dollar falling fast. People said the IMF might repossess the country. It was a time of more hideaways for the rich—the expansion of the sandbox. ‘Make it your own,’ the tourist board told the visitors. Tires burned again at roadblocks. And tourists tipped demonstrators who let them pass, easing their escape. No sugar—much of the time. Little rice. No flour. People could buy necessities only by marrying goods, purchasing flour—were there flour—along with a luxury, a jar of chutney, a box of Cheer. No vaccine. But plenty-plenty polio. Children bent up all over the place. Talawa pain, missis, talawa pain. (187)

Right after this passage, Clare is taken, by Harriet, to have an interview with the leader of the guerrilla movement. At this moment of the narrative, Clare is a thirty-five-year-old woman who is aware of her historical family and country background. During this interview Clare reveals she has been back for the last two years and states that she has been studying and “teaching children in a secondary school downtown” (192). When questioned what kind of history she has been teaching the students she says that it is “[t]he history of their . . . our homeland” (193). Along this interview Clare reveals that she is aware of a great deal of the unofficial history that had been hidden from her

while she was in Jamaica and also in the USA. So, she has played an important role in trying to make knowable the unofficial history of her country and her people, not only to herself but also to this community she chooses to identify with.

This interview becomes the only passage in *No Telephone to Heaven* that the reader is made aware that Clare has already been in contact with not only the history of her country but with the history of her own family. She reports that she had “listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart” (193) and that she is aware of “[g]hosts; the spirits of Maroons” (193). She makes explicit that along the history of Jamaica her family is also guilty and responsible for the huge suffering of the African slaves as she states:

I am in it. 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.
(194)

This information given during this interview reveals that the unofficial history has been unlocked and that Clare is fully aware of relevant parts of Jamaica and of her family history. The consciousness of these historical facts shapes her new view upon her homeland and upon how she sees herself in her community.

Although Clare does not recognize the power of her father’s guidance any more, she is aware that her past cannot be erased and that within her soul she has inherited several cultural influences. When the guerrilla leader asks her about her allegiance, Clare states: “I have African, English, Carib in me” (189). She is conscious that all the

layers of her cultural influences are juxtaposed, and although she favors her matrilineal ancestry, she is not able to dismiss all the other influences.

Although towards the end of the novel she is back to her homeland, the narrative voice makes sure to highlight that the feelings of displacement and in-betweenness felt abroad, still persist. During the interview, the narrative voice states clearly that the interviewer sees Clare differently from the group she is ready to join when she asks: “Do you think you are morally superior to someone of my color?” (190). Clare, naturally, denies any difference among them and states that they are alike, that they have a common ancestry by declaring that the interviewer is the color of her grandmother. Clare tries to blend into the group by means of her color identification with her grandmother and, consequently, with her mother.

In her decision to counter attack the actual established political system, Clare joins this guerrilla movement and is accepted by the interviewer as she states: “My history brought me to this room. The history I have learned . . . rather, recognized . . . since my return is something else. I know only that the loss, the forgetting . . . of resistance . . . of tenderness . . . is a terrible thing” (196). However, this decision to identify with this part of the Jamaican population, which she is not part of, places her again as a displaced person within her own home country. She tries to follow her mother’s advice to fight for her people as she makes clear during the interview: “My mother told me to help my people. At the moment this is the closest I can come” (196). As she favors her matrilineal cultural traits, she decides to follow her mother’s advice as a way of establishing a connection with her maternal legacy. This group she favors represents the people that her mother reminds her of.

The first chapter of *No Telephone to Heaven* is called “Ruininate.” This word connotes something that is spoilt, destroyed as it is the surroundings where Clare’s grandmother’s house is placed:

By the time the group had decided to take the farm as a place to stay and conceal themselves, the forest had already moved in—long time—around the house, edging the verandah. Mahogany. Broadleaf. Mosquito wood. Shadbark. Silk-cotton. Guango. Cashew. Lignum vitae. Ebony. Wildpine. The forest had obliterated the family graves, so that the grandmother and her husband, and their son who died before them, were wrapped by wild vines which tangled the mango trees, anchoring their duppies to the ground. (8)

The word “ruinate,” “a distinctive Jamaican term” (1) may also refer to the broken and decaying parts of a building. In this sense, this title matches with the description of Clare’s grandmother’s house in the parish of St. Elizabeth, as mentioned before. The narrative voice seems to set the tone of hopelessness that also permeates the narrative. As the narrative voice states, “[t]he grandmother was long since dead, and the farm had been left by the family to the forest. To *ruination*, the grandmother would have said” (8).

Although this place is pictured as decayed and abandoned, it represents the life and the hope Clare logs for on her way to restoration. This is the place she so much longs for during her wanderings through the USA and England. Although this place seems to be, literally, going through a disintegration process, it, paradoxically, provides protection and guards Clare and the other guerrilla members from the outside world, as it is shown in the quote below:

The soldiers left enough forest alive so that they were not visible from the road which passed at the foot of the hill. They lived in a clearing behind a screen. People of course knew someone was there, but they were given to understand only that the granddaughter of Miss Mattie had returned. (11)

The imagery that is evoked in the first paragraph of this chapter is one related to a dark and gloomy afternoon where that piece of land seems to have been forgotten by God:

It was a hot afternoon after a day of solid heavy rain. Rain which had drenched them and seemed not to have finished with them, but only to have taken itself off somewhere to return soon, replenished, with a new strength. The promise of another deluge was suspended in the afternoon half-light. The sun—hanging somewhere behind the sky, somewhere they could not find it—was unable to dry the roadbed or the thick foliage along the mountainside, so the surface stayed slick-wet, making driving a trial. (3)

Throughout this first chapter, the narrative voice plays with a depressing description of nature. Nature seems ready to provide its darker side as if it were telling the revolutionaries that whatever they are planning to accomplish will not be backed by the nurturing side of nature.

Moving along with this scenery there is a truck crowded with men and women—Clare, Harriet, and the other members of the guerrilla movement. Nature does not seem to collaborate with their intent to question and subvert the ruling regime in Jamaica. The sun seems to deny its presence, its brightness, and its undeniable contribution to the

lives of those characters in the back of the truck. Without the sun, the roadbed is slippery and the difficulty of their enterprise is stressed. The road, where the truck is riding along, together with the environment, all seem to invite the reader to perceive that the Jamaican land, Clare so much longs for, might be more inhospitable than she might have expected. This truck, with all the guerrilla members, is also fighting against the vigorous nature in order to reach its destination, as it is stated:

At each curve the driver took care to sound his horn. That frequent blast and the constant rattle of the truck bounced through the valley rimmed by the mountains, loosing themselves in the soft green and mixing with the harsh metallic voices of clinging blackbirds, questioning, it seemed, who these people were and asking what was their purpose here—all sounding against the steady *drip-drip* of the water. (4)

They are driving through a valley, a depression of land surrounded by mountains. The non-stop rain conveys a feeling of despair and hopelessness facing a stronger force. In this scene, in which nature seems not to collaborate with their enterprise, the motto NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN, which is written on the side of the trunk and is also, significantly, the title Cliff chooses for the novel, represents a break, a rupture with heaven, with God, and with the possibility of being successful in the project. Nature seems to tell them that a connection with God is cut off, and that there is nobody to hear their pleas. Therefore, there is no use in waiting for a suitable solution, from heavens, to their problems.

In this truck, Clare Savage is first presented by the narrative in the following manner: “A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowner, native-born, slaves, émigrés, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily

could have hated her” (5). The narrative voice is clearly positioning Clare in a rather uneasy situation as she cannot erase all cultural influences she has inherited. All elements of her heritage and life experience are here put together, juxtaposed, shaping her multi-layered identity. Within her own homeland, facing the social class she decides to support, she still could be portrayed as a displaced person, a “white-chocolate” as she is called by the principal of the school in the USA. She is now in the truck, but as the narrative voice states, even though she is giving her life to support the people of her country, she cannot be easily accepted by them for her ambiguous position.

To take part in the guerrilla movement Clare agrees to allow this group to use the land, which once belonged to her maternal family, to prepare their revolutionary acts against the government. I believe that this act of conceding the use of her family land by this group is one step into her attempt to embrace her mother’s advice to do something for her people, as Elia observes: “Eventually, as Clare and Harriet grow closer, Clare also learns to embrace her own multiplicity, and becomes an empowered, politically-aware active person, donating her grandmother’s abandoned land to the revolution she joins” (355). This rotten piece of land becomes not only Clare’s home, but the home of all guerrilla members. They clear part of the land for plantation and trade some part of their production, especially *ganja*, that is, marijuana, with “a small-plane pilot, a shaggy whiteman” (11). In exchange, this man brings them ammunition and guns which are “passed to them in wooden boxes, stamped MADE IN USA, further information as to their origin broadly stenciled in black on the ends of the boxes: Massachusetts, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana” (11). With this reference, the narrative voice criticizes the members of the guerrilla movement for using the land for growing illegal narcotics and also for commercializing guns and ammunition with the USA as a means to support their cause.

Although the revolutionaries desire to set a different social class structure in Jamaican society in order to open a new space to accommodate the marginalized population, they seem to do so by means of violence, as we can see from the guns they acquire. They combat the imperialistic regime by using the same weapon used by this system. Yet, the hostility and brutality that shapes the relationships in *No Telephone to Heaven* is also portrayed from a different perspective.

To illustrate the growing violence in Jamaica, the narrative voice gives an example of the atrocious killing of an upper-class family—Paul H's family. This passage illustrates once more the complexity of the political and social relations in Jamaica, as in the case of the revolutionaries' means of attaining their goals, mentioned above. At this point, the striking violence that shapes the relation among the social classes in Jamaica does not have only a connection with the dichotomous relationship that is represented by the historical opposition between colonizers and colonized. The boundaries that limit the relationships between different social classes in Jamaica seem to be very strict and fixed, as Elia illustrates: "Paul has never been to Christopher's Dungle shack, or Christopher's girlfriend's apartment, although he calls him, and occasionally picks him up there. Christopher, on the other hand, is at first a kitchen help, then yard boy in Paul's parent's villa" (362). In this sense, the different social classes do not mix. Paul H and Christopher inhabit the same house but live in worlds completely apart. Their contact, despite being cordial, remains at the level of the relationship between master (Paul H) and servant (Christopher), until something quite tragic happens.

Paul H is the character who is at the party at Buster Said's house with whom Clare has sexual intercourse. When Paul H arrives at home, after this party, his father, mother, sister and the housekeeper are all dead. This killing is committed by

Christopher, the yard boy, who has been close to Paul H's family since early age. When Paul arrives at home and sees what has happened to his family, he confirms naively that "[t]hings were getting truly out of hand, his father would say" (23). The only person he thinks about calling to help him is his long term "friend," Christopher, as the narrative voice ironically states: "Yes. He would ask Christopher to come and help him clean up the mess, offering him a few dollars for his trouble" (27). Paul H's thoughts in this sentence reveal his customary treatment of Christopher, a poor dark-skinned boy, who has long been exploited by this middle class light-skinned family. The "friend" who used to play with him when both of them were young is the one who will also kill him: "As Paul turned, the machete made a wide arc behind him, blade cracking against vertebrae. Him nuh know what hit him, bredda; or did he?" (49). Right after this passage, the saying "NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN" (50) is again connected to this tragic episode symbolizing that there might be no hope, "no miracle" (50) for this country that suffers such complex political, racial, and social problems. As the critical narrative voice observes, "NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. Fighting among themselves—as usual. How did they come to this?" (19).

The motto NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN also interweaves with Clare's search for a place to be called home. This place defined as home "is usually represented as fixed, rooted, stable – the very antithesis of travel" (George 2). In Clare's view, this fixed place is represented by Jamaica. However, we could understand that this motto signals that the home that Clare is so much in search of might not be the idealized space that she desires. Jamaica may be seen as a place that is completely abandoned and there is no way to change the rules and regulations that were once part of their colonial past. Jamaica has "no connection, no telephone to heaven," and there seems to be no signs of hope for the construction of a better and more egalitarian society. Paradoxically, when

Clare comes back, she is entirely conscious that her place, her home is there within her people. Yet, the truck, which literally moves around carrying her, the other members of the guerrilla movement, and the situation she finds herself in, may represent the very antitheses of a house as being a fixed, permanent, and nurturing place.

Although Clare is back to her home country, her search for a place to belong to is still an ongoing process. Following Stuart Hall's analysis that one's identity is a construction that is never complete, Clare's search for a reconnection with her identity and her home is still a continuing process. The reiterated reference to the truck moving through a desolate landscape bearing such a sign on its side—NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN—becomes a metaphor for the ongoing quest for the reconstruction of a historical consciousness, which involves Clare's recovered understanding of her family background. Through this mobility, that may symbolize her journeys in an attempt to glue the parts of her historical past back together, Clare also faces the difficulties of establishing a home in her homeland.

Once, when Clare is searching for some belongings of her mother and grandmother around the house, she is called by Harriet who says they need to go because "[t]here is a new plan" (200). This episode takes place in the last chapter entitled "Film Noir." Clare and all the other guerrilla members will find death, in a valley, on the set of the shooting of an American and British film in Jamaica. This title is very suggestive as the guerrilla revolutionaries end up facing a dramatic death on this film set. The term film noir is used more often to describe stylish Hollywood crime dramas. The association here between the film setting and the outcome of the guerrilla's plan is foreshadowed by the title of the chapter that reveals that there is no possibility of success.

After Harriet announces to Clare the new guerilla plan, there is an extract of an article that is published in *The New York Times* on August 27, 1984 (200). This article, besides describing all the stunning, breathtaking and exotic beauty of Jamaica, also emphasizes that “[i]t also has a racially mixed population of many hues and ethnic distinctions, which . . . includes a number of people willing to serve as extras” (200). In this passage, the ironic use of the expression “to serve as extras” seems to convey some ambiguity. It does so by presenting the scene which follows after the reference to this article. Two men, a British and an American, are sitting in a bar and in their conversation one of them states how the Jamaican people would sell themselves for any money or other privileges:

Jamaicans will do anything for a buck . . . Look around you . . .
the hotels . . . the reggae festivals for white kids . . . Jesus! The
cancer spas for rich people. Everyone from the hookers to the
prime minister, babe. These people are used to selling themselves.
(202)

When confronted with the scene of the guerrilla members and their fight against the imperialistic domination in Jamaica, this picture of Jamaicans selling themselves for any small sum of money is quite unsettling. Once more, there seems to be a criticism on the stereotypical view that foreigners have of Jamaica—an outlandish country where rich people go for an exotic experience and a place for exploitation where “extra” labor force can be gotten easily and cheaply.

The narrative voice presents another passage that supports this reading. These two white men are about to leave the bar and when they ask the owner of this place for their bill, the following dialogue takes place:

How much do we owe you?

Ah . . . four drink, sah? That will be twenty dollar, sah—
American, not Jamaican. For a hundred more, me will throw in mi
mumma and cure fe you cancer as well. (204)

Therefore, from a British and American perspective, the population, as anything else in Jamaica, seems to be viewed as if they were commodities. Through this passage, the narrative voice seems to convey that the Jamaican population and land are there, standing not as an independent and self-governing country, but only to suit the American and British demands and interests. This open contempt facing the other triggers a counter-reaction that encourages one small portion of the Jamaican population to defend their country. In Skinner's view, "[o]ften the dominant groups display contempt for the homelands of their victims, and the latter feel constrained to defend the countries from which they or their ancestors came" (11). This need to protect their country and the memory of their ancestors is clear when Clare joins the guerrilla group.

Along the novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, the narrative voice keeps warning the reader of what is about to happen with the characters. These two American and British men seem to be aware that the guerrilla revolutionaries are about to attack the setting in which the American/British film will take place. The shooting of the film seems to be a kind of mouse-trap situation, and once more, the motto NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN is connected with the idea of a future failure, as both foreigners comment: "Nah. I don't think so. Anyway, babe, about your fear, about revolution . . . the class system wouldn't permit. I mean, they're more English than the English in that regard. At least, the ones on the top are. The ones who call the shots" (203). They even state that for the shooting of the film they are lucky to "have an island. Landscape. Extras up the ass. Weather. And a fucking army complete with helicopters—" (203). The helicopters here seem to be the ones that will be used in the scene that portrays the

execution of the guerrilla members by the end of the narrative. The intention of these two men seems to have some support and connection with some of the local people, as they state: “But if there’s trouble, we’re well set. We have enough natives employed as scouts and advisers, so-called, that if there was a problem we’d be the first to know” (203). As they state previously that Jamaican people are used to selling themselves, we gather, by their conversation, that they have already paid “some bucks” to some of the locals. These “hired” people are probably the underprivileged citizens who will help, maybe unconsciously, in the execution of the very group that is fighting for this marginalized social class. Therefore, this conversation seems to reveal that the American and British, together with the Jamaicans who are “on the top” of the ruling regime, as they mention, are aware of the guerrilla members’ conspiracy against the government, and they are ready to smash and silence their intention, through the killing of the revolutionaries.

To contribute to the killing of all guerrilla members, these two men “hire” for a hundred dollars, a poor Jamaican boy, called De Watchman. Yet, this boy is completely unaware that he will contribute to the death of the guerrilla members. Following the foreigners’ reading that Jamaicans sell themselves for just a little, De Watchman asks what he needs to do in exchange for the dollars, as he states: “What you want me fe do, sah?” (205). De Watchman is the representative of a person from the low social class in Jamaica as he does not even know what a movie is, as stated in the following passage, when he is having his first conversation with these two white men:

A movie. You know. You have seen a movie, haven’t you?

I don’t know, sah.

Jesus Christ!

No need fe call him name, sah.

No; okay. I think you'll be fine. Your hair, the look in your eyes. Look, Brian. Look, Watchman, I don't want you to change a thing. We'll pick you up here in one week—understand? Same time. There's a hundred dollars for you if you come with us. (205)

What these men actually want is that this boy sits “in a tree and howl. That's all. You can do that, can't you?” (205). The choice of the verb “to howl” here is quite suggestive as it is often related to animals in despair or in anger. The patronizing way the foreigners treat the man they start to call “De Watchman” is also conveyed through the use of the action of howling. They, in fact, do not see him as human—a reference that will be mentioned later on.

The moment of the shooting of the film, the narrative voice emphasizes, again, the description of the landscape, of nature as it does in the first chapter of this narrative. Again, nature does not seem to collaborate with the intention of the film company or the guerrilla. Now, these are the last moments of Clare, Harriet and the other guerrilla members. The scene takes place at night, in the dark side of a forest, as it is described by the narrative voice:

The truck had reached its destination. The group got off, quickly, gathered their weapons, and set off into bush. It was night. Dark and cool. The air thin. Harriet grasped Clare's hand. Walk safe, girlfriend, walk safe. Clare squeezed her friend's hand in return and moved off on her own. (206)

The truck, which carries the motto NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN on its side, is there, as it was in the first scene of the novel, as the only means of transportation to carry the group. This motto, again, seems to remind the reader that the enterprise of the guerrilla members seems to be doomed to fail, as the narrative voice states:

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.
(16)

As in the first scene of the first chapter, they are again in a valley, in a depression of land. They are camouflaging themselves in the bushes in the jungle. As the historical Maroons, the guerrilla members are ready to fight in defense of their land:

As they lay in preparation for their act, hidden by dark and green, separate, silent—as silent as Maroons—they watched the scene below them. The valley was lit by a harsh, unnatural light, sending deep shadows into the hollows of landscape, creating false contrasts. (206)

When they start shooting the film, the De Watchman is there hanging on a tree, waiting for the right moment to be instructed on what to do, unaware that he will take part in a killing. He receives the instructions: “Howl! Howl! I want you to bellow as loud as you can. Try to wake the dead . . . Remember, you're not human. Action!” (207). The action to murder is given and “[t]hen the light was gone. And the people hidden in the bush, waiting for the soft signal of the abeng, were confused. This was not meant to happen; it had not been in the plan” (207). While Clare is there, confused and bewildered by the strength of De Watching's howling, the noise covers and muffles the coming noises of the helicopters that are supposed to annihilate them. As the narrative voice describes the scene: “His howls became larger, longer—for a time his noise masked other noises. Of the actors and technicians, retreating the scene and locking themselves in trailers, as they had been warned” (207).

In her position as she “was lying flat in a bitterbush” (206), Clare could do little but wait, speechless, for her end. As the “lights came over them from above” (208), they begin to question: “Who had been the quashee?” (208). Suddenly, “[l]ights played and skidded across their hiding places, as helicopters spun into the valley. Lights sliding over, guns hot. Spraying the breadfruit tree. Sasabonsam fell, silent. Spraying across the bushes” (208). For them, there was no more time left: “Some returned the fire—but were no match for the invaders. Some could not—surprise and sadness held them still. There was no time left to them” (208). Clare, who is hiding in the bitterbush is not given a chance as “[s]hots found the bitterbush” (208). She is gone. No more hope of accomplishments. As stated previously in the first chapters, there is indeed “no telephone to heaven”, and “no connection with God,” “no miracles” (50).

Toland-Dix discusses the end of *No Telephone to Heaven* by observing that:

In the end, Cliff decides that it is not possible for Clare to return and occupy a different space, in large part because others will not accept her rejection of white identity. The home Clare longs for does not exist. She gives her life in the struggle to create the community she envisions. (50)

As discussed before, the question of race is very meaningful for the development of Clare’s perception of who she is and where she belongs to. She decides that she belongs and wants to be part of her home country. Yet, when she is there, she seems to be still puzzled about who or what group she should form an alliance with. Within this guerrilla group, she is not totally accepted by its members and, outside this group, the part of society she belongs to, which is not the subaltern group she defends, seems not to accept the fact that she rejects and subverts rules that have been long established during the writing of Jamaican history. As Toland-Dix states, “the conclusion seems fatalist. In the

end, the only way Clare can connect her black matrilineage is by joining her bones to their bones in the Jamaican soil. Only when color is no longer distinguishable does it become irrelevant” (50).

Clare engages in a fight against the authoritative regime. At the same time that she subverts the ruling regime in Jamaica, she also subverts the teachings of her father, and again, she finds herself in that in-between place that she struggles to emerge from. Thus, I believe she comes to the end of the narrative without wholly and peacefully reconciling with her multiplicity of identifications. Clare together with Harriet, as both take part in the guerrilla movement, try to disintegrate the hegemonic history by subverting the ruling government. Nevertheless, Clare fails in her attempt to invent new spaces in which the voices of the subalterns, which she sides with, could be heard. Before the fatal scene of death, she might have envisioned that, through that rebellious act, they would be successful in dismantling the political system that had been governing and in their view destroying Jamaica. Instead, their act leads them to their final downfall.

Clare’s attempt to create a new society in Jamaica seems to be doomed to fail. The last scene in *No Telephone to Heaven* that is followed right after the shots from the helicopters hints that Clare has met her death in the bitterbush. The narrative voice displays this subsequent burst of sounds at the very moment the “shots found the bitterbush” (208):

O je t’adore, O je t’adore, O je t’adore

Poor-me-one, Poor-me-one, Poor-me-one

Tres-tontos-son, Tres-tontos-son, Tres-tontos-son

Kitty-woo, kitty-woo, kitty-woo

Whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip

Back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw

She remembered language.

Then it was gone. (208)

This significant mixture of sounds is analyzed by Edmondson in the following terms:

even as the helicopters flying over the guerrillas' hiding places in the bush tell us that their mission has failed, the novel ends with a burst of sounds—English, patois, bird sounds—which signify the unharnessed possibilities of discourse: the power to name, signify, create. These remain embedded in the landscape, future potential to reclaim representation. (190)

The end, with this burst of sounds, could signify the multiplicity of cultural heritage that is housed in the Caribbean area, Jamaica, and in Clare's identity as well. After the dark night in which the guerrilla members face their death, the narrative voice ends this novel with these words: "Day broke" (208). I believe that there is a double meaning conveyed by these last words. One possible reading is that, even though Clare and the revolutionaries fail in their intent, after darkness, light and day will eventually appear. In this sense, there might still be a possibility to articulate the differences among the Jamaican social, cultural and political system. There is still a possibility, in the future, for a dialogue in which the barriers of segregation could be minimized. The whole narrative, however, seems to negate this possibility. As Buell states:

It is hard to know if the novel dramatizes the failure of a valid revolutionary dream of separate community or if it hints that there is an essentially spurious, simulationist quality to such a dream in an interconnected, postmodern world. What is hard to gauge is the

intent and extent of the irony involved. Does the end of the novel represent a deeply ironic tragedy—the necessary failure of doomed, but valuable, idealism? Or does it hint that both Clare’s personal quest and her public project are narcissistic and compromised, and that nostalgic revolutionary nationalism in the more modern, more internationalized world of Jamaica (penetrated by two global systems, unlike Kenya, and up to the moment in fashion and information) is not only an impossibility but self-deception? (106)

The questions Buell poses in his analyses seem hard to answer. The end of this novel leads us to different directions. I believe the narrative voice plays with this ambiguity in order to leave an open end so that the reader is left with a handful of options to analyze Clare’s journeys into her selfhood.

Does the end imply that one of the worlds that Clare defends and identify with, her mother’s one, the African one, loses terrain and is then swallowed up by the world, represented by her father? Or does it imply that the multiplicity of sounds, as stated by Edmondson, that helps to close the narrative, signals to a future possibility in which these worlds could coexist and administer their differences? Is this an utopian possibility? Edmondson analyzes this ending in light of the history of the Caribbean region by stating that:

In the Caribbean, whose ‘conclusion’ was one of slavery, colonization and consequent ‘Third World’ status, the historical narrative has functioned to contain or erase other histories by reading the region solely in terms of how it served to construct the historical realities of Europe or America. (186)

If we consider her analyses, the history of the Caribbean region has been one of silence and subjugation, as I discuss earlier in this dissertation. So, the articulation of the differences among these diverse worlds would be hard to take place so that a new alternative space could be constructed to accommodate the multiplicity of voices in the Caribbean area.

The difficulty of leaving the limits of one's world and engaging in an attempt to recreate one's history, one's community, is also discussed by Gifford in his analysis of the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*. According to him:

The truck that transports Clare and her rebel friends to their new communal home bears the message on its side: 'NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN.' That message plainly affirms how implausible it is for those less privileged than herself to leave the unmitigable hell of the world they leave. (37)

Again, we can see that according to his analyzes, the limits of the subaltern disobedience are clearly set. The borders that separate the social classes in Jamaica seem to be unshakable and this rigidity seems to permeate any kind of interaction among the classes in this country.

I believe that, on her way to restoration and reconnection with her matrilineal ancestry, Clare befriends Harriet also because this character seems to be able to accept Clare in her full multiplicity and diversity. Both of them set up to discover an alternative angle to understand their history of subjugation and segregation. Harriet, together with Clare, claims for, not only their personal transformation, but also for a political and social one that could provide for the marginalized voices they favor. However, Harriet, as Clare, comes to the end without really being able to propose some kind of transformation, as Elia mentions:

But the most significant aspect of *No Telephone to Heaven* is that Harry/Harriet never undergoes a physical transformation, remaining ever dual in body, as indeed is the fate of all Creoles, diasporans and biracial for whom transformation is impossible. The only option available to hybrids is reconciliation with the various elements that make up their identity, a spiritual healing that gels these elements into viable wholeness rather than fragmentation. (353)

Paradoxically, we could say that both characters, Clare and Harriet, seem to come to the end without being able to reconcile entirely with their heritage and their diversity. There is no doubt that a spiritual transformation has taken place in both characters' lives. Nonetheless, I believe both of them still come to the end as in-between characters that have gone through a deep process of radical changes. As Gifford states, "[b]y the time Clare Savage arrives at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, her worldview has undergone a radical metamorphosis" (107). Both Clare's and Harriet's worldview have changed. Although this is a novel of resistance, it also provides the reader with several passages in which transformation, even though desired, is also denied. The characters seem to be deprived of fully taking hold of the desired degree of transformation. But, we could also say that this novel comes to the end pointing to, at least, one positive direction. Even though Clare and Harriet face death, their journey towards their way to reconcile with their diversity, their heritage and their country signals that they have gone through a significant learning experience and accomplished relevant changes to their lives.

Conclusion

*No Telephone to Heaven: The Limits of Subaltern Revolt and the Metamorphosis of a
Worldview*

“Home”
home
is safety
home
is naked
home
is soul
home
is where my truth lies
Floyd Crenshaw

No Telephone to Heaven involves above all Clare’s quest for a better understanding of her multi-layered selfhood. Questions of race, ethnicity, gender identification and political involvement are intertwined in the process of development of her consciousness about who she is and the several cultural traits she has inherited. Clare, along the narrative, walks along a lane in which her notions about what home means develop into a crescendo since the beginning of her journey, in *Abeng*, until her death, in *No Telephone to Heaven*. This journey towards a quest for her identity and her affiliation leads her to return to her home country, to reconnect with her matrilineal heritage, and to side with the guerilla movement in Jamaica.

The identification of where and what home means comes also with Clare’s experience abroad. She begins to visualize who she is and to understand the limits, which are imposed by the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, which surround the

perceptions of home, through her connection with the other people she meets in the USA, England and also in her home country.

In the development of *No Telephone to Heaven*, the narrative voice displays Clare's trajectory as she gains progressive knowledge of how to embrace her diversity. However, this narrative "does not lend itself easily to a plot summary" (Elia 353). There are several layers that structure the telling of this narrative, which are all interconnected and contribute towards the growth of Clare's understanding about her compound identity. There are also several characters who add to Clare's process of awareness and questioning of her identity, such as her father, who may be said to represent the colonial white power, as suggested by Gifford—"Clare's white father represents a world in which British colonialism is a virtue" (15)—; Kitty, her mother, who represents her African ancestry; Miss Mattie, her grandmother, who represents the matrilineal connection with the land and also with the African heritage in much the same way the mother does; and finally Harriet, who plays the role of a mother surrogate to Clare and has a strong influence on the paths Clare eventually chooses to tread. Clare's involvement with the members of the guerrilla movement is another episode that contributes to a twist in Clare's journey. This twist takes place right at the moment when she is back in her home country to reclaim her connection with her maternal ancestry.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the question of race and ethnicity is meaningful for the development of the narrative as Clare's choice for her maternal ancestry leads her back to Jamaica, an issue that is central to my discussion. It is through Clare's perception of how differently she sees herself, racially and ethnically speaking, in relation to other people she encounters during her journeys around the USA, England and also in Jamaica, that she is able to make her decision to side with her maternal

African legacy. In a sense, this decision questions the continuity of the patriarchal authority that is represented by Boy, Clare's father.

The discussion in chapter 2 focuses on the question of gender identification. In this part, the narrative voice showcases the importance of the female characters Kitty and Miss Mattie in Clare's life and journeys. These female characters, together with the transvestite Harriet, acquire a great significance as the narrative unfolds and are responsible for Clare's reconnection with her history, her people, and her land. The way in which this reconnection takes place is very powerful and influential as Clare, along the narrative, is left under her father's guiding hands and principles. Although Clare does not have the maternal support she longs for, she ends up favoring the African side of her heritage, which is represented by the female characters of her family.

In this part, I also highlight the importance of gender performance played by Harriet. Through Harriet's feminine gender performance, I show how the novel creates another version of the maternal figure, which is typically represented by a domestic, family-oriented woman. Instead, this mother surrogate openly criticizes traditional gender roles and reveals how gender can be socially constructed. Harriet induces Clare to resist, challenge and subvert the process that historically has placed women in a subordinate position in Jamaican society and is the one who leads Clare to assume a more politically relevant role in her home country.

In the discussion that shapes chapter 3, I try to show that there is no doubt that the writing of *No Telephone to Heaven* is one that "conceives a narrative that affirms resistance and social transformation" (Moynagh 114). On the other hand, the narrative voice seems to leave an open door to reaffirm the impossibilities of political and social changes in Jamaica as all guerrilla members, including Clare, succumb to the heartbreaking end. In this part, Clare chooses to favor a social class in Jamaica which

she does not belong to. The unsuccessful end seems to hint that there is no way to subvert the ruling regime and the social rules established.

By the end of this novel, Clare has, undoubtedly, undergone a relevant transformation. It is through this renovation that she is able to connect with her maternal African ancestry. However, the feeling of being split and not being able to position herself within her community still persists. As she chooses to connect with the guerrilla movement, she is, at this very moment, positioning herself, again, in the ambiguous position that she so much wants to avoid.

I believe she is successful in trying to sort out the multiple characteristics she inherits from her parents. Racially and ethnically speaking, Clare goes against her father's teaching in order to try and camouflage to belong in the American society. She does not favor the privileges she could have if she had favored her light-skinned complexion. Instead, she decides to identify with her maternal memories and ancestry that involves a history of migration and dislocation because of the slave trade.

Clare is able, along her journey, to better understand what and where her home is, as she decides to come back and identify Jamaica as her home country, as her motherland. Her perception of how her identity is continuously constructed is much clearer if we compare it with the time when she starts her journey in the beginning of *No Telephone to Heaven*. As Clare, Harriet is, along the narrative, also able to make her decision to identify with her female gender identity. She constructs her feminine presence and takes the role of a mother to Clare, a fact that is naturally accepted by this character. Although Clare dies at the end of the novel, I argue that she manages to attain a much better perception of her affiliations and we could also say that her journeys have provided her with a better understanding of her identity formation and her identifications and she is finally able to connect to her home and her heritage.

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