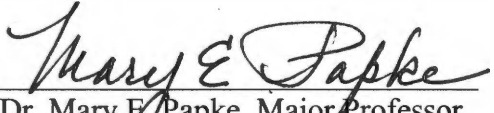


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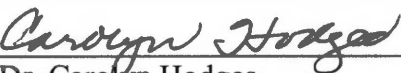
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by April Conley Kilinski entitled "Embodying History: Women, Representation, and Resistance in Twentieth-Century Southern African and Caribbean Literature." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Dr. Mary E. Papke, Major Professor

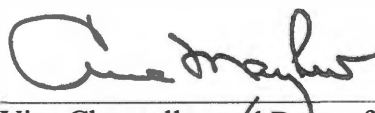
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Vice Chancellor and Dean of
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EMBODYING HISTORY: WOMEN, REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANCE IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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April Conley Kilinski
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Abstract

This dissertation illustrates how twentieth-century Southern African and Caribbean authors of English fictions recuperate the metaphorical and material female body from the male-centered project of British colonization by employing the female body as a site of resistance through representations of illness, eating disorders, and racial and gender performance. I include works by men and women as well as white and minority authors to illustrate how the female body becomes a point of convergence for narratives of resistance in these postcolonial works. Since each narrative is informed by hybridity—through syncretism, miscegenation, and contact with the metropolis through immigration—I argue that each author demonstrates the need to embrace a hybrid subject position in order to effect resistance. Moreover, I contend that the damaging effects of the lasting legacy of Victorian gender normative behavior which governs and often limits female agency necessitates a reconnection to a mother figure and the motherland in these novels as well.

The first chapter provides a broad historical background of the British Empire's role in colonization in the areas under study as well as specific histories for Jamaica, Haiti, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. I also include in this chapter the historical developments that conflated the racialized female body with representations of the land under colonization and a discussion of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the seminal colonial representation of the themes that the narratives in later chapters resist. The second chapter argues that portrayals of illness J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and Erna Brodber's *Myal* serve as metaphors for the corruption and sickness inherent in the colonial system, specifically education. The third chapter contends that eating disorders

in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* become a means of self-empowered resistance for the main characters in each narrative. Chapter four asserts that politically informed racial and gender performance leads to active resistance by female characters in Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. The final chapter draws conclusions about the similarities and differences informing these narratives, and calls for engaged scholarship and political activism to continue in literatures and regions that labor under the continuing legacy of British colonization and patriarchy.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines the English fictions of twentieth-century Southern African and Caribbean authors who reclaim the female body as a site of resistance to British colonialism as well as native and British patriarchal authorities. This introduction includes discussions of the specific histories for each of the regions under consideration and how ideas of race and gender were figured in the colonizing project. I also briefly consider how British colonial fiction treats the bodies of women, both British and native, through a discussion of *Heart of Darkness* at the end of the chapter. All of these elements inform the main concern of my project: how the female body functions in postcolonial—or post-independence—fictions from Southern Africa and the Caribbean. In the body chapters, I argue that representations of illness, eating disorders, and active resistance in works by one man and several women as well as by white and minority authors illustrate how the female body becomes a point of convergence for narratives of resistance in these postcolonial literatures. More specifically, I trace the female body figured as a site to reflect the “illness” of colonization in chapter two, using *Age of Iron* by J. M. Coetzee and *Myal* by Erna Brodber, which ultimately leads to the kind of resistance seen at the end of *Myal*. In chapter three, I consider the female body itself figured as a site of resistance through eating disorders in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat. Finally, in chapter four, I show how *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* by Zoë Wicomb and *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff portray actively resisting bodies. Edwidge Danticat, who is Haitian, does not explore British colonization and patriarchy, but her

works deal with the same gender and racial themes as the other texts, since the history of race and gender relations in Haiti followed similar patterns as in countries under British colonial power, as the discussion of Haiti's history below illustrates.

In the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, P. J. Marshall rightfully notes that the British Empire "incorporated territories and peoples who differed very widely from one another and for whom British rule took very different forms and meant very different things" (374). However, Patrick Colm Hogan asserts that these areas share an

historical encounter between culturally distant and geographically separated societies where for some extended period one society controls the other politically and economically . . . and the dominant society justifies its control through the denigration of the dominated culture and throughout the ideological insistence that the dominated people are an inferior race. (2)

This, then, establishes a shared history rather than discrete experiences in these regions. Additionally, fictions from Southern Africa and the Caribbean share a similar literary history; as Elleke Boehmer notes, "African and Caribbean nationalist writers focused on reconstituting from the position of their historical, racial, or metaphysical *difference* [from the British] a cultural identity which had been damaged by the colonial experience" (186). Therefore, examining together texts from these two regions can fruitfully explore to what extent illness, eating disorders, and a kind of racial and gender performance have been imported or imposed as part of colonial praxis, as well as how they have been appropriated by native writers as forms of resistance. For these authors, the primary target of antagonism is the way that British culture shaped gender ideology, and the principle means of resistance to that kind of oppression is the female body.

Since each region does have its own individual history, and one hegemonic response to colonization cannot and should not be posited, I have chosen to do a careful examination of the separate histories of each. However, this attention to historical particularities also shows that issues such as racial stratifications and hierarchies as well as gender constructions developed in similar ways under colonization. Though I do not argue for a monolithic response, the issues of race and gender are dealt with in similar ways by the authors under study here. These similarities were influenced by British notions about race and gender during colonization. Thus, I will follow the historical discussion of each region with a discussion of the history of British conceptions of race and gender as well as how the two were often conflated in the colonizing project.

South Africa

Nigel Worden notes in *The Making of Modern South Africa* that the Dutch settled in the Cape colony in 1652; however, since indigenous inhabitants like the Khoikhoi and the San people had already come into contact with the Bantu speaking people as well as the Xhosa people, “The region had become both socially complex and economically diverse before colonial settlers moved in” (9). Struggles between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi over cattle and land characterized the Dutch period of occupation (Worden 9-10). The British then established permanent control of the Cape in 1806 and began a series of attacks on the Xhosa during 1811. Military victories over the Xhosa paved the way for the 1820 settlers (12). After 1820, the British began a policy of slave labor and restrictions on the Khoikhoi through Ordinance 49 passed in 1828, which imposed “pass controls on African workers in [the] Cape Colony.” This policy was soon revoked by Ordinance 50 which ended “Khoikhoi indenture” and was followed closely by slave

emancipation in the British Colonies in 1834 (vii). Zoë Wicomb takes up the idea of how the Khoi people were alienated from their land and history in the final chapter of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* when the narrator and her mother take a trip into the Drakensberg Mountains.

The 1830s saw a movement into town by white settlers and a change in the economic structure through the development of Merino sheep wool production. According to Nigel Worden, “these developments led to the migration out of the colony of about 15,000 eastern Cape pastoralists in the 1830s. This ‘Great Trek’ (1836) came to be seen in the twentieth century as the seminal event in South African history when it provided the symbolic images crucial to the ethos of Afrikaner nationalism” (13) in the *Tweede Trek* of 1938. There were two main reasons for the “Great Trek.” The first was that the British colonial administrators had not given the trekkers representative government which omission was coupled with the “social implications of placing freed slaves and Khoikhoi servants” on an equal level with Christians, which seemed to them against the laws of God and nature because of their differences in color (13-14). The second reason also involved an economic component. Many of the trekkers had been renting land since they were not “members of the new capitalizing wool gentry.” Therefore, they could not become owners of the land since payments were often in arrears. Some of the trekkers, including the “leader, Piet Retief, were heavily in debt and were being pursued by creditors” (Worden 14). Thus, banding together against British economic forces provided a way for the Afrikaans trekkers to form a unified sense of identity and control over their own fates, which also served as an important consideration when the images of the “Great Trek” were reprised for the *Tweede Trek* in 1938.

During the 1850s, the British seemed to relinquish direct political control in the interior of South Africa. However, “from the 1870’s they adopted an aggressive thrust into the whole sub-continent. In the course of two decades, Basutoland, Griqualand West, the South African Republic in the Transvaal, the Transkei and Bechuanaland were conquered or annexed and the Zulu and Pedi were defeated and their lands brought under imperial control” (21). With the discovery of costly minerals came the need for labor and supplies to mine them. The British saw the South African interior as a place where they needed to exert control directly, since “direct control over the highveld would . . . enable a variety of settler and colonial interests to secure and regulate African labor” (22). The British economic interest in African resources serves as an important concern for the South African authors included in this project. Wicomb describes the destructive consequences of this singular interest in financial gain at the expense of the land in the first chapter of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, while Coetzee’s narrator comments on the way the British “ravished” the South African landscape for their own profit in *Age of Iron*. The British initially began annexing the region under the auspices of protecting the African people from the Boers; however, since the discovery of diamonds, these moves should actually be understood as an attempt to keep the Boer republics from “divid[ing] the region between them” (24). According to Worden, “by the end of the 1880’s, the British had effectively exerted control, either directly or through their colonies in the Cape and Natal, over a large number of African societies” (27). Nonetheless, the British were unable to accomplish their ultimate goal of a South African Confederation because of Boer resistance in the Transvaal. The ability to stave off the British advances into the

Transvaal served as a boost to Afrikaner nationalism and bitterness over any British authority in the region (27).

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the British pursued a much more aggressive tactic of imperial intervention. Though the British were met with resistance all along the way, the native African people were ultimately unable to withstand the British tactics of exploiting internal conflicts (often produced by colonial pressures), armed confrontation, and taxation and land seizure (28). But, despite “indigenous independence [being] . . . largely destroyed, South Africa in the early 1890’s was still divided into settler colonies and Boer republics” (28). The South African war from 1899-1902, prompted primarily by the discovery of gold mines, completed the process of British conquest which had begun in the 1870’s (29). After the war, the Boer republics joined forces with the British to form the Union of South Africa in 1910. This union and its constitution were characterized by white supremacy, and, as Worden asserts, “white unity [which] was . . . upheld at the expense of black political and land rights” (36) had deleterious effects on the lives of native Africans well into the twentieth century.

Segregationist policies in the early twentieth century in town, such as “the Mines and Works Act (1911), which imposed the colour bar, the Natives Land Act (1913), which segregated land ownership, and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (1923), which provided residential segregation in towns” (83), “had precedents in the white supremacist laws and practices of the nineteenth century” (82). These laws were often based on class as well as racial distinctions and provided the foundation for the apartheid system that dominated in the latter half of the twentieth century. Just as Britain’s involvement in

South African colonization concerns the South African authors included here, so, too, does the legacy of apartheid that grew out of their colonial policies. In *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* Wicomb explores the legacy of apartheid for those classified as “coloured” in South Africa, while in *Age of Iron* Coetzee illustrates the divisive consequences for relations between whites and blacks under such a system.

Apartheid was the policy of the Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party (later renamed the Herenigde Nasionale Party [HNP]), which originated as a splinter group from Herzog's National Party in 1934 and captured leadership of political Afrikanerdom in the 1940s. This party won power in 1948 by appealing across class lines to an Afrikaner nationalist identity. As Anne McClintock notes in *Imperial Leather*, this sense of a unified identity was due in large part to the *Tweede* (second) *Trek* in 1938 which succeeded in “mobilizing a sense of white Afrikaner collectivity where none before existed” (376). The foundation of apartheid was, then, racial segregation.

Racial segregation policy was instituted in 1949 with the prohibition of “mixed marriages” and in 1950 with the Immorality Act, which “extended the existing ban on sex between whites and Africans outside marriage to prohibit all sexual conduct between whites and other South Africans, including Indians and coloureds” (Worden 107). Also in 1950, the Population Registration Act “enforced classification of people into four racial categories: white, coloured, ‘Asiatic’ (Indian) and ‘Native’ (later ‘Bantu’ or African)” (108). These segregationist policies were eventually extended to every aspect of life with laws such as the Group Areas Act (1950), which enforced separate residences, and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953), which ensured segregation in areas like “transport, cinemas, restaurants and sports facilities” (108). Apartheid was also

extended to education with the Bantu Education Act which segregated schools and assured that black children did not receive the same level of education as whites. J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* shows how this eventually led to protests among black students. In 1959, "the Extension of University Education Act parceled out the different ethnic groups to different universities" (McClintock 339). Wicomb's protagonist, Frieda, becomes a beneficiary of this Act when she is admitted to a recently desegregated university in the third chapter of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*.

Resistance to apartheid existed from its beginning; however, several key incidents are worth noting in the chain of events that lead to the end of apartheid in 1991. The first is the Sharpeville shootings of 1960, which took place when a group of Africans staged a peaceful march to the police station in Sharpeville to protest against having to carry passes. According to Worden, 180 people were killed in the shootings (121). As a result of these shootings, "strikes and stayaways followed throughout the country and the government declared a State of Emergency, detaining ANC [African National Congress] and PAC [Pan Africanist Congress] leaders and then banning both organizations . . . internationally[;] . . . serious calls for economic sanctions against South Africa were made at the United Nations" (122). Britain, which officially left South Africa in 1961, also condemned the policies of apartheid. The second key moment of resistance to apartheid came during the Soweto uprisings in 1976, which were led by students whose ideas were influenced by the Black Consciousness movement taking place in America and elsewhere. Against this backdrop, the 1980s emerged as a decade of intense strife as the policies of apartheid began to fail, which period is represented in *Age of Iron*. In the 1990s the bans on the ANC and PAC were lifted, and F.W. de Klerk began the process

of rights negotiations with these groups in an effort to affect significant change. A new democratic constitution resulted as did the election of an ANC-led government in 1994 (137).

Zimbabwe

The British had originally intended to make Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) part of South Africa, and it had been “invaded and conquered by Cecil Rhodes’s British South Africa Company in 1890” (Worden 30). However, hopes that it would extend Britain’s control of mining and become a “‘second Rand’ proved unfounded” (30). According to Dickson Mungazi’s book *Colonial Policy and Conflict in Zimbabwe*, after officially colonizing Zimbabwe in September of 1890, Rhodes appointed Leander Starr Jameson, who was his partner in the DeBeers Mining Company, as the first administrator of Rhodesia, serving from 1890-1916 (10).

The period from 1890-1923 saw several major laws passed in Rhodesia, which according to Mungazi, convinced the native Africans that in order to survive British colonization, they would have to learn European ways. These included the “Hut Tax Ordinance in 1894, the Native Registration Regulations of 1897, the Education Ordinance of 1899, the Land Ordinance of 1900, the Education Ordinance of 1910, and the national referendum of 1923” (18). This 1923 referendum officially ensured that Rhodesia would not become part of South Africa as its fifth province when “8,774 white voters favored responsible government status” as opposed to the “5,999 [who] favored joining South Africa” (18). Mungazi notes that between the years of 1924-1939, native Zimbabweans sought to prevail under a British colonial rule which had, through the enactment of the laws listed above, declared its “intention of staying permanently in

Zimbabwe” (18). The primary avenue taken in this survival tactic was to seek out western education. Tsitsi Dangarembga explores this survival tactic in *Nervous Conditions* when Tambu, the narrator, tells how her family was removed from their land and how her Grandmother sent her son, Babamukuru, to the whites to be educated since she understood that to survive in the new world created by the whites, they had to learn their ways.

Mungazi argues that the natives of Zimbabwe made the concession to seek Western education because

for them [Africans] to continue to resist the imposition of the colonial system would have given the colonists an opportunity to destroy the very fabric of the African culture itself. The European tolerance of that culture came from a mistaken belief that the Africans submitted to colonial political will and perceived their actions, not as an exercise in survival, but as an acceptance of colonial institutions. (35)

Though the Africans in Zimbabwe initially submitted to British authority as a means of survival, they, like all colonized cultures, eventually resisted British colonial rule.

According to Mungazi, the stage for the conflict between native Zimbabweans and British colonial authorities was set in 1937 when the Native Councils Act was passed. This Act sought to have Africans “acquiesce . . . to the promotion of its [British colonial government’s] own interests by having them [Africans] serve on advisory boards with no real power” (60). This act met with significant resistance and was consequently amended in 1943 to provide native Africans with some “power to raise and spend funds on their own developmental programs under the control of the colonial government” (61). However, by 1960, “the Africans formed councils all over the country with objectives

different from those outlined in the law itself,” which new objectives were specifically designed to resist the colonial government’s policies (63).

Throughout this time, native Zimbabweans were also beginning to protest the unequal educational standards of rural and urban schools (66). As a result of the colonial government’s failure to respond to the rural Africans’ call for a school in their name, “they [Africans] decided that the many other forms of council activity were to rally around the central and fundamental undertaking in education” (71). After a prolonged series of applications by the councils for a school in their name between 1951 and 1956, the colonial government ultimately rejected the request in 1957. After this, several key events took place in Zimbabwe’s history that led to the war for independence, which began in April of 1966. First, the ANC was banned in 1959; second, the National Democratic Party, founded in 1960, was banned in 1961; third, the Zimbabwe African National Union, founded in 1962, was banned in 1964; and, finally, student protests in 1964 combined to reject the educational policies of the Rhodesia Front (RF), whose unequal expenditure on education for the two races “remained a permanent feature of the RF educational policy throughout its administration” (81). This educational policy, according to Mungazi, “was the major cause of the war that lasted from 1966 to 1979” (83). As in South Africa, students speaking out against unfair racial segregation in education ultimately led to the end of British colonial rule. Dangarembga’s character Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* represents the kind of student who recognizes the control inherent in colonial education and speaks out against it.

In December of 1979, “the Lancaster House Conference officially turned over the reins of government from the Rhodesia Front (RF), the last colonial administration, to the

Africans” (93). The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front took office on April 18, 1980, under president Canaan Banana (97).

Jamaica

Nicholas Canny asserts in “The Origins of Empire” that “by the end of the seventeenth century, a new concept of Empire had been established, which involved the assertion of dominion over foreign places and people, the introduction of white, and also black, settlement in these areas, and the monopolizing of trade with these newly acquired possessions” (22). It was under this philosophy that the British developed a wealthy “planter plutocracy and an affluent commercial community” in Jamaica (30). In “The ‘Hub of Empire’: The Caribbean and Britain in the Seventeenth Century,” Hillary McD. Beckles notes that Britain gained possession of Jamaica in 1655-56 when Cromwell’s Republican army seized the island from Spain (285). Along with the rest of the Caribbean, Jamaica became part of “the greatest British colonial market for slaves” by 1660 (227).

Between 1748 and 1815, the period, according to J.R. Ward, of Abolition, “The West Indies achieved their greatest economic importance within the British Empire” (415). This “Age of Abolition” also became an important time in the formation of race relations in the Caribbean. Particularly important to race relations was the emergence of a mixed-race population. The single men who acted as overseers on plantations often “took mistresses from among the younger slave women under their control. Consequently, the coloured (mixed race) element grew from about 5 percent to 10 percent of the slave population” (Ward 417). These coloured slaves were often shown favoritism and were regularly spared having to work in the fields. By the time slavery

was abolished, “the British Caribbean had a quite numerous locally born class of mixed race ‘free coloureds.’ However, they were still subject to severe discriminations” (417). Additionally, the majority of these “free coloureds” were “almost as colour-conscious as the whites. Mixed race people insisted that a degree of European ancestry gave them superiority over the black masses” (438). Michelle Cliff and Erna Brodber both depict characters who have internalized this idea of racial superiority as a result of European ancestors in *Abeng* and *Myal*, respectively.

As occurred in many British colonies after World War II, a nationalist consciousness emerged in Jamaica by the 1940s. This consciousness grew primarily among the middle class and was characterized by a shared concept of social identity. Howard Johnson notes in “The Black Experience in the British Caribbean in the Twentieth Century” that “the cultural divide between the middle and working classes narrowed as members of the intelligentsia celebrated Afro-Creole culture as authentic and non-European” (338). Though not as forceful as the nationalism and anti-colonialism found in colonies in Africa and Asia, this national consciousness did help pave the way for Jamaican independence. Brodber shows the empowered connection to an African heritage when characters connected to the spirit world heal the protagonist in *Myal*, and Michelle Cliff shows how an understanding of native history can serve as an empowering tool for resistance in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

In 1944, Jamaica received a new constitution ratifying “universal adult suffrage By the late 1950’s . . . Jamaica had already been granted the ministerial system and advanced in . . . 1959 . . . to full internal self-government with responsibility for internal affairs” (Johnson 336). In 1960, Iain Macleod, who had been appointed as

Colonial Secretary in 1959, declared that he viewed the Jamaican government “as qualified for independence on its own. Up to that point, the colonial office had envisaged that the colonies would achieve nationhood not individually but as part of a West Indian Federation” (343). However, Jamaica voted to secede from the Federation in 1961, and in May of 1962, the Federation came to an end (343). Jamaica attained independence in 1962, but as was the case in Southern Africa and Haiti, Jamaica “advanced to independence without a disruption of the long-entrenched social structure, with its colour/class correlation” (344). This legacy of a social structure dictated by race was formulated on British colonial policies and attitudes about race and, thus, deeply entrenched in everyday life in Jamaica.

Haiti

Though never under British control, Haiti, as David Nicholls notes in *Haiti in Caribbean Context*, “is part of the Caribbean, and indeed . . . much of her early post-colonial experience is of relevance to the more recently independent countries of the region. Those who know the Caribbean will find that much of what is said about Haiti applies also to the Anglophone islands” (5). These commonalities in history, social structure, and literature are of primary importance to my project, so this discussion of Haiti’s history will focus on those points most relevant to that country’s relationship to the parts of the Caribbean that experienced British colonization.

Like that of most countries colonized by the British, Haiti’s history also involved a strict adherence to classifications of people based on race. Nicholls refers to divisions in Haiti as a kind of “caste” system, which “legally and customarily defined status groups, into one of which a person was born and out of which it was difficult to move”

(22-23). Those with the most power and influence were the whites, who, nonetheless, constituted a minority. Those people considered coloured or *affranchis* were in the middle of the power structure, while blacks, who were primarily slaves, were on the bottom (23). Haiti experienced the abolition of slavery earlier than those colonies under British rule when the French outlawed it in 1793 in Saint-Domingue. At this time, “civil rights were accorded to all men irrespective of colour Thus from a legal point of view the caste system came to an end” (24). However, the color question continued to plague Haitians throughout the nineteenth century, even after Haiti received political independence in 1804 (24).

Indeed, the association of race and class persists in Haiti even today. As Nicholls notes, “Crudely the general . . . coincidence between colour and class [in Haiti today] can be said to date back to colonial times. As most of the slaves were black, so most of the poor are black today. As most of the *affranchis* [free coloureds] were mulatto, so today most of the rich are light-skinned. This is a familiar feature of Caribbean social structures and its roots in the system of slavery and manumission are evident” (204). Edwidge Danticat depicts the psychological and physical impact that blackness and its attendant lower class position has for several female characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

Another important similarity between Haiti and the other regions examined in this study is the issue of gender relations. Prior to independence, during the revolution of 1789-1803, “women played an important role, not only by supporting the soldiers in various ways, but also by joining their ranks” (122). However, after independence, the government itself saw fit to maintain a large army. This drew men away from agricultural work so that women became responsible for the majority of food production.

The Haitian writer Jean Price Mars contended “that the women in the peasant communities had been reduced to the level of ‘farm animals’ or ‘work tools’ by their husbands” (qtd. in Nicholls 122). Danticat also explores the gender discrimination in Haiti when the narrator learns from her aunt and her grandmother how every aspect of a woman’s life is controlled by a patriarchal system.

The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915-1934, and according to Myriam Chancy in *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, “The radicalization of the entire country in response to the invasion—the rise of Haitian nationalism in particular—allowed for the relatively unopposed involvement of women in politics, and with it, the evolution of Haitian feminism” (48). In fact, by 1950, “article nine of the Haitian Constitution recognized women as fully emancipated human beings with equal rights” (42). Unfortunately, this rise in feminist consciousness was undercut in 1957 by the Duvalier regime. According to Chancy, “Women under Duvalier were to serve the State in a singularly *depoliticized* manner: to serve the State meant to renounce the advancements made by women in the years just preceding the 1957 presidential election, to be good, dependent, wives, mothers, and even productive market women” (43, italics in original).¹ Indeed, by 1960, “speech had become an endangered activity, one fraught with political danger. With Duvalier as master of propaganda, words became ready tools of oppression. Using Haitian folklore, he invoked the most feared of *vodou* myths to create an atmosphere of paranoia and violence Although both men and women suffered violence at the hands of the new ruler’s secret police—the *Tontons macoutes*—

¹ Danticat re-imagines the figure of these market women as representatives for female solidarity in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

women by virtue of their sex, were given fewer avenues to access the power of the word” (26). Danticat takes up the ways that women were treated by the *Tontons macoutes* in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* through Martine’s violent rape at the hands of one of these soldiers. Haitian feminism did experience a resurgence after the military coup of 1986, but, as Nicholls notes, “Haitian women still find that they are in certain ways an oppressed and overworked majority” (129). As is the case with the histories for all of these regions, the legacy of gender discrimination was intimately tied to constructions of race.

Race and Gender Constructions

The main form of exclusion within the British Empire was consideration of race. As Sean Hawkins and Philip D. Morgan note in “Blacks and the British Empire: An Introduction,” this was due to the fact that “by the middle of the nineteenth century pseudo-scientific thinking was fully developed and the emergence of Social Darwinian ideas refined belief in white domination as well as the subordination of blacks” (14). This “scientific racism” was, in turn, influenced by the relationship in the British Empire between class and color, and, as Vivian Bickford-Smith notes, it was also “encouraged by events—be they the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 or the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865—that seemed to cast doubt over the ultimate success of the ‘civilizing mission’ and coincided with, and partly fuelled, doubts about the imperial project itself” (203). By employing these theories of scientific racism, the British sought to place “social ranking and social disability on a biological and ‘scientific’ footing” (McClintock 49). As a result, many of those in the regions of contact began to internalize these ideas,

particularly those people considered to be “coloured,” or having a mixed-race background.

Hawkins and Morgan point out that this self-internalization on the part of coloureds was true both in South Africa, where the differences between races were codified under apartheid, and in the Caribbean, despite the fact that the races were never legally separated there. The attempt on the part of mixed-race people to differentiate themselves from those considered black stemmed directly from the desire to escape the full brunt of British racism (17). Bickford-Smith contends that in South Africa, Creole or coloured people not only tried to distance themselves from identification with black people and culture, but “the majority among these elites . . . fashioned themselves along the lines of what they took to be the respectable, metropolitan, British middle-classes” (198). However, “this enthusiasm [for British culture] was not the result of mere mimicry by ‘colonized minds.’ Rather adherence to British ideas and manners stemmed from a realization that these provided a source of power within a (often rapidly) changing African setting” (Bickford-Smith 202). Wicomb shows how this realization leads to valorizing white values through the narrator’s father, Mr. Shenton, in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*.

Similarly, in Jamaica there operated a “tripartite social structure inherited, in its essential features, from the slavery era” (Johnson 317) that consisted of black, brown and white, with blacks on the bottom, coloureds in the middle, and whites on top. This system also relied upon a close association between race and class. As Johnson notes,

In most British Caribbean societies, the descendants of free people of colour formed the core of the middle class . . . [;] this group . . . benefited in Jamaica from the decline in the sugar industry which provided them with opportunities for

joining the planter class. Light-skinned members of this group in Jamaica often aspired to whiteness forming the 'census whites' who were white by self-definition in the census but were widely known to be of mixed ancestry. (318)

As with the Creoles in South Africa, "The middle class shared an obsession with colour distinctions. Considerations of skin colour and physical attributes (preferably European-type) influenced marriage decisions and casual social relationships. Individuals were generally reluctant to associate with those of darker skin and were especially intent on distancing themselves from the lower class" (319). Michelle Cliff shows how this ideology can have debilitating effects for those who espouse it (as the narrator's father, Boy, does), since it alienates them from their native history and causes psychological fragmentation.

Not only did those in the middle class separate themselves from blacks in economics, they also "aspired to 'Englishness'" in their religious preferences and often "devalued folk culture forms in song, dance, and stories" (321). However, these were upheld by the black lower classes for whom "a belief in obeah persisted" and so they "often attached themselves to syncretic Afro-Christian religious cults such as Myal, Revival, and Pocomania (Pukimina)" (321). Despite this distancing from black culture by mixed-race people, in South Africa and in the Caribbean, this group became the target of ever increasing British racism as scientific categories about race became more ingrained in the English way of thinking.

Philippa Levine contends in "Sexuality, Gender, and Empire" that "as racial hierarchies rigidified through colonial contact and scientific data, which claimed to prove that race was biological, women's fertility was increasingly linked to racial purity" (146). She continues, "the prospect of mixed-race progeny was increasingly unpalatable. There

was a constant fear that mixed-race women would attract white men and the resulting sexual liaisons would dilute the racial stock, with babies ever less English” (140). This perceived need to protect the purity of the races had serious implications for British and native women alike.

Elleke Boehmer contends that “Empire was male . . . in inspiration. The examples which men followed in the imperial field, the ideals of valour and personal glory to which they marched, were those found in the imperial histories, or colonial tales of masculine achievement” (76). This masculine vision which characterized the colonial project profoundly influenced the way that British as well as native women were portrayed in colonial writings and in how the British generally characterized native lands and cultures. The male-centered project of British colonialism influenced conceptions of British women in two key ways. Both, as P. J. Marshall illustrates, were largely unfounded. The first conception concerning British women is that “the women lost us the empire” (Marshall 246). Marshall explains that

The assumptions behind such propositions are that race relations in tropical colonies were poisoned by the presence of white women, who forced white males to stop sexual relations with ‘native’ women and instead to cocoon their wives and children, as well as themselves, in a world where contact with non-European people, domestic servants apart, was reduced to a minimum. (246)

This perception of the British colonial wife was fueled by the commonly held belief that colonial wives lived “over-secluded and trivial lives” (247), an idea echoed by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. While Victorian conventions regarding women’s roles did, to some extent, force this kind of seclusion onto British women, this belief was also crucially tied to a second conception about British women—that they were the continual target of violent sexual attention from native males. In *The Oxford History of the British Empire*,

Rosalind O'Hanlon argues that since it was "Infused with racial and sexual significance, white domestic space, and white women in particular, became . . . the focus of tension and challenge. The peculiar sexual hysteria of 'Black Peril' scares swept through the white societies of the British Empire with extraordinary frequency from the late nineteenth century: in India, Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, Papua" (393-394). This largely unsubstantiated fear of the white female body being violated by native men caused British men to be fiercely protective of their women and, ironically, then to blame the women for problematic race relations and consequent loss of the empire. While he does not blame his white female protagonist for the loss of empire, Coetzee does seem to share a similarly vexed attitude toward his protagonist in *Age of Iron* by making her white female body the site of a kind of punishment for the ills of apartheid.

Despite these conceptions about British women, Boehmer's argument that "if they experienced discrimination in the masculine world of the Empire, still European women more often than not formed part of the same race and social group as their male consorts and counterparts" (224) cannot be ignored. As P. J. Marshall points out, "Women were not admitted into administrative posts in the colonies until after the Second World War, but this does not mean that individual women had not been able to exert a significant influence on colonial policies long before that" (247). British women were at the very least complicit in the colonizing project and in some cases actively involved in policy making.

By contrast, as Boehmer points out, "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"

(Boehmer 224). This double marginalization of women was a feature of British colonial practice from its beginnings. This was in large part due to the fact that the British conceived of unexplored places as virgin land. Anne McClintock argues that “The myth of the virgin land is also the myth of the empty land, involving both a gender and a racial dispossession. With patriarchal narratives, to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting male insemination of history, language, and reason” (30). She continues, “for women, the myth of the virgin land presents specific dilemmas . . . [;] women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned” (30).

This symbolic linking of women to the land and the British need for control asserted itself most prominently in concerns over African women’s sexuality. According to Diana Jeater in “The British Empire and African Women in the Twentieth Century,” “Controlling men’s labor, always of paramount importance to the architects of Empire in Africa, was matched, if not at times surpassed, by colonial concerns over the sexuality of African women” (228). These concerns about sexuality manifested themselves in British colonial policies that were often isolated from the reality of culture in the region of contact. As Jeater makes clear,

although gender ideologies imported from Britain failed to describe African women’s experiences accurately, colonial administrators found it difficult to develop more appropriate ways of thinking about local women. They had European notions about the spheres in which subordination was crucial for ‘civilization,’ notably sexual propriety, marriage, the division of labour, and property. They tried to intervene in these areas to make African women ‘civilized.’ (230)

These gendered divisions began during slavery. Catherine Hall argues in “Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century” that slavery in Africa and the Caribbean

“had established its own well-defined sexual division of labour: men worked outside the home, women as domestics” (64). Not only did slavery serve to inscribe British ideas about gendered spheres, but stereotypes about African women persisted even after emancipation.

In “Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century,” Barbara Bush contends that “African-Caribbean women continued to be associated with ‘heathen practices’ stemming from slavery and associated with promiscuity, rejection of Christian marriage, and ‘mother-headed’ families. Colonial policies . . . focused on two key strategies: the strengthening of indigenous patriarchy to control both female migration and sexual autonomy and the promotion of Christian marriage, and ‘home life’ education emphasizing health, cleanliness, and hygiene” (98). This emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene stemmed from what Anne McClintock calls an “epochal shift” in imperial ideology. According to McClintock, the shift was from “scientific racism—embodied in anthropological, scientific and medical journals . . .—to what [can be called] commodity racism.” With this shift, the “Victorian middle-class home became the space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race, while the colonies—in particular Africa—became a theater for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity and the reinvention of gender” (33-34). Both Dangarembga’s and Wicomb’s texts explore the negative consequences of this shift for their female protagonists in *Nervous Conditions* and *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, respectively.

Despite this shift, there was still a need, according to McClintock, to satisfy the “empirical standards of the natural scientists” by creating “visible stigmata to represent—as a commodity spectacle—the historical anachronism of the degenerate classes” (41).

According to T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Sarah Bartmann, a Khoi woman known as the “Hottentot Venus,” “provided the missing link in the ‘great chain of being,’ the crucial step between humanity, that is, Europeans, and animals. Indeed, among all the explorative undertakings of the French nineteenth-century medical community, this African woman figures as the treasured find, the key to the origin of an inferior species” (17). Sarah Bartmann was born in the “interior of the Cape Colony of South Africa in 1788 and [was] renamed Saartjie Baartman when the region came under Dutch colonial rule” (17). In 1810, Bartmann entered into a contractual agreement with Alexander Dunlop and Henrik Cezar which “stipulated that in addition to performing domestic duties, she was to be exhibited in England and Ireland” (18). She went on exhibit in September of that year, and the primary attraction for audiences was her “abnormally” large buttocks. In 1815, Georges Cuvier, a renowned French naturalist, along with “a team of zoologists, anatomists, and physiologists [,] examined Bartmann” (22). In the course of her three-day examination, Cuvier also drew sketches of Bartmann naked. Sharpley-Whiting contends that “The sketches allow the viewer to observe, document, and compare her various physiognomic and physiological differences, differences that vastly differentiate the Other from the European selfCuvier’s description abounds with associations of black femaleness with bestiality and primitivism” (23-24). When Bartmann died later that year, Cuvier received permission to autopsy her body and examine it “in greater detail” (27). The exhibition and examination of Sarah Bartmann’s body served to make her “the paradigm for the invention of the female body as an anachronism. The supposedly excessive genitalia of this woman . . . were overexposed and pathologized before the disciplinary gaze of male medical science and a voyeuristic

public” (McClintock 42). In this way, the process of Othering in the colonial project asserted a British supremacy over colonized people through literally employing the female body as a site for illustrating superiority.

The exhibition of black female sexuality reemerged in Europe during the 1920’s, according to Diana Jeater, in part because modern art’s engagement with African sexuality “provided an outlet for its recognition within Europe, at a safely exoticized distance. The sexual aspects of African bodies, and particularly female bodies, became the subject of suitably ‘ethnographic’ discussion and observation” (232). Additionally, by this time, British ideas about gender in the colonies were characterized by a Victorian obsession with “eradicat[ing] what was defined as female ‘sexuality’ but was actually female independence” (242). This Victorian fixation on female sexuality “accelerated the emergence of new systems of class differentiation within African communities, including more European models of marriage. By the 1930’s in Africa colonial policies regarding independent women had given middle-class, and indeed, working-class, African women, a real incentive to express themselves as ‘respectable.’” This was done primarily through Western-style marriages that “appealed to upwardly mobile urban African women, as a mark of their difference from the morally suspect independent women who had become targets of colonial hostility” (245). Dangarembga explores this phenomenon in *Nervous Conditions* when Babamukuru insists that his brother and his sister-in-law be married in a Western ceremony after the arrival of such an independent woman, Lucia.

While patriarchy served literally to enforce British authority over native women, the British also asserted their authority over regions and cultures metaphorically.

According to Boehmer, “If colonization was a struggle for supremacy, not only of white

against black, but between European nations, the scramble for territories took on the aspect of a conflict between competing virilities. Here we see how the ranking of cultures relative to a dominant and warlike Europe might have led to the feminization of other peoples” (86). Far from being abolished during independence, oppression of women was “reinforced by the pressures of national liberation. Gender divisions in particular were often brought into greater prominence” (Boehmer 224). Further, native men also continued a legacy of patriarchy which was carried out against native women.

Hawkins and Morgan assert that

Patriarchal ideologies in Africa, which eventually spread from white administrators, missionaries, and settlers to black men, had much in common, but elaborate attempts were made to pretend that these were African rather than British ideas . . . [;] colonial officers worked with African men to create a system of patriarchy enshrined in ‘native custom’ and administered by ‘native courts.’ But ‘native’ was just a euphemism for colonial, and colonial was itself a disguise for an alliance of black men and British [male] officers. (19)

This is not to say that the British simply imported patriarchy along with their authority and culture into the areas of contact. Rather, British depictions of native cultures as weak and feminine caused a change in the way that native patriarchy was written about and practiced.

As Rosalind O’ Hanlon points out, “for many urban middle-class men, buffeted by forces of economic change and torn between conflicting cultural norms, ‘woman’ and ‘home’ came to stand as a tranquil refuge of unchanging ‘tradition.’ This created an intense focus on women and the home as realms of freedom and cultural integrity, beyond the reach of the colonial state” (386). Contemporary literature clearly reflects this conception of women as guardians of tradition and home, and “reified images of women, particularly of women as mothers, were often central to the ways in which

national or 'community' identities themselves were defined" (386).² I hope to show with specific texts how authors reclaim the female body as a site of empowered self-identification. I will, then, focus on ways in which the female body has been conceived of as a site of resistance, though mothers and concepts of home in the motherland are also important in these constructions. Specifically, my primary focus is on literature written after the 1970's and 1980's when gendered images of women began to change due to such "key historical developments [as] the resurgence of the women's movement in Europe and the United States, and, crucially, the political and cultural initiatives taken by Third World Women, and women of color in the First World, to define their own positions in relation to Western feminism" (Boehmer 225). However, before discussing these postcolonial literatures, I will briefly examine the way that colonial literature, represented here by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, helped to reinforce imperial ideology regarding race and gender.

Heart of Darkness

According to David Armitage in "Literature and Empire," "Empire spurred the growth of literature, as the planting of colonies went hand-in-hand with the building of a canon" (99). A very important text which contributed profoundly to the colonial canon is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a text which reinforced the male-centered nature of the colonizing project and the feminization of Africa as a dark and unknown place that must be penetrated and conquered. This text also illustrates well how an author sets up the darkness of Africa as physically, psychologically, and even morally debilitating—a

² Images of women as mothers as well as the complicated relationships between mothering and nationality along with concepts like 'motherland' and 'mother tongue' have been well explored in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, edited by Susheila Nasta.

figuration which many of the writers I will deal with contradict and often work directly against. Lastly, this novel embodies the colonial ideas about gender as these were defined for white and black women.

Conrad shows the male-centeredness of imperial ideology through Marlow's description of how women view colonization: "[i]t's queer how out of touch with truth women are! They live in a world of their own and there had never been anything like it and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact, we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation, would start up and knock the whole thing over" (16). Thus, Marlow establishes men as the bearers of reason and order who, then, can understand and critique the colonizing project as he does, but who also become responsible for taking that masculine sense of order to Africa through English imperialism.

Heart of Darkness aligns colonization with male imagery and the myth of Africa as a virgin land. Marlow illustrates this in his discussion of why he wanted to go to Africa as a child. He remembers looking at a map of Africa and seeing a "blank space" (11), and when he recalls his journey to meet Kurtz, he says that "We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (37). The English presence in Africa provides form and meaning for this virgin territory by penetrating the land and filling in the map by naming the places "discovered." Marlow does offer a critique of the imperial project by describing it as a kind of theft and by asserting that the "conquest of the earth" actually means "the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves" (10). However, his narrative also conforms to racist

ideas about Africa and its indigenous people at the time. Thus, Marlow's narrative reveals a kind of ambivalence regarding colonization in that he is critical of the brutal tactics used for economic gain, yet he is unable to rise above stereotypical notions of race and gender to actively resist those same practices.³ As Edward Said's reading of the novel makes clear, "They [Marlow and Kurtz] (and of course Conrad) are ahead of their time in understanding that what they call 'the darkness' has an autonomy of its own, and can reinvade and reclaim what imperialism had taken for *its* own . . . [; however,] Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination" (30). Marlow's racist rhetoric keeps him entrenched in an imperial mindset that can only envision Africans as inferior.

Marlow insists, for instance, that the Africans are "men" (20), but he later lists them with objects and property as "dusty niggers with splay feet" (21). He also robs the Africans of their claim to history when he calls them "prehistoric" and says that the English "were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories" (37). Additionally, he says of the cannibals aboard his ship, "I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time—had no inherited experience to teach them, as it were" (42). Stripped of their claim to history, the African people in this book are depicted as dependent on the English to "civilize" them from their

³ Marlow's ambivalence is very similar to Mrs. Curren's criticisms of apartheid in *Age of Iron*, which I discuss in detail in chapter two.

savage ways. As Chinua Achebe contends, “The real question [in this novel] is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans” which, he asserts, Conrad’s racist attitude perpetuates (257).

This is most clear in Marlow’s description of “the savage who was fireman” (38). Of him Marlow says, “he was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap” (38). Not only does Marlow’s narrative thus affirm racist notions of Africans as savages in need of civilizing, it also asserts the need for the English to bring a kind of ordered reality to the region.

At the same time, Marlow describes his experience in Africa as a kind of “dream-sensation” that cannot be fully articulated (30). This dream-like vision of Africa also helps to solidify the notion that the African climate can adversely affect physical and mental health. According to Alison Bashford, “The idea that climate and the physical environment affected the bodily and mental constitutions of individuals was deeply ingrained in British medical theory and practice. Thus, being ‘out of place’ was understood as a biological and medical (and later as psychological) problem, literally productive of disease or ill-health” (131). Indeed, this idea appears early on in the text when a doctor, who studies “the mental changes of individuals” who go to Africa, examines Marlow in the interest of science (15). Tony C. Brown notes in “Cultural Psychosis on the Frontier” that “If the darkness overtakes the colonialist, as in the privileged case of Kurtz, it is as quality otherwise latent, lodged deep within him, but which irrupts *due* to intimate contact with the lawless wilderness . . . which by its very nature threatens as a massive presence that will ‘block’ the imposition of civilized order”

(18-19 emphasis in original). Thus, Conrad upholds the idea that Africa is psychologically debilitating while re-enforcing the idea of European rationalism and “reality” when Marlowe contends that discovering the book left by Kurtz’s Russian companion, which represents Western Culture and literacy, makes him feel as though he is again in the presence of reality (39).

Significantly, the representation of black female sexuality contributes to the debilitation inherent in the darkness of the African landscape. Marianna Torgovnick, who contends that the African woman is Kurtz’s wife, argues that the women “is the representative ‘native,’ the only one fully individualized and described in detail, except for the Helmsman, who also dies in the story. She is, the text insists, the symbol of Africa. Once she enters the narrative, she is made to embody the landscape, rendered throughout in the language of pathetic fallacy” (150). Torgovnick goes on to say that “Marlow clearly conceives of her as a substitute for, an inversion of, Kurtz’s high-minded, white ‘Intended.’ Like the Belgian woman, she is an impressive figure, but unlike the Intended, she is not ‘high-minded’: she is presented all body and inchoate emotion” (146). Conrad underscores this binary relationship in the way that Marlow describes each woman and the function each serves in the novella.

The descriptions of each woman are worth quoting in their entirety. Of the African woman, Marlow says,

along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high, her hair was done in the shape of a helmet, she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck, bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She

must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding. (60)

This description conflates this woman's body with the African landscape since "both she and the land convey 'sorrow,' while the land itself 'seemed to look at her' as though it were looking at itself" (McIntire 260). After this woman realizes that Kurtz is leaving, "[s]he turn[s] away slowly, walk[s] on following the bank and passe[s] into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at [them] in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared" (61). Gabrielle McIntire contends that "Marlow's orientalizing terms here invoke visions of a valuable and hunted animal retreating back to its camouflaged zone of protection: she disappears into the thickets to resume her spatial identification with the 'dark' territory" (61). In the same way, he had associated the environment around the colonial posts with feminine qualities earlier in the text when he described them as "clinging to the skirts of the unknown" (36). Here, as McIntire rightfully argues, "the African woman 'passe[s]' back into the feminized indecipherability of the unknown which defines her" (261). Thus, Conrad employs "a fantasy of extension between race, gender, and territory to propose, in effect, that race and gender *are* the motherland" (261). Moreover, in this configuration, the African woman becomes the boundary line for Marlow's journey into "the heart of darkness" since "Her death fulfills her role of emblem of the African landscape . . . [which is] death in the novella" (Torgovnick 155). On the other hand, Kurtz's Intended also becomes a kind of border of empire since

Marlow is unable to tell her the truth about Kurtz. As Torgovnick contends, “Even the eminently white Intended makes Marlow lie, and he ‘hate[s], detest[s] and can’t bear a lie . . . because . . . there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies’” (155). As boundary figures, these women represent what Torgovnick calls “a yearning for and yet fear of boundary transgression, violence, and death” (156), which desires Anne McClintock argues were the underpinnings of the masculinist project of colonialism since “As European men crossed dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries In myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge” (24).

Kurtz’s “Intended” is described as follows: “She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without thought for herself She had the mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful” (73). Susan Hagan characterizes this description of Kurtz’s “Intended” as follows: “associated as she is with self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of community, the ‘[Intended]’ becomes associated with the community, its moral values, civilization, restraint of the animal man—she becomes associated with culture itself” (49). In the same way that the African woman becomes a symbol of the African landscape and all of its corruptive powers, so Kurtz’s “Intended” becomes the symbol of morality and purity represented by English culture. In essence, her purity constructs her as a kind of blank upon which the idealized notion of imperialism can be written.

Though they are characterized as opposites, the African woman and Kurtz's "Intended" serve a similar function in the text as representatives of women's roles in the colonizing project. Gabrielle McIntire asserts that "Conrad associates the women with the cultures and geographies they inhabit as though by contiguous extension. The principal women of the text are always positioned in transitional spaces in either the colony *or* the metropole, while they are decidedly static In terms of Marlow's understanding of his voyage, the women are neither *here* nor *there*; or rather, they are only ever *here* or *there*, since they are powerless to transgress the limit that such a boundary implies" (258 emphasis in original). The women serve here to underpin "a sense of extreme separation between the colony and the metropole, and as such they are crucial for guarding and preserving difference between Africa and Europe" (McIntire 259). Though Conrad grants limited agency to the African woman, both women's bodies, and particularly the body of the African woman, serve as powerful tropes for the culture and the land. This novel's racialized and gendered history of British imperialism sets the stage for the contemporary fictions that comprise my study.

Chapter Outline

The legacy of British colonization and its rigid racial and gender constructions inform all of the texts examined in this project. Though they are works of fiction, they are always concerned with history and how it is shaped and narrated. As Barker, Hulme, and Iverson argue in the introduction to *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, "Postcolonial work is . . . to a degree reconstitutive: to begin to understand local geographies and histories and to allow them to count in a way previously denied, are crucial counter-hegemonic moves" (10). For the South African writer, according to

Andre Brink, “the only justification for the novel lies in saying what cannot be said in any other way . . . [;] [thus,] apartheid ironically imposed on the writer precisely the need to report, as this was not permitted to the other media. Whatever else the writer set out to achieve, the need to function as historian—that is, through ‘reporting’ and ‘representing’—informed much of her/his activity and defined much of her/his scope” (17). This holds true for the Southern African writers J. M. Coetzee, Tsitsi Dangaremba, and Zoë Wicomb discussed in the following chapters.

Myriam Chancy argues that in Haiti there also “is a connection between history and storytelling, between Haitian women’s lives and the ways in which narratives enable Haitian women writers to preserve those lives . . . [;] since a codified history of Haitian women has yet to be written, the project of recovering the roots of Haitian women’s self-definition is made possible only through the evaluation of narrative forms The fictional is therefore a conduit for a historical narrative that is elsewhere denied existence” (5-6). Additionally, in the Caribbean, according to Evelyn O’Callaghan, in literature by women, “the female protagonist’s initiation into the complexities of the adult world reflects the development of a ‘national’ as well as a ‘personal’ identity. The conflated ‘herstory’ is indeed a collective one” (*Woman Version* 7), which idea can be extended to the texts by Erna Brodber, Edwidge Danticat, and Michelle Cliff as well.

The writers of fiction examined in this project share a common vision; as Peter Horn makes clear, “Fiction is not about how it really was: fiction is an attempt to keep the story about the past open, an attempt to deny the impression the historians try to create that what they say is all there is to say about the past. Fiction is about the possibilities . . . [;] possibilities which are denied in the official record” (Horn 31). Thus, these writers

claim for themselves a space in which to acknowledge those parts of history often denied in the official records and in so doing resist the totalizing effect of European history by exploring possibilities for resistance.

Initially, forays into the possibilities of fiction in these regions emulated European models. As Rhonda Cobham notes, in early twentieth-century Jamaican literature, women were portrayed in “domestic settings, as ideal figures whose conflicts were likely to be between marriage and the service of God rather than a choice of lovers” (203). These kinds of images were prevalent in early literature, but they were at first consistently applied only to white female characters. Cobham contends that “the appropriation of these images to describe black and brown women must therefore be seen as the expression of a legitimate—if misguided—wish on the part of the new black bourgeoisie to claim for itself the prerogatives of virtue and refinement from which their race had until now been excluded” (203). Similarly, early postwar South African writers often imitated English models and transported English values into their writing. However, beginning in the 1970’s, South African authors began to forge a new kind of literary standard that was not informed by European values and ideals (McClintock 351). The same holds true for literature from the Caribbean.

This new literary standard involved an element of resistance to colonialism and British culture. As noted earlier, for the works discussed in this project, the primary target of antagonism is the way that British culture shaped gender ideology. As Evelyn O’Callaghan notes,

since colonial culture was chiefly transmitted via the middle-class values and aspirations enshrined in an inherited educational system, the alienating effects of schooling . . . have long been targeted . . . [to] reveal the ways in which

restrictive gender roles imbue colonial ideology Crucial to this type of schooling for ‘young ladies,’ with its Victorian strictures as to respectability and morality, is an underlying taboo on the expression of female sexuality. (4)

The primary means of resistance to this kind of oppression is, not surprisingly, through the female body.

This use of the female body as a site of resistance has a precedent in the history of British colonialism. According to Beckles, slave women used their bodies to rebel against slavery in several ways, including manipulation of fertility. Plantation managers were often at a loss for how to “explain satisfactorily low birth rates and high infant mortality rates. Most were suspicious that slave women were applying ‘unnatural’ brakes upon their reproductive process . . . [;] the widespread belief . . . was that it was part of an anti-slavery strategy that had become endemic. By declaring gynecological warfare upon slavery, enslaved women were accused of engaging in a most effective form of resistance” (“Taking Liberties” 141). In addition to reproductive resistance, there are also precedents for female resistance in the figures of Nanny in Jamaica, who led a band of Maroon soldiers, and Nanny Griggs in Barbados, who played a key role in the slave rebellion of 1816 when she “conveyed news of developments in the Haitian revolution to other slaves . . . [;] Both Nanny of the Maroons and Nanny Griggs constituted matriarchal leadership within the revolutionary tradition of anti-slavery” (145). The figure of Nanny in Jamaica serves as an important source of power in Michelle Cliff’s novels discussed in chapter four.

Though overtly concerned with resisting British colonialism and patriarchy, the literature about colonized people examined in this project also reflects a continued conflict with Britain. Many of these characters experience what Patrick Colm Hogan

calls “‘alienating hybridity’—the estrangement from both traditions, the sense that one can be neither English nor Igbo (Hindu, etc.), the paralyzing conviction that one has no identity, no real cultural home, and that no synthesis is possible” (17). Hogan goes on to say that for this kind of character, questions about identity arise when he/she “internalizes the alien culture after extensive education, typically including a period in the metropolis. His/her racial or ethnic origin prevents true acceptance in the foreign culture, and the internalization of the foreign culture makes him/her (in Achebe’s phrase) ‘no longer at ease’ in the home culture as well” (17). This is true for several of the characters examined in this project who must then undertake what Homi Bhabha calls the “borderline work of culture” which, he argues, “demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present” (7). In these texts, the authors do what according to Bhabha constitutes a “renew[al] [of] the past, refiguring it as a contingent, ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7), thereby constituting a space of empowerment from which to construct their own narratives.

The hybridity of the colonized subject is further complicated by the presence of mulatto or coloured people native to the former colony but who are the product of miscegenation between a British colonizer and a native, and by the late twentieth-century phenomenon of increased contact of the native person with the metropolis through immigration. The kind of resistance explored in this literature is thus necessarily complicated by the hybridity of colonial identity in negotiating what aspects of British culture to accept and which to reject. By using aspects of British culture, and specifically education, to enact resistance against that same culture, these characters demonstrate

what Bhabha calls the “ambivalence” of mimicry, thereby mocking colonial “power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable” (Bhabha 125). Finally, a further complication to the resistance to be examined here is the triangulation of relationships which occurs between the colonizer and the colonized when a previously colonized subject moves to America.

While the four main countries I will be dealing with do have their own particular histories, there are also many similarities in the themes and concerns in the works I will be examining. Therefore, I will show how these texts work together and speak to each other in the ways that they treat similar issues. While other critical works have examined literatures from these regions together, this project is the first to pair J. M. Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* with Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* with Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which I also analyze using Susan Bordo’s work as a rubric for the first time.⁴ Authors from both major regions explore through mixed-race characters the continuing legacy of the brutality that native women often suffered. These texts explore as well the complexity of identity formation in such characters who are taught to hate the part of themselves that is native while valorizing their English ancestors and heritage. According to Patrick Colm Hogan, “the mixed-race character who strives to be white and who collaborates with the colonizer is a common figure in much postcolonization literature” (5). Authors from both regions also address the fraught nature of white native characters who are portrayed as outsiders to the British as well as to the native cultures. Additionally, authors from both regions portray the

⁴ Aside from Constance Richard’s article “Nationalism and the Development of Identity in Postcolonial Fiction: Zoë Wicomb and Michelle Cliff,” I am also the first to link together texts by these authors.

corrupting influence of British and/or American education and values for natives.

Finally, authors from both regions address the damaging effects of the lasting legacy of Victorian gender normative behavior, which governs and often limits female agency.

Much of the work done on female resistance to colonial and patriarchal authority centers on treatments of madness, including articles such as “Revisioning Our Kumblas: Transforming Feminist and Nationalist Agendas in Three Caribbean Women's Texts” by Rhonda Cobham, “Breakdown or Breakthrough? Madness of Resistance in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *A Question of Power*” by Miki Flockemann, and “The Theme of Madness in Four African and Caribbean Novels by Women” by Elaine Campbell. I have, in turn, centered my discussions on how the texts included here reclaim the female body as a site of resistance to this dual oppression.

For instance, in chapter two, I use Susan Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor* to illustrate how illness functions in J. M. Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* and Erna Brodber’s *Myal* as a metaphor for the corrupting ideals of colonization. In *Age of Iron*, Mrs. Curren’s cancer serves as a metaphor for the cancer of apartheid in South Africa. Though she is never fully able to overcome her racist attitudes about black people, she does transgress racial boundaries in her relationship with Vercueil, which act constitutes a threat to the purity of white femininity that “needs” to be protected by apartheid as well as punished for sins against it. Coetzee is not only the sole white author examined in this project but also the only male. Moreover, he is the most widely recognized and critically acclaimed of all the authors about whom I write. Therefore, his vision of the female body, and particularly a white female body, as a repository for all of the shame and punishment due to white South Africans and his treatment of racial relationships as hindered by stereotypes and

unrelenting power structures serve as an interesting counterpoint to the ways that the minority female authors under consideration here seek to empower the female body as a site of resistance that draws strength from productive hybridity, such as Erna Brodber, whose novel *Myal* is also included in this chapter. Through Ella's mysterious illness in the text, Brodber contends that Western values—both British and American—are corrupting to the body. However, unlike Coetzee, Brodber imagines a cure for this illness which comes through Ella's active resistance to colonial education.

In the third chapter, I draw on Susan Bordo's configuration of anorexia and bulimia in Western cultures to show how Tsitsi Dangarembga and Edwidge Danticat rework the way that eating disorders are figured in the postcolonial texts *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. These novels both explore how female characters resist colonial and patriarchal authority over their bodies through eating disorders. For Nyasha and Sophie, rejecting food becomes their only way to display power, specifically over their own bodies. Thus, while these characters' eating disorders are self-destructive, they are also psychologically empowering.

In the fourth chapter, I draw on the work of Homi Bhabha and Judith Butler to show how choosing politically aligned performances of race and gender can lead to active resistance in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* by Zoë Wicomb and *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff. Wicomb's text charts Frieda's beginning of consciousness regarding active resistance to racial categories in South Africa. Unfortunately, the text does not include her choice to embrace actively the ideas she learns throughout the text. On the other hand, Clare's active participation in revolution in *No Telephone to Heaven* represents the most overt form of resistance practiced by any

character examined here. However, even her group cannot escape the legacy of colonial authority in that someone in the group betrays them to the authorities, and Clare and her comrades are all killed.

In the final chapter, I discuss why the legacy of British colonization and continued patriarchy inspire such similar themes for these authors. I also discuss possibilities for why there is no clear resolution possible in these texts even though they hold out a kind of hope for characters who find female solidarity and community as well as for those who acknowledge and embrace their native heritage.

Chapter 2

The Diseased Body: Colonization as Illness in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and Erna Brodber's *Myal*

Age of Iron by J. M. Coetzee and *Myal* by Erna Brodber are both set during periods of intense political transition in their respective countries—1986-1989 for South Africa in *Age of Iron* and 1913-1919 for Jamaica in *Myal*. Sheila Whittick says of South Africa during these years that “Ravaged from the inside by interracial violence, morally and economically eroded from the outside by sanctions increasingly imposed by the international community, white South Africa was facing in the period 1986-1989 a death sentence as imminent and inescapable as that confronting Mrs. Curren [*Age of Iron*'s protagonist] herself” (45). Joyce Walker-Johnson notes that in Jamaica during the time period of *Myal*, “The inter-war years, as Trevor Munroe has noted, marked a phase of ‘pervasive and progressive racial self-assertion on the part of African Jamaicans.’ The year 1919, one of rioting and civil disturbance, was, the novel suggests, both the start of this new phase and the culmination of efforts by the second generation of freedmen The events of the novel show a growth of awareness” (55). Thus, each novel is concerned with a specific time in its respective country's history when resistance to a colonial legacy was marked by violence and social unrest. It is not surprising, then, that illness becomes a primary metaphor through which these authors write about these troubled years.

Despite sharp differences in locale and time, both novels portray women who suffer from an illness that is for both a direct by-product of patriarchal and colonial corruption. Their diseases, therefore, serve as metaphors in the sense that Susan Sontag

discusses in her book *Illness as Metaphor*. There, Sontag argues that “Illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust” (72). Sontag asserts that cancer serves in this capacity as a “master illness” that is “more specifically polemical” than other illness metaphors. As such, it “suggests a profound disequilibrium between individuals and society Disease metaphors are used to judge society not as out of balance but as repressive” (72-73). This certainly holds true for the two texts under study since both authors depict illness as a direct consequence of the repressive legacy of colonization. Sontag goes on to say that “cancer is understood as the overwhelming or obliterating of consciousness . . . [;] cells are multiplying and you are being replaced by the non-you” (67). In *Age of Iron*, Mrs. Curren correlates her cancer with the policy of apartheid, a legacy which results in the loss of her sense of self as she grows more and more removed from her body. In *Myal*, Ella’s and to a lesser extent Anita’s education serve to alienate their minds from their bodies thereby leaving their bodies vulnerable to exploitation. Sontag also notes that cancer is often discussed through the rhetoric of colonization wherein the cancer cells colonize the body from the site of the original tumor (64). Thus, cancer becomes the appropriate metaphor for these authors to explore the dual oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy in the form of apartheid in *Age of Iron* and in the form of exploitation or “spirit thievery” in *Myal*.

Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* and Ella in *Myal* are, to some extent, both victims of these dual oppressions; however, they are also clearly partly responsible since they experience these oppressions with a degree of complicity, most damagingly through education. Mrs. Curren is a retired classics teacher, presumably having worked in the system that black characters in the novel protest against as part of a corrupt policy that

seeks to maintain racial segregation in South Africa. As a white person under the apartheid system, Mrs. Curren has also been a beneficiary of the systemic racist society into which she was born. Ella's collusion in her oppression happens, in turn, as a result of her education as we see when she chooses to identify with white characters in her books and when she later willingly tells all of her history to her American husband who then betrays her memories by turning them into a play that he characterizes as "the best coon show ever" (80). Both characters' complicity serves not only to make them a part of their own oppression but also serves as a way to alienate them from the more extreme realities of racial and class conflicts in their respective countries. Further, both novels imply that what eventually causes these characters' illnesses is internalizing these white, colonial values at the expense of acting against the corrupting forces at work in their countries. This passive complicity leaves them hollow like dolls (as both are described) and personally susceptible to the corruption in the form of illness that follows on such internalization.

While Ella's disease in *Myal* is not named as cancer, it is characterized by a growth that must be expelled from her body before she can get well. Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, on the other hand, clearly suffers from cancer. Sontag notes that "cancer [has] been regularly invoked to condemn repressive practices and ideals Modern disease metaphors specify an ideal of society's well-being, analogized to physical health, that is . . . frequently . . . a call for a new political order" (76). Thus, Mrs. Curren's cancer gestures toward the repressive practices of apartheid in South Africa and implies that the nation's health depends on "a new political order" that is not based on segregation. As Fiona Probyn notes, "Elizabeth Curren is . . . an individual 'infected by the violence of

the state' and her representations of cancer as a threat to both the stability of her own identity and the political stability of the state has its echo in medical discourse which surrounds cancer" (218). Ella's illness, similarly, bears witness to a society's dis-ease with the legacy of racial and class hierarchies instituted under British colonization.

Significantly, Sontag also asserts that there is an "ancient metaphoric connection between cancer and a pregnancy" (44) wherein "cancer is a demonic pregnancy" (14) and the "lump" often characterizing the disease becomes "a fetus with its own will" (13), making this metaphor a decidedly female one. Mrs. Curren and Ella both experience their illnesses as a kind of "pregnancy," which also connects the metaphor of their illnesses with the female, reproductive body, and which, in turn, also connects their bodies to the land which is also figured as feminine. Thus, each diseased "pregnancy" which cannot bring life works against the use of the female body to reproduce the colonial "family" state.⁵ In Mrs. Curren's case, she cannot continue the Afrikaans, white legacy of apartheid by bearing racially pure, white children. Ella's case, in turn, speaks to the corrupting, death-bearing disease of colonization, a sickness that in this manifestation will not reproduce and so cannot sustain this particular pattern of domination.

As a result of their illnesses, both characters must undergo a kind of "re-education" about themselves, their histories, and their countries. Significantly, this re-education occurs in both cases as the result of a collaboration between races, thereby demonstrating the necessity of hybridity in combating the evils of colonization, an idea that all of the works in this project to some extent explore. While both novels illustrate a need for hybrid, interracial cooperation, the collaboration presented in *Myal* yields much

⁵ See introduction for a fuller explanation of this concept.

more positive results than the one in *Age of Iron*. In the latter novel, Mrs. Curren must succumb to her illness—in a way, to have her body “re-colonized” by the disease—as a form of punishment or penance for apartheid. Thus, her disease operates in the way that Sontag contends that cancer has always been perceived, “as a scourge; it was, metaphorically, the barbarian within” (61). Additionally, however, Coetzee’s use of cancer as a kind of punishment causes it to operate in the novel in Sontag’s terms as a “calamity” which “can clear the way for insight into life long self-deceptions and failures of character” (43). Mrs. Curren does, in fact, realize that though she has never been an intellectual supporter of apartheid, she has been a beneficiary and perhaps an unwitting participant in this system. However, Coetzee does not grant Mrs. Curren the agency to act on her new insights. Her diseased body serves only as the repository for punishment rather than as a representative site of resistance or change. Moreover, Florence, Mrs. Curren’s black maid and the only other female character in the text, also lacks any agency in working against the apartheid system. She functions in her son’s protest against the corrupt system only as a supportive by-stander and not as an active participant, while for Mrs. Curren, Florence functions only as the Other against whom she writes her own narrative. Despite these character limitations in the novel, *Age of Iron* does illustrate the evils of apartheid during the mid to late nineteen-eighties, and Mrs. Curren’s cancer as the metaphor for that corruption does demonstrate that this system is, in Sontag’s words, “unqualifiedly and unredeemably wicked” (83); it also posits the possibility of effective collaboration between races to foster understanding and bring about change. However, this resolution never is fully explored in the novel, which ends with Mrs. Curren’s death.

On the other hand, Ella does expel the “malignant” “pregnancy” that afflicts her and begins to effect some kind of resistance by teaching *against* what the colonial book used at her school invites her and her students to believe about themselves – particularly their being incapable of surviving without the “benevolent” presence of the English. Moreover, the collaboration between the members of the community and Maydene Brassington, the Methodist minister’s British white wife and Ella’s benefactor, is successful. Thus, Ella’s resistance and Maydene’s and Miss Gatha’s roles in her recovery illustrate a greater level of agency for women in this text than is seen in *Age of Iron*. However, the results of Ella’s resistant teaching are not played out in the text, and the rest of the community’s resistance remains incomplete since Selwyn, Ella’s husband, has already turned his play about the town into a film. Additionally, Ella’s guidance for how to teach against the text occurs under the male direction of Reverend Simpson, the Baptist minister, rather than as a result of her own self-determined path of resistance. Though the development of Ella’s political consciousness remains in the beginning stages at the end of the novel, her ability to see past the alienating message in her colonial text and her desire to work against that message make *Myal* an important connection to the texts discussed in chapters three and four.

The Diseased Body: *Age of Iron*

The text of J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Age of Iron* consists of an extended letter written by the narrator, Mrs. Curren, who lives in Cape Town, to her daughter who lives in America. The text, written over the course of three years, is one continuous letter detailing how Mrs. Curren’s cancer gets worse while the political tensions in South Africa grow increasingly more violent. Mrs. Curren begins her letter on the day that she

receives her diagnosis of terminal cancer, an illness which began several years ago as breast cancer and has now spread into her bones. Ina Gräbe notes that “In *Age of Iron* . . . the segmentation [division of the narrative into chapters] signals a linear or chronological development in which the last stages of the narrator’s terminal illness are marked by an increasing awareness of the socio-political context in which her personal suffering is situated” (287). Sheila Whittick contends that Coetzee’s position as a white intellectual aligns him with Mrs. Curren and through her narrative he “gives free rein . . . to his own need to pursue certain important truths both about himself as a white South African and about the culture with which, despite his strong moral condemnation of it, he has the indissoluble link of historical complicity” (45). Thus, Coetzee uses Mrs. Curren to represent complicit white intellectuals in South African society who verbally protest apartheid but who never *actively* resist it. To that end, Mrs. Curren represents Coetzee’s own failings as well as the failings of other whites in apartheid South Africa. In this way, his unflattering portrayal of Mrs. Curren as ultimately solipsistic and therefore unable to overcome her prejudices despite her new knowledge and increased insight into South Africa’s problems serves as an accurate, if scathing, critique. However, I also find the particularly gender-biased, and perhaps subconsciously racist, nature of this critique problematic. It seems to me that Coetzee can only imagine the female body, and particularly a white female body, as the site where *all* of the shame and punishment due to white South Africans must be exacted, and, as was mentioned earlier, he also grants no agency to the only black female in the text, Mrs. Curren’s maid, Florence. Further, while he employs black male characters to educate Mrs. Curren, the two black males in the text, Bheki and John, who do act in the cause against apartheid, are both killed which also,

obviously, forecloses their agency. Moreover, the racist sentiments attributed to Mrs. Curren, particularly those focused on the sexualized black body (both male and female), often seem to go beyond the purview of Coetzee's critique to re-inscribe, instead, the very attitudes that the larger narrative seeks to criticize. Thus, Coetzee's treatment of female characters along with his depiction of racial relationships as hindered by racist stereotypes and unrelenting power structures make this novel an important counterpoint to the ways that the minority female authors under consideration here seek to empower the female body as a site of resistance that draws strength from productive hybridity.

The cancer in Mrs. Curren's body clearly serves as a metaphor for the "cancer" of apartheid in South Africa, and on the day that she learns of her diagnosis, she also meets Vercueil, a drunken black man who has recently begun squatting on her property and who eventually becomes the person she entrusts with her letter to her daughter. Vercueil serves as Mrs. Curren's first acknowledgement of a person who suffers as a consequence of apartheid. Through her relationship with him and through her maid's son's activism in the cause for ending apartheid, Mrs. Curren comes face to face with the harsh realities of what the struggle means for those involved. Coupled with the pain of her cancer comes the increasingly more personal and more painful awareness of the oppression that her complicity through her white privilege has caused. Fiona Probyn contends, "In particular the novel focuses on the nature of white liberal complicity, a situation characterized by Elizabeth Curren who is simultaneously *inside* (an accomplice to) apartheid/neo-colonialism and *outside* in opposition to it [since] Elizabeth feels that her complicity and cancer are related as cause and effect" (214). Though she is not an Afrikaner or an

intellectual supporter of apartheid, Mrs. Curren's refusal to act against apartheid or to support those who do signals her guilt.

While she does come to recognize this guilt throughout the course of the novel, Mrs. Curren's awareness ends with a self-centered need for her own salvation in death rather than in an active participation in resistance against apartheid. Significantly, the white female body becomes the place where the pain and disease of cancer must play out as a parallel to the pain and disease characterizing race relations. Equally significant is that black men—Mrs. Curren's servant's son, Bheki, and his friend, John, as well as Vercueil—play the primary role in making her aware of the injustices to blacks.⁶ As Gilbert Yeoh claims, "*Age of Iron* has a blatantly lop-sided structure, in which Mrs. Curren's expansive discourse claims most of the available textual space. Nevertheless, the novel's sly implication is that her discourse may amount to nothing, while the marginalized voices of Vercueil, Thabane and John count for something" (122). When Mrs. Curren thinks about the system of apartheid, she always imagines it as a male, patriarchal construct and believes that white men are the ones who make the laws and who wield the power since she imagines the country's leaders as "The bullies in the last row of school desks, raw-boned, lumpish boys, grown up now and promoted to rule the land" (28). Indeed, as Anne McClintock's study shows, apartheid, as it was constructed through Afrikaner nationalism during the "Tweede Trek" (the Second Trek modeled after the "Groot" [Great] Trek led by Peit Retief), was built around and inscribed on the white

⁶ This is similar to the way that Coetzee treats the rape in *Disgrace*—as if the white female body, the very thing to be preserved and kept pure by apartheid, is what must be made to suffer at the hands of a black male for the political consequences of such a system.

female body which became the site of “protection” from black male sexuality and miscegenation that threatened to “corrupt” pure white blood.

McClintock notes that “Nine replicas of Voortrekker wagon were built” and that “Each wagon became the microcosm of colonial society at large: the whip-wielding white patriarch prancing on horseback, black servants toiling alongside, white mother and children sequestered in the wagon—the women’s starched white bonnets signifying the purity of the race” (370-371). Thus, white women served as important symbols in what McClintock terms a “fetishistic displacement of difference” that helped to create a sense of Afrikaner collectivity and that became a major reason for the success of the Nationalist party in 1948 (375-376). Moreover, McClintock goes on to say that “White women were not the weeping bystanders of apartheid history but active, if decidedly disempowered,⁷ participants in the invention of Afrikaner identity. As such they were complicit in deploying the power of motherhood in the exercise and legitimation of white domination” (379). Significantly, Mrs. Curren imagines her cancer as pregnancy when she says, “The sickness that now eats at me is dry, bloodless, slow and cold . . . There is something about it that does not bear thinking of. To have fallen pregnant with these growths, these cold, obscene swellings; to have carried . . . this blood beyond any natural term, unable to bear them, unable to sate their hunger: children inside me eating more every day, not growing but bloating, toothed, clawed, forever cold and ravenous. Dry” (64). This pregnancy steals rather than produces life, thereby making this kind of “motherhood” an affirmation of the corruption of apartheid which ravishes her body, leaving less and less

⁷ My critique of Coetzee’s gender-biased narrative stems in large part from what I perceive as his collusion in keeping women like Mrs. Curren (and even Florence) “decidedly disempowered” in the fight to end apartheid as well.

of her sense of self in its wake. In this way, her “pregnancy” of cancer is very much like Ella’s psychosomatic “pregnancy” in *Myal*, which is also conceived as a result of oppression and which also holds no promise for life. The systematic spread of her cancer to her bones causes Mrs. Curren to see her body as useless and as something which has betrayed her, thereby extending the symbol of her diseased body as a metaphor for the by now completely corrupt and dying apartheid system.

Coetzee thus envisions the white female, and, specifically, the maternal body, in this case Mrs. Curren’s, as the necessary site for the pain/punishment of apartheid even as it is also her body that serves as her entrée into her new education by the very people that the apartheid system sought to protect her against—black males. While this kind of subversive narrative strategy theoretically holds the potential for political enlightenment—in that the two groups who have been most polarized under apartheid learn to understand and to mutually respect each other once they are permitted the opportunity to see each other as each really is and without the divisive social strictures of the apartheid—this is not the narrative that gets played out in the text. Instead, Mrs. Curren interacts with and understands these men only in the stereotypical ways that women relate to men—as a “wife/lover” to Vercueil and as a mother to Bheki and, more specifically, John. While these are the two roles most feared for a white woman to occupy—providing evidence of miscegenation through mothering of a non-white child—Mrs. Curren does not choose these roles as a political protest that actively undermines the social strictures imposed by apartheid laws. That is, she does not seek out these relationships and is reluctant to develop any kind of connection or feelings for John, especially, but also for Vercueil. Though these men help her to recognize her culpability

in apartheid's corrupting legacy, their relationships do not result in the same kind of productive hybridity that leads to the resistance that Brodber envisions in *Myal*. Instead, Mrs. Curren's refusal to accept these men on any terms other than her own reinscribes the power structures of apartheid since they become relevant only insofar as they serve her self-centered narrative of white guilt.

Vercueil's appearance on the very day that Mrs. Curren receives her diagnosis and begins writing her letter underscores Coetzee's need to punish the white female body and his desire to have black males as the ones who spur her on to political consciousness. Mrs. Curren describes Vercueil as "a derelict" and says that he is "tall, thin, with a weathered skin and long, curious fangs, wearing a baggy gray suit and a hat with a sagging brim" (3). It is curious, of course, that she would describe him as having fangs, but this description suggests that she equates the loss of her life in some way to his presence—as if with these "fangs" he will suck her life blood. This choice of description also serves as her first representation of him using animalistic qualities, which she will continue to do throughout the novel. Gilbert Yeoh notes that "From the beginning, one is aware of the novel's self-conscious *textual* construction of Vercueil's identity, though Mrs. Curren's main rhetorical gesture in this opening is to stereotype. She readily claims to know this stranger, though her knowledge of him issues in the form of profuse stereotyping" (119). To use Fiona Probyn's words, this deployment of the stereotype to confine and control the way Vercueil and other blacks are seen throughout the text makes Mrs. Curren "both well-meaning and sick-making" (222). Though Derek Attridge and others note that Vercueil's race is omitted in Mrs. Curren's descriptions, the textual and

cultural cues in the novel indicate that his race is not ambiguous and that he is coloured if not black.

Mrs. Curren follows her description of him as a derelict with the statement that he represents the homeless people who have become part of the fabric of life in Cape Town now (7). This kind of class status for so many people would not be tolerated if the people were white in apartheid South Africa. Additionally, Mrs. Curren's assumptions about his being a derelict, a thief, and a drunkard indicate a kind of socially sanctioned racism that validates making these kinds of assumptions about a homeless, black person. Mrs. Curren also offers to let him do her garden work and expresses uncertainty about his literacy (12). I would argue that Mrs. Curren's conjecture that he may not be literate does not stem from his position as a homeless person but, rather, from a social set-up that leaves black men of a certain age without the proper education or even access to education that would permit them to acquire decent jobs and homes. Additionally, asking him to do garden work is tantamount to asking him to perform a job that only black men—often derogatorily called “garden boys”—do. In fact, when one of Mrs. Curren's neighbors sees Vercueil on her property and calls to warn her about this, Mrs. Curren gives the socially acceptable explanation for his presence: he works for her. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, the way that Bheki, John, and Florence treat him confirms that he cannot be white.

From the first, Florence resents Vercueil's presence, and she tells Mrs. Curren that “he is rubbish. He is good for nothing” (47), something she would not tell her white employer about another white person (regardless of class) allowed to stay on Curren's property. More importantly, Bheki and John take away Vercueil's alcohol and tell him

that “They are making you into a dog!” (45). The rhetoric of “us” vs. “them” and their desire for him to stand with “us” against the “them” of the whites again suggest that he is, in fact, either coloured or black. This recognition of his race is very important for understanding the way that Vercueil functions for Mrs. Curren’s “education” about the realities of apartheid and for how he functions in Coetzee’s use of him as part of her “punishment,” which must be staged on her body. As David Atwell argues, “Whilst his full significance must always remain partly obscure (in Afrikaans, ‘verskuil’ means hidden, ‘verkul’ deceived), he is also a paradoxically enabling presence who reminds Mrs. Curren of boundaries to be transcended” (176). Mrs. Curren’s insistence on stereotypical descriptions of him suggest that she cannot, ultimately, transcend these barriers, and this, then, I would argue, is why Coetzee portrays her as deserving of her punishments.

As a black, homeless person, Vercueil acts as the first agent for Mrs. Curren’s “re-education” about the realities for non-white people under apartheid. As Whittick asserts, “Vercueil represents, amongst other things, the old black Africa with which Elizabeth Curren is familiar and therefore most comfortable. He is, as perceived through her eyes, a rather devious, seedy character, both corrupted, as the metaphor of his weakness for brandy denotes, by his contact with white culture, and damaged—viz. the symbol of his crippled hand—by that same contact” (43).⁸ Mrs. Curren claims to oppose apartheid and relates that she always stands when she hears a speech from one of the ministers “as a way of keeping what I can of my self-respect (who would choose to face a

⁸ Whittick also notes that in *Dusklands*, “the eponymous narrator describes how the indigenous tribes of South Africa were given brandy by white settlers in exchange for their land and flocks” and that “physical deformity is also used as a symbol of the blacks’ persecution in South Africa in *Waiting for the Barbarians*” (43).

firing squad sitting down?)” (10). In fact, when she watches one of these speeches on television shortly after meeting Vercueil, she claims that they bear this speech “[t]ogether, blow after blow” (10). However, she will soon learn that the shame of this system is not shared equally and that, in fact, she has benefited from its injustice. Vercueil makes her aware of some of this privilege when he calls attention to her large house, something he does not have, and tells her that she “could turn it into a boarding house” (10) for students. Though she ignores his suggestion at this time, the question of sharing her house, and by extension herself, recurs throughout the novel.

Mrs. Curren then details for her daughter the way that she and Vercueil spend time together and become companions of sorts when she tells him about her mother and her childhood traveling over the country in wagons and about her daughter who has gone to live in America. Vercueil sympathizes with her poor health and helps her with things like starting her car. However, far from serving as a source of enlightenment about the way that apartheid dehumanizes and degrades those it excludes, this friendship serves only to expose Mrs. Curren’s own racism in that she can only ever focus on his negative qualities, describing him, yet again, as a thief and as a kind of animal or an “insect . . . emerging from behind the baseboards when the house is in darkness to forage for crumbs” (14). Coetzee also illustrates the way that she has internalized apartheid’s value system when he has her assume that Vercueil should work as her gardener in exchange for her kindness. However, Vercueil refuses to comply with her version of the way things “should” operate wherein she would give him money because he *deserves* it. He asks her “Deserve? . . . Who deserves anything?” (21). Though this is a discussion of money, it can also be read as an implicit critique of apartheid, which arbitrarily

determines that whites deserve a position of privilege simply by virtue of their skin color. In the same way that Mrs. Curren does not believe that Vercueil deserves her money without working for it, so his comment makes clear that she does not deserve her position of privilege since she has also done nothing to earn it.

Vercueil's refusal to comply with hers and her society's dictates regarding "proper" race relations incites Mrs. Curren's admission that life in South Africa is like being "aboard a sinking ship" (22). Significantly, however, whenever she has these moments of clarity and understanding, she immediately tries to escape. She follows the above statement about being aboard a ship with the statement that she keeps "the short-wave radio at my bedside. Most of the time there is only talk to be heard; but if one persists into the unlikely hours of the night there are stations that relent and play music . . . [,] anthems of all nations, celestial music," and she claims that this music rising upward is "the one border they cannot close . . . [,] the border upward, between the Republic of South Africa and the empire of the sky" (23). Thus, she seeks an easy escape from the realities of what she hears spoken about on the radio through music. As her pain worsens, she seeks again to escape by turning on the television where she encounters "the parade of politicians every evening" (28). However, when she questions why she watches these people whose philosophies and practices disgust her, she wonders whether she does so "Because the reign of the locust family is the truth of South Africa, and the truth is what makes me sick?" (29). Here she makes the first connection between the disgust and shame she feels under apartheid and her belief that internalizing this system's values is what has corrupted her body. She also makes a connection between her body, ravished by cancer, and the land which she says was "taken by force, used, despoiled, spoiled,

abandoned in its barren late years. Loved too, perhaps, by its ravishers, but loved only in the bloomtime of its youth, and therefore, in the verdict of history, not loved enough”

(26). Just as she was “loved” by South Africa in her youth and prospered under the State’s policies, she too has been abandoned to the debilitating effects of the cancer that corrupts her body and South Africa. However, her identification with the land is a false one since that land has always belonged to Africans.

Significantly, Vercueil watches this broadcast with her (though from outside the house), and she claims that as they listen, “I know how he feels as surely as if he and I were making love Across the courtyard he squatted, smoking, listening. Two souls, his and mine, twined together, ravished” (30). Though she understands that she has to some extent been complicit in apartheid and that she has benefited from it, she can imagine a connection with Vercueil only through the stereotype of the black man who is sexually attracted to a white woman. And this is the way she continues to imagine their relationship, even until the moment of her death at the end. After connecting with him, in her own way, then, she asks him to mail her letter to her daughter. This can also be seen as the beginning of her equally self-centered relationship to her new-found knowledge about her position in South Africa. She seeks out Vercueil’s company as a way of atoning for her guilt, but she is ultimately interested only in what he can do for her—serve as her guide/angel to her death, as her messenger, and as the person who will pass on her daughter’s inheritance. She also turns Vercueil into the Other throughout her writing by saying that in writing about him, she writes about herself (19). As such, her narrative about Vercueil acts in the same way as does Selwyn’s play about Ella since he serves only as the backdrop against which her story, which she believes only she can tell,

can be written. Section one begins Mrs. Curren's process of "re-education" by having her face the reality of homelessness in Vercueil and in her questioning of whether or not the corruption of apartheid has caused her illness; however, this is just the beginning of what she learns about her disease and her punishment.

The second section of the book opens with Florence, Mrs. Curren's maid, returning with her son Bheki. In discussing her relationship with Florence, Mrs. Curren reveals more about her complicity with and complacency toward apartheid over the years. Though Florence has apparently lived with and worked for Mrs. Curren for several years, Florence does not "entrust [Curren] with" her daughter's "real name[s]" (37). Moreover, we also learn that working for Mrs. Curren has separated Florence from her family since Florence pays her sister to care for the children (43). However, Mrs. Curren seems to feel no guilt for these conditions; instead, she assumes a kind of privileged knowledge about Florence's family life by imagining what they do on the weekends when Florence does return home and insisting that "All of this happened. All of this must have happened" (43). Whittick reads Mrs. Curren's account about the degrading conditions of Florence's husband's job and the family's separation as representing "the dehumanized features of a ruthlessly segregated society in which the homeless, the hopeless and the lawless fight for survival against a background of the most desolate urban chaos" (46). However, Mrs. Curren's position as a privileged reader/writer who has the right to assert her version of another's life suggests that she takes the same attitude toward Florence as she does toward Vercueil since she also controls and confines her into the image she wants of her rather than asking Florence about her life and her children. This mirrors the way that she deals with the problems taking place in the townships.

When Florence tells her that Bheki and John have come with her because of troubles in the schools, Mrs. Curren says, “Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks learning What I know about events in Guguletu depends solely on what Florence tells me and on what I can learn by standing on the balcony and peering northeast: namely, that Guguletu is not burning today” (39).⁹ Like Mrs. Curren’s vision of Florence’s life as the way “life should be” (44), the media in South Africa also report an idealized and false notion of race relations.

When Florence does tell her the truth, Mrs. Curren chooses not to explore what problems cause Bheki and others to protest; rather, she chastises Florence for not making sure that he is in school and for allowing him to be cruel in the way that he talks to Vercueil. Unwilling to accept Mrs. Curren’s indictments anymore, Florence tells her that “It is the whites who made them so cruel! Yes!” (49). Although Mrs. Curren showed some understanding of her part in apartheid as well as guilt earlier on, when confronted with this reality directly, she refuses to accept blame and accuses Florence, saying, “You say, ‘This is not my child, this is the white man’s child, this is the monster made by the white man.’ Is that all you can say? Are you going to blame them on the whites and turn your back?” (50). Florence ignores her rebuke by asserting that she and others are proud

⁹ It is worth noting that this moment also turns into a self-centered one for Mrs. Curren when she says that she wants to shout at Florence to look at her since she “too [is] burning” (39). Inevitably, all of her moments of insight are followed by a self-serving urge or action, and, as Whittick argues, “however much we may sympathize with Mrs. Curren’s reflex here, this kind of exclusive preoccupation with one’s own pain is ultimately, Coetzee suggests, morally inadmissible since it is just a different form of escapism” (55). Concentrating on her own pain rather than on the pain of those in the townships once again reveals Mrs. Curren to be ultimately self-centered and unwilling to act against apartheid’s injustice for blacks.

of their children for their strength because they are like iron (50). Mrs. Curren, at this point, can only castigate Bheki and John for not being in school as well as Florence for not ensuring that they go; however, she soon finds out how right they are about the white oppression they suffer daily when two white men intentionally knock Bheki and John off of their bikes, seriously injuring John. Thus, the troubles she has been shielded from by the media and has chosen to ignore in term of Florence's lot have now shown up in her front yard, making it impossible to claim any longer that she does not know. As with her other revelations, Mrs. Curren relates this knowledge to her maternal and diseased body when she describes ministering to John's wounds as "motherhood . . . parodying itself" (64).

While John's "accident" implicates her in the realities of increasing racial tensions, Bheki also figuratively brings the indictment against white oppression into her front yard when he tells her that he refuses to go to school because school only functions to "make [them] fit into the apartheid system" (67). Since Mrs. Curren used to be a teacher in this very system, she must now directly confront her role in apartheid practices, even if she has theoretically always disagreed with them.¹⁰ As Gilbert Yeoh notes, "Though there is no doubt that Mrs. Curren's classicism is as good as obsolete in present-day South Africa, the novel still evokes a tension between the educational ideals she stands for and the contemporary condition of South African education" (108). When she visits John in the hospital, she tells him that she used to be a teacher and that had he been

¹⁰ It is interesting that almost immediately after this, she tells Vercueil that her daughter (who she also characterizes as being like iron) left South Africa and vowed not to return since she "will certainly not apply to—what can I call them?—*those people* for permission to come. She will come back when they are hanging by their heels from the lampposts, she says" (75). Like her mother, Mrs. Curren's daughter opposes the apartheid system but chooses to escape to America rather than to stay and help in the fight to end it.

her student, he “might have learned something about what can happen to our humanity in time of war” (80). Recognizing that her comments fall on deaf ears, Mrs. Curren seems to forget her lesson on humanity and, as she has done with Vercueil and Florence, she assumes a privileged knowledge about him, thereby confining him in her imagination of him as someone who “never listened to any of his teachers, but . . . sat like a stone in the classroom, impervious to words, waiting for the bell to ring, biding his time” (80).

Though she remains unwilling to examine *why* John does not listen to her, she does assert that what happened to him makes her feel ashamed when she tells Vercueil that she “should simply accept that that is how one must live from now on: in a state of shame. Perhaps shame is nothing more than the name for the way I feel all the time. The name for the way in which people live who would prefer to be dead” (86). By connecting the feeling of shame with the feeling she gets from knowing that she is dying of cancer, Mrs. Curren once again asserts that her disease occurs in correlation to or as a direct result of the accumulation of apartheid’s evils, which are coming to the fore not only for the country but also very directly for her and in her immediate situation.

Significantly, at this point Mrs. Curren experiences her cancer once again in terms of pregnancy; she tells Vercueil that she has “a child inside that I cannot give birth to. Cannot because it will not be born My daughter is my first child. She is my life. This is the second one, the afterbirth, the unwanted” (82-83). This description of her cancer, and by extension the injustices of apartheid, as afterbirth bears a striking resemblance to what Winifred in *Abeng* tells Clare about colonization in Jamaica: “They brought people here in chains and then expected to prosper. They killed off all the Indians and all the snakes and believed they were doing good They are all gone now—the

ones who did these things—gone to their reward. But the afterbirth is lodged in the woman's body and will not be expelled. All the waste of birth. Foul-smelling and past its use" (165). Just as colonialism left an unproductive destruction in its wake in Jamaica, so apartheid's legacy leaves only death. While this is an important recognition, Mrs. Curren has still not seen everything that she must in order to comprehend fully the truth of South Africa's pain.

In the third and longest section in the book, Mrs. Curren experiences first-hand what the media has not reported about the happenings in Guguletu when she takes Florence to find Bheki after a phone call informs them about shooting by the *witdoeke* (soldiers) in the bush. On this trip, she meets Mr. Thabane, who serves as yet another teacher in Mrs. Curren's long lesson about the atrocities of apartheid. As they travel into the townships where the trouble gets increasingly worse, a child, who Mrs. Curren says is "Ten years old at most. A child of the times, at home in this landscape of violence" (92), comes to help them find their way. Seeing such a young child so accustomed to this kind of violence causes Mrs. Curren to recall her own childhood, which she says she remembers "only [as] a long sun-struck afternoon" (92). Recognizing the disparities between their two worlds, Mrs. Curren asks, "Will we at least be allowed our Nirvana, we children of that bygone age? I doubt it. If justice reigns at all, we will find ourselves barred at the first threshold of the underworld" (92). Once again, a confrontation with the realities of her privilege causes her to accept her punishment. Though she seems now to accept fully the consequences for her part in this system, when she confronts the violence of people being terrorized and having their houses burned, she immediately questions if this can "*really be happening to [her]*" (96 emphasis in original) and once again wants to

escape this reality by getting into her car and closing “out this looming world of rage and violence” (96).¹¹ When she voices this desire to Mr. Thabane, he, like Bheki and John refuses to allow her ideas to go unchallenged when he tells her “‘You want to go home But what of the people who live here? When they want to go home, this is where they must go. What do you think of that?’” (97). Moreover, he challenges her to direct action, but she is unable even to articulate a protest, much less to act on one. Instead, she retreats once again, this time to her car which represents for her not only the past but also a time, in her words, “when British was best” (98). Mr. Thabane’s challenge serves as an indictment against her failure to act in the past and also especially in the present, when she is directly positioned to do so, thereby continuing Mrs. Curren’s re-education through black men. Though Mr. Thabane appears to bear no grudge against Mrs. Curren’s ineffectual stance, he makes sure to point out to her that the fighting she witnesses is instigated by whites against blacks and that it is not “just a quarrel among blacks, a spot of faction fighting” (101), which facts directly contradict the rhetoric in the media about the source of most of these problems at the time.

While Mrs. Curren escapes the fighting in the flats by retreating to her car, she cannot escape the price that the fighting exacts from Bheki, who is violently shot and killed. She must confront this reality when she goes with Florence and Mr. Thabane to see his body lying in the hall with several others. When she asks who killed him, Mr.

¹¹ Notably, she also reverts back to stereotypical ideas about black people in this moment when she complains about a teenage girl knocking her down and then “[toiling] up the duneside, her huge backside quaking” (96). She goes on to say that she cannot endure another such “blow These people can take many blows, but I, I am fragile as a butterfly” (96). When confronting the disparities between her privileged life and that of most blacks in South Africa as a theoretical idea, Mrs. Curren readily accepts her part of the blame. However, when put in the position in which she must endure what the black people around her have to endure, even for a little while, she seeks retreat and falls back onto stereotypical and essentialist rhetoric regarding the differences between her and them.

Thabane assures her that the bullet in Bheki's body will read thus: "'Made in South Africa. SABS Approved'" (103). The horror of Bheki's death brings about Mrs. Curren's clearest admission of her part in apartheid up to this point, this time not just as someone who has unwittingly benefited from this system but as someone who actively participated in oppression, when she says "We shoot these people as if they are waste, but in the end it is we whose lives are not worth living" (104). By using the word "we" in this observation, Mrs. Curren directly implicates herself in the crimes committed against Bheki and others. Johan Geertsema notes of this encounter that "The journey into Guguletu . . . is also a journey into Mrs. Curren's consciousness, enabling her to *see*, forcing itself upon her" (95). In fact, Mrs. Curren says after seeing Bheki that "This is the worst thing I have witnessed in my life. And I thought: Now my eyes are opened and I can never close them again" (102-103). Accepting her part in the guilt also makes her willing to bear the full punishment; she contends that "If someone had dug a grave for me there and then in the sand, and pointed, I would without a word have climbed in and lain down and folded my hands on my breast. And when the sand fell in my mouth and in the corners of my eyes I would not have lifted a finger to brush it away" (104). Derek Attridge notes that "Mrs. Curren's realization of the otherness of her servants is a shock to her liberal principles and classical education; but this lack of understanding is primarily a forceful demonstration of the need for political action to transform social relations" (256). However, even at this point Mrs. Curren does not act; instead, she once again mediates her insights through her physical pain when she says she wants the white guards to see "a scar, a hurt, to force it upon them, to make them see it with their own eyes: . . . the scar of all this suffering" (106). While forcing these guards to see a scar of

suffering could constitute a political action, she ultimately fails to act on her impulse, which, significantly, is to show them her mastectomy scar where her cancer, and therefore her connection to and acknowledgement of apartheid's ills, began.

Having developed her sense of her disease as a manifestation of the contagion of apartheid, Mrs. Curren says, "To each of us fate sends the right disease. Mine a disease that eats me out from inside. Were I to be opened up they would find me hollow as a doll, a doll with a crab sitting inside licking its lips" (112). As Mike Marais contends, "Since 'cancer' in Latin means 'crab,' the suggestion here is that Mrs. Curren's illness should be construed as a metaphor for the erosion of selfhood by the State's structure of power" (9). In the same way that Ella's complicity in education makes her a kind of "puppet" for Selwyn to manipulate, Mrs. Curren's participation in apartheid's destruction makes the description of herself as a doll an apt metaphor for not only the way that she has been emptied out by it but also for the way she has allowed herself to be used in furthering the State's agenda.

Confronting the reality of her part in the abuses of apartheid causes Mrs. Curren to examine every aspect of her life, including the idyllic childhood memories that she cherishes so much. While looking at a family picture taken when she was a very small child, Mrs. Curren says, "There are flowers behind us that look like hollyhocks; to our left is a bed of melons. I recognize the place. It is Uniondale, the house in Church Street bought by my grandfather Year after year fruit and flowers and vegetables burgeoned in that garden But by whose love tended? Who clipped the hollyhocks? . . . Whose was the garden rightfully? . . . Who, outside the picture, leaning on their rakes, leaning on their spades, waiting to get back to work, lean also against the

edge of the rectangle, bending it, bursting it in?" (111). This realization that the life she has always enjoyed has come at the expense of black people's labor and self-effacement causes her to acknowledge that it has also come at the expense of their lives when she tells Vercueil that when she walks "upon this land, this South Africa, I have a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them" (125). This realization makes clear a new understanding of her relationship to the land as well since she acknowledges that it belongs to the spirits of the Africans who died for it. And, like all of the other times before, Mrs. Curren wants to escape her insight about the lives sacrificed; however, she also knows that "If I get over it this time I will never have another chance *not* to get over it. For the sake of my own resurrection I cannot get over it this time" (126). While it is significant that Mrs. Curren understands her need to confront and accept the truth of South Africa's history, she still problematically does so only in so far as it can benefit her, for *her* salvation. As with all of her other revelations, Mrs. Curren relates this understanding to her body as well when she explains why she has trusted Vercueil with her letter: "Because I cannot trust Vercueil I must trust him When I was younger I might have given myself to him bodily. That is the sort of thing one does, one did, however mistakenly. Now I put my life in his hands instead" (131).¹² Further, just as in the first section, when Mrs. Curren initially asked Vercueil to mail her letter, her reaffirmation of her trust in him is not enough to redeem her completely. She must also resolve her feelings for Bheki's friend John, whom she confesses to her daughter she does not love (136).

¹² I find it interesting that Zoë Wicomb and Michelle Cliff (discussed in chapter 4) also have their light-skinned, privileged female characters seek redemption for their racial position through sex.

Mrs. Curren imagines her daughter's reply to this confession when she says, "Yes, you reply, he is not lovable. But did you not have a part in making him unlovable?" (136). Thus, she at least partly concedes Florence's argument that the reason the children are cruel is that the whites made them that way. Yet again, though, Mrs. Curren admits this fault only because "I do not want to die in the state that I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved" (136). She also sees her ability to love John as connected to her love for her daughter when she says that "When one loves, one loves more. The more I love you, the more I ought to love him. The less I love him, the less, perhaps, I love you" (137), but when she is confronted with what it really means to love by Mr. Thabane's definition of comradeship—"when you are prepared to lay down your lives for each other without question, then a bond grows up that is stronger than any bond you will know again. That is comradeship" (149)—she dismisses this notion as "just another of those icy, exclusive, death-driven male constructions" (150). Though she wants salvation, she is still unwilling to act or make a sacrifice for others or to validate their sacrifices, the most common religious precept required for salvation. Moreover, her dismissal of comradeship as a "male construct" seems somewhat ironic given that she learns everything through such constructions.

She has the chance to participate in this kind of sacrificial love for John when the police come to her house for him. However, instead of sacrificing herself for him the way one imagines a mother would for her child, she will only tell them "*Ek staan nie aan jou kant nie*" (153). She proclaims that she does not stand on their side, but she does not try to save John's life. Whittick notes of this moment that "Mrs. Curren is forced to stand by helplessly while the police gun down the fugitive teenager to whom she has offered

sanctuary[;] the white community can no longer be protected from the knowledge of the violence ravaging their country. Now as never before whites are having to recognize and reckon with the presence of blacks in *their* hitherto monochromatic world” (49). Though the police do threaten her, she presumably does have the option to act the way that Bheki did. Instead, she only threatens the officers with her illness when they try to remove her from her house. She tells them to put her down because she has cancer and says, “*Cancer!* What a pleasure to fling the word at them!” (155), and thus she uses her illness as a kind of weapon against the officers who seek to remove her from her house without her consent. Indeed, she says that she relishes being able to throw her disease at them and the way that they react by stepping back as if it is contagious. In fact, she tells the female officer that she will probably also get cancer one day because “It is hard to escape” (156). As Probyn claims, “Elizabeth sees her cancer as not only a personal indictment but also as a (projected) public event; a broader sign of South Africa’s ‘illness’ in the wake of apartheid. She refers to her cancer as a contagion which will soon take over the white population of the country: a plague to wipe out the sinners” (215). Mrs. Curren’s use of her cancer as a kind of threat certainly seems to bear out this analysis. However, I find it significant, given her propensity to equate her illness with her maternal body, that she directs her warning only to the *female* officer, thereby limiting the purview of her punishment to another white female body.

John’s death and her inability to stop it alienate her from own home, and so she wanders into the street, thereby surrendering (at least temporarily) the last vestige of her privilege by rendering herself homeless. However, she does not escape more punishment since this homelessness, however temporary, positions her to experience, this time first-

hand, what life is like for Vercueil and countless others, and as with everything else, she experiences it most clearly through her body. When she leaves the house, she falls asleep on the street and is “raped”/violated by the little boys who shove a stick in her mouth looking for fillings. Again, this serves as a kind of education by a black male who establishes that she is no better than any of the other homeless people who live on the streets and who are forced to take extreme measures (looking for fillings) to survive. Not surprisingly, Vercueil rescues her and lets her sleep with him on a piece of cardboard outside. After spending the night with him outside, Mrs. Curren confesses to Vercueil what she has learned about South Africa and about her role in making it what it is now. She says,

A crime was committed long ago. How long ago? I do not know. But longer ago than 1916, certainly. So long ago that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is part of me, I am part of it I am a good person What times these are when to be a good person is not enough! What I had not calculated on was that more might be called for than to be good What the times call for is quite different from goodness. (165)

Though she knows that the “crime” which created present-day South Africa was committed before her birth, she also readily accepts that the position she held most of her life as intellectually opposed to apartheid, and therefore “good,” was and is not enough. Significantly, after she makes this confession, she admits to Vercueil that she has had a breast removed and that she regrets that she is “marked [because] People don’t like marked objects” (167). Again, her body represents her flaws, but she also believes that she can still do something (167). What she chooses to do, apparently, is to accept Vercueil fully into her life and into her home.

When they get back to her house, they find it has been ransacked by the white police officers who killed John. She understands that “The true purpose [is] the touching, the fingering. The spirit malevolent. Like a rape: a way of filthyng a woman” (169). This figurative rape at the hands of whites this time finalizes Mrs. Curren’s complete separation from all other whites, and she not only lets Vercueil into her home, she also lets him into her bed and openly declares to the police officer that “Mr. Vercueil takes care of me. Mr. Vercueil is my right-hand man”¹³ (173). She claims Vercueil’s presence in her life in defiance of the police officer’s disgust, but the fourth and final chapter reveals that even with all of her acceptance, with her life nearing its end, she can still, to some extent, see Vercueil only in stereotypical images of black masculinity, though they never have sex or anything like sexual contact. Namely, she believes that he is sexually attracted to her and that he is a child who needs her guidance, especially with regards to sex. She says that “He needs the help only a woman can give a man. Not a seduction but an induction He does not know how to love as a boy does not know how to love. Does not know what zips and buttons and clasps to expect. Does not know what goes where. Does not know how to do what he has to do. The nearer the end comes, the more faithful he is. Yet still I have to guide his hand It seems to me now that he has no more conception of death than a virgin has of sex. But the same curiosity. The curiosity of a dog that sniffs at one’s crotch, wagging its tail, its tongue hanging out red and stupid as a penis” (196-97). Though she readily admits her dependence on Vercueil’s care, she cannot relinquish the notion that she must somehow teach him, in a very similar way to

¹³ Interestingly, it is Vercueil’s right hand that is injured. By asserting that he is her right-hand man, Mrs. Curren recuperates, to some extent, his value while at the same time, she tries to recuperate the value from her own “damaged” body.

how she has (most often to her chagrin) been lecturing characters throughout about what they should feel and how they should behave. As Yeoh argues, “Mrs. Curren’s severe failure is her inability to countenance honestly Vercueil’s care (and love) for her, which she objectifies as the care of a faithful servant ‘boy’ whom she still directs” (125).

Moreover, she can imagine her instruction of him only in sexual terms (despite the fact that she educates him about death) as if the only way for her to envision the relationship between their two bodies is to figure it in terms of sexuality. Ultimately, then, Mrs. Curren’s relationship with Vercueil is never one of equality, and in keeping with the white guilt that she feels throughout, it is Vercueil, a black male, who exacts the final punishment on her body when “He [takes her] in his arms and [holds her] with mighty force, so that the breath [goes] out of [her] in a rush” (198), in an embrace that offers no warmth.

Throughout *Age of Iron*, Mrs. Curren suffers while reporting South Africa’s suffering, and in both cases, the suffering grows increasingly worse. In that way, her pain mirrors the pain in the country as well; however, she never moves beyond the pain to *act* in any way against it, and, as Probyn argues, “Though Elizabeth links her own death to the death of the old South Africa, there is no assurance that her death will lend society its ‘cure’” (223). In fact, when her narrative ends in 1989, South Africa is still two years away from apartheid’s official death. It is, therefore, understandable why Coetzee does not include this image in the text. However, I find it problematic that what he does imagine as apartheid’s final gasp before death can only be figured as the suffering body of a white woman. Mrs. Curren does make clear that her disease reaches beyond her body to the whole of her corrupt society, but she insists that the only ones

suffering along with her are also white women so that even the ugliness that is “the soul showing through the flesh” (132) gets projected onto the “beauty queens” (132).

Moreover, Florence, like Vercueil, represents an Other against whom Mrs. Curren constructs her narrative. Mrs. Curren says that “Florence is the judge If the life I live is an examined life, it is because for ten years I have been under examination in the court of Florence” (142). Florence’s judgment, however, does not remove her from the position of stereotype in Mrs. Curren’s imagination. When she dreams of Florence before her death, she imagines that “Her dark coat, her dull dress have fallen away. In a white slip ruffled by the wind, her feet bare, her head bare, her right breast bare, she strides past” (178). This image of Florence, with her breast bared, represents not only what Marais calls “the cultural other” (10), but she also represents the stereotypical image of the plenitude of black female sexuality which directly contrasts with Mrs. Curren’s disfigured body represented as lack in her mastectomy scar. Thus, black women operate for her, and I would argue for Coetzee as well, only as the site of alterity for white women. Finally, Mrs. Curren’s examined life does not lead to resistance, and the resistance enacted by Bheki and John also ends in death. Redemption from suffering cannot—yet—occur.

The Co-Opted/Corrupted Body: *Myal*

In the same way that *Age of Iron* does, *Myal* begins with the revelation of Ella’s sickness when she and the Brassingtons are at Mass Cyrus’s house seeking her cure. Thus, the book opens with the problem, and then through a series of flashbacks and non-linear narratives, the reader learns how Ella came to be in this state and how her disease also functions as a metaphor for the ills in her society, such as aspiring to white and,

more specifically, English ideals and even identities at the expense of “black” identity. Mass Cyrus makes the connection between these social ills and Ella’s sickness clear when he notes the problems that “in-between colours people” have with native traditions and cultures. He says, “These new people, these in-between colours people, these trained-minded people play the percussions so loud and raucous, the wee small babe could know they feared the tune This pain, confusion and destruction is what these new people bring to themselves and to this world” (1, 3). Significantly, not only does Ella’s illness affect her, but it also disrupts the harmony in nature since “the bastard cedar, the physic nut and shy shame-mi-lady, mimosa pudica to you. On their shoulders he always placed the sin-generated afflictions of the human world. They felt it” (2). Thus, Ella’s illness not only reflects a social disharmony, but it is also connected to the land and an unhealthy equilibrium between humans and nature. As Shalini Puri notes, “The exorcism and its results echo through the human and natural worlds: trees have memories and weep with the wounds of history” (109). Moreover, Mass Cyrus also makes clear that though Ella suffers from the affliction, her cure depends on a healing in the rest of her family as well since “Curing the body is nothing. Touching the peace of those she must touch and those who must touch her is the hard part. And you can’t do that unless you can touch their spirits” (1). Ella’s cure must also be mediated through physical, intellectual, and spiritual means.

Ella’s restoration to health impacts the health of her whole community since, as Tabish Khair contends, “*Myal* . . . does not display a basic characteristic of the European *Bildungsroman*: a centered, individual character whom the narrative follows all the way through from point one to the end of page. The growth it describes is as much communal

as individual: actually, the two are linked throughout the novel, which is essentially about the need to reconnect all the ‘halves’ severed by colonization” (122). This separation as a factor in Ella’s illness, and by extension that of the community’s, exists because of their concession to white values. Mass Cyrus says, “My people woulda humble them spirit and let me reach them: but this kind of people, . . . spirit too sekkle pekkle” (1). In Ella’s case, then, the white values she has aspired to have corrupted her body as well as her mind and spirit, creating a fragmentation which is reflected in the non-linear narrative and which bears a strong similarity to the fragmentation evident in the non-linear narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven*.¹⁴

Also like Michelle Cliff’s novels, Brodber’s text illustrates a concern with history, especially the history of colonization and the legacy of exploitation it began. Significantly, the spirits of the characters of a colonial school book relate this history of oppression and the collusion it invites. The story in this book details how farm animals, tired of being used without their consent and having their creations taken from them (in the form of eggs, etc.), decide to leave the farm to fend for themselves. For the first few days, they are happy in their new-found freedom, but Mr. Joe, the farmer, predicts that “Nobody else will care for them the way I do. They’ll soon know that and be back with me” (101). Just as he predicts, the animals soon grow unhappy without his protection and return voluntarily to the farm where they forget that they ever wanted to leave (102-103). The spirits take on the identity of the characters from the story, and as Neil Ten Kortenaar notes,

¹⁴ This novel is discussed at length in chapter four.

In Brodber's novel, the spirits Willie, Dan, and Perce have been in conversation for centuries—ever since Africa. They are identified with barnyard animals . . . and they form a musical band These myal spirits possess living hosts in each generation. Dan currently resides in the Reverend Musgrave Simpson, the Baptist minister, while Willie and Perce inhabit the bodies of Ole African and Mass Cyrus, respectively. The link between the spirit and host is mutually beneficial: the spirits gain bodies through which to act in the present, and the living acquire memories that extend back centuries. They attain a spiritual force with which to act in the world, and the means of communication with each other across distances. In Brodber's text the male spirits are joined in the present by a single female spirit simply called Mother Hen, who is not part of the band of musicians but dances to their music. . . . Mother Hen currently possesses the leader of the Kumina tabernacle, Miss Agatha Paisley [Miss Gatha]. (53)

By choosing the identities of the characters in the book, the spirits and those whose bodies they inhabit are able to effect change and communicate about the problems and solutions in their community, thereby giving agency back to the very ones the colonizers sought to take it from when they wrote the story. Thus, Evelyn O'Callaghan's contention that "Read from a post-colonial perspective, the novel's reinterpretation of the animal fable is a rewriting of colonial history as spirit thievery, and valorization of communal self-empowerment" (74) illustrates how the novel works against written colonial texts and their version of history.

The relationship established between the spirit world and the people of Grove Town constitutes the myal of the title; as Joyce Walker-Johnson explains, "Myalism was part of a continuing tradition of religious movements by which the slaves attempted to counter what they perceived as evil forces ranged against them. . . . In practice, Myalism attempted to harness beneficent forces to counteract malign influences, which, in Jamaican slave society, were identified both with the operations of Obeah men who abused their powers for malevolent or self-centered ends and with the 'sorcery' of the Europeans, the agents of enslavement" (52). Further, "Brodber's use of the animal fable

is especially appropriate to the context, since it alludes to the comparisons of the Negro with children or animals in travel books, diaries and some historical writing by Europeans. Brodber . . . transforms the original story by . . . [reversing] the significance of the earlier characterizations of the Negro as animal” (Walker-Johnson 60). This history of resistance serves as an important factor in Ella’s resistance as well.¹⁵

In two extended conversations between the spirit characters, they relate Jamaica’s history and how the people of Grove Town became vulnerable to what they call “spirit thievery.” They remember “a time four hundred years ago” when they realized that “they [were] coming. Those nameless haunts” and that they had resolved to “send them back to their tacky old ships But they had come” (38-39). In a later conversation, they also relate the problems that arose when “they,” the colonizers, came:

They stole our sound We got no support man. No one could hear us. . . . They sold Joseph, my man Conjure men, voodoo men, wizards and priests. They didn’t like us man they gave them our voice they sent in their message, using our voice They sold Joseph in Egypt Hoodoo men, voodoo men gave them our sound We said men should keep and learn to use their power They said men should give them that power.—In exchange for fear ‘Easier to rule,’ they said.—Then came the outers singing our song, ruling the rulers. Hoodoo men, voodoo men, wizards and priests. Gave them our sound, then sold their own souls.—Easier to rule? Ha! Easier to follow. Easier to be a zombie. No faith in the people, no faith in themselves. They didn’t like us man. We said folks should keep their power They split man from his self. A working zombie.—Split them from us. Made us a joke. Made us a blot. (66-67)

The history these spirits remember details how colonization invited collusion between oppressed people and their colonizers so that the “hoodoo men” and “voodoo men” betray and work against their own people as well as themselves. Thus, the sick pursuit of English values like light skin and social power emphasize how colonization becomes a

¹⁵ This is also very similar to the way that Cliff uses a history of resistance to influence Clare’s ultimate resistance at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*.

disease of both the body and mind, “spirit thievery” or an exploitation of another person for selfish and corrupt gain.

This model of exploitation is established in colonialism as well as in patriarchy so that women suffer a dual oppression, particularly through their bodies. Just as the female body was the site of the rhetoric underpinning colonization as a decidedly masculine project, it also literally becomes the site of the corruption inherent in such a project, made manifest in Mass Levi’s “small” spirit thievery against Anita and more emphatically in Ella’s illness.¹⁶ As Denise de Caires Narain argues, “What Brodber dramatizes in *Myal* with the use of Anita’s and Ella’s bodies is a playing out of the variety of ways in which cultural alienation is imposed on the whole community; their bodies become the stage upon which the whole community’s zombification is enacted and exorcised” (110). This exorcism leads to resistance against the colonial forces enacting this exploitation when Ella learns to teach against the message in the colonial book that lends its names to the characters in the spirit world who help both Anita and her.

Even more than Mrs. Curren’s cancer, Ella’s “zombification” and affliction result from the way that colonial forces have played out in her life. Ella is the illegitimate daughter of Mary Riley, a light-skinned woman, whose family constitutes an anomaly in the Grove Town community since they are “three long face, thin lip, pointed nose souls in a round face, thick lip, big eye country!” (8). Her father, Ralston O’Grady, is “one of those Irish police officers whose presence[,] the authorities must have felt, kept the natives from eating each other. As is usual, this new officer came to town with no wife

¹⁶ This image of the female body literally exhibiting the corruption of colonization and patriarchy through illness works directly against the notion in *Heart of Darkness* that contact with blackness, and particularly the stereotypically sexed body of the black woman, causes Kurtz’s illness, since in Ella’s case it is a white man who infects her “black” body.

and needed a housekeeper” (6). Though Mary “didn’t object too strongly to giving O’Grady wife,” as Reverend Brassington acknowledges, “one could hardly call that [Mary’s pregnancy] a sin. . . . How can a black woman really be Eve when the God of the garden had stacked the cards to that she could not say ‘No’?” (87). Ella’s conception was a direct result of the colonial and patriarchal oppression that made it acceptable for a white man to force a black woman to have sex with him, and her alienation in the community stems from the racism of that same system which convinced Jamaicans that color was tied to worth, thereby ultimately inciting the self-hatred and jealousy that would prompt a community to hate and reject someone who looks like Ella.

The people of Grove Town, who are used to children like Ella being raised in Kingston, resist Ella’s presence in their community, and the narrator notes that from the first “It was hard for Ella. It was hard for the district people” (9). Ella’s looks inspire part of this discomfort since “The whiteman didn’t have to give her fine skin, straight nose, thin lips and growing hair for she already got that from the Riley side. He could only give her the colour and a little straightening on the hair to make her look white and that is what he gave her” (9). Her looks alienate her from the other children who will not associate with her except to call her names like “Salt pork” and “Alabaster baby” (9). As Denise de Caires Narain argues, “Ella’s alabaster skin and straight hair set her apart from the community, for whom her body acts as a conduit for a range of superstitions, jealousies and anxieties. She is also the result and embodiment of exploitative sexual relationships between black women and itinerant white men” (108-109); “The sight of the mother and child vexed them [the people in the district]” (Brodber 7). Significantly, the district people also do not want Mary to bring Ella to the bush because she is female.

They tell Mary, “you no see say this is a no nowhere fi bring up a little brown skin girl chile like that. If it was even a boy it coulda manage perhaps. But is a girl. The chile must study for nurse, or typist or something” (7). Though the district people see Ella’s future place as being in a “white collar” profession, her teachers refuse to take any time or interest in her because they know that she will have benefits that they will not as a result of her light skin: “And they were more than a little vexed at that and built up resentment against her With all the books they had read and exams they had sat around trying to pass, and the men they couldn’t enjoy because they might disgrace the profession, no one was going to give them with their black selves any job as a clerk anywhere in Kingston or Morant Bay or any other town anywhere in the world. . . . So they stopped seeing her and she too stopped seeing them” (10-11).¹⁷

As a result of her isolation from everyone around her, Ella creates an imaginary world for herself wherein she travels to the places in Europe that she learns about in school and where she “feels its snow” and meets “people who look like her. She met Peter Pan and she met the Dairy Maid who could pass for her sister” (11).¹⁸ Ella’s identification with these characters indicates the split in her psyche that begins early on.

In his reading of this aspect of the text, Neil Ten Kortenaar asserts that

Ella O’Grady’s reading resembles the myalist communion with ancestral spirits; it allows her to travel across distances and communicate with imaginary (but nonetheless real) friends In Ella’s case, however, the potential for an enhanced spirituality is a vulnerability to hostile spirit possession. The mental dissociation she experiences, whereby fictional characters inhabiting a distant land come to seem more real than the people around her, has harmful physiological effects: a sheet of gauze descends to divide her imagination, filled

¹⁷ Though Ella’s color will take her farther than her teachers, it is worth noting that their class position is, at least partially, dictated by their proper gender behavior as well.

¹⁸ Ella’s identification with the white characters in her books is not unlike Clare’s identification with Pip from *Great Expectations* in *Abeng*.

with foreign friends The disembodied communication made possible by literacy, with its potential for blurring identifications of race and gender, is harmful to the proper constitution of the self. (62)

When Mr. Holness, the primary teacher at the school, asks Ella at thirteen to read a poem by Kipling, the narrator says that the images in the poem about steamers are not new to her because she “had been to England several times. To Scotland too Peter Pan had taken her into a coal mine and up through a chimney and she had come out looking more like her mother. She remembered the trip very well for it was the first time she felt real” (11). What makes Ella feel “real” in her fantasies is inhabiting a black body like her mother’s, and since she cannot not do that in reality, she confines herself to the imaginary world—lives in her mind and away from her body—of white characters where if she is not real, at least she looks the same as everyone else.

This kind of collusion with a colonial ideal of self-effacement in an attempt to become white¹⁹ also shows up in Rev. Brassington, the Methodist minister, who, like Ella, is mulatto. When he goes to England for school (an appropriate move for someone who has internalized colonial values and who sees England as the “mother country” where one can better one’s self), he meets Maydene’s family and admits his mixed-race background with shame. Maydene remembers, “That William was not all white was as important to him [her father] as to William but with different values. Where William was apologetic, Father was delighted” (16). Maydene’s father’s pleasure with William’s racial background stems from his disagreement with popular science regarding racial traits. He believes that all truly great things come from mixed-race or “brown” people

¹⁹ Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* identifies this desire as the primary psychic affliction for colonized people.

(16).²⁰ Despite her father's enthusiastic approval of his race, William Brassington still holds to English ideals about what constitutes "proper" behavior, and he seeks to impose these values on the Jamaican people later through his ministry.

His desire to change the people prompts Maydene's lament that "'In church after church, the colourful clothes have gone, replaced by colour-less white and those felt hats which people buy—buy you know—and wear only on Sundays That is the nature of this kind of ministry—to exorcise and replace" (18). As Joan Miller Powell contends, "William Brassington is shown as a fabrication of colonization, a person educated away from himself. As such he privileges sameness, uniformity and conformity and operates within the repressive space created by the symbiosis of patriarchy and colonialism" (85). In this way, William behaves in this text in a very similar way to Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions* discussed in chapter three, who also tries to Anglicize his relatives. William's desire to do away with individual particularity as well as with native cultures and values amounts to what Maydene calls "spirit thievery" (18). Though Maydene disapproves of William's practices, she also sympathizes with him in that she realizes that he avoids mission work in Grove Town because he "is crippled by the fear of going back to the Grove Town of his past" (19), where, the text implies, he endured a treatment similar to that of Ella. Therefore, Maydene believes, after seeing Ella recite Kipling's poem, that Ella will be able to shed some light on what she does not know about how to help William since Ella and William are of the same racial mixture. Significantly, Maydene recognizes in Ella what she also saw in William when she first met him. She says that

²⁰ This is not unlike the philosophy popular among African American writers like Jean Toomer, who were writing around this same time during the Harlem Renaissance in America.

when Ella was reciting her poem, she “looked as if she was flying. Totally separated from the platform and from the people around her. Not just by colour but as an angel in those Sunday school cards is separated from people below” (17). Ella does, in a sense, fly when she travels in her imagination to England and Scotland, which mental journeys also separate her from those around her. Significantly, Maydene recognizes as well that “she is not happy up there in the sky. She wants to be real . . . Does William want to be real? . . . Whatever is William’s bother is tied up with reality, that little girl and Grove Town” (17). Maydene then becomes involved in helping Ella and, by extension, her husband.

Though Maydene is white and British, her father’s disposition about race predisposes her to fall in love with someone whom other British people would consider beneath them. Moreover, Maydene respects the culture of the people in Grove Town and would prefer for William to minister to the people so that he would “find a way of linking what they know with what he wants them to know” (19). This idea of finding a point of connection is summed up in Maydene’s love of the word “Cusp,” which her dictionary defines as “A point where two curves meet” (13). Kevin Hutchings notes that “Maydene’s sensitivity to interactions between ‘disparate points’ makes her potentially well-suited for a positive and equitable species of intercultural encounter, for, in contrast to her husband’s discursive self-centeredness, it signifies her ability to ‘forgo a permanent fixed self’ which, as Abdul R. Jan Mohamed has argued, ‘is essential if one is going to understand and appreciate a racial or cultural alterity’” (114). Thus, even though she is white, she represents a kind of hybridity which will be put to use when she joins with the spirits of the farm animals to help Ella after she marries Selwyn Langlely. In fact,

when the spirits meet to discuss their plan “To beat back those spirit thieves” (67), Reverend Simpson (Dan) realizes that the way do so is to “learn their ways . . . and pass it on, but just enough for an antidote. So this is where the Mistress Maydene comes in!” (68). They can learn as much as they need from her so that they can resist with power.²¹ Including Maydene in their resistance allows for what Catherine Nelson-McDermott calls “an extraordinary co-optive move which alters the positionality of the whites in the Morant Bay community, making it possible for them not to be colonizers. They are enabled to become community members without the community absorbing white (colonizing) values” (61). Thus, her involvement and connection with the people in Grove Town proves more positive than does Mrs. Curren’s with the black people in Cape Town.

Maydene decides that in order to help William, Ella must come and live with her, and to accomplish this, she seeks out the help of Amy Holness, Teacher’s wife. At this point, in 1913, when Ella is thirteen, Maydene and William Brassington have not lived in the area for very long, and Amy believes that Maydene exemplifies any other white person who might seek out a light-skinned black girl to live in her house when she says, “These white people just wan tek people pickney fi practice pon. Want Mary good-good pickney fi pasture out to her two red-face son. Is pumpkin belly dem wan send this one back home with too?” (20). Amy assumes that any interest Maydene has in Ella is exploitative in nature and that, as O’Grady did with her mother, Maydene’s sons will only use Ella for sex. Maydene respects and appreciates the people of Grove Town,

²¹ This idea of learning from Maydene as an antidote is closely connected to Bhabha’s notion of ambivalence wherein a colonized person uses the power in what they learn from the colonizer against them, and this is what happens at the end of the novel when Ella teaches against the book where the spirits of the farm animals originated.

however, and she understands Amy's implication that "Amy had accused her of stealing her people and exploiting their bodies" (22) when she addresses her using the linguistic rituals which Maydene also respects and which William dismisses as "silly" (21).

Maydene sees William's condescension toward these rituals as his "once again wanting people to empty themselves in front of him so that he can remodel them into shapes of which he approves" (21). By contrast, Maydene empties herself for Amy and tells her that her interest in Ella stems from her desire to help William, and in the course of their conversation, she learns that Amy would also like to raise Anita, another especially bright girl at Teacher's school who is being raised by her single mother, Euphemia. This connection and Maydene's honesty convince Amy that her interests are pure, and she agrees to take Maydene to see Mary. Significantly, the whole town learns of this meeting very quickly because "a white woman and a black woman walking together quietly and comfortably like equals was news" (24). Additionally, when she speaks to Mary about Ella's coming to live with her, she suggests that Ella come to her house only on the weekends so that she can spend the week with her mother. She also says that instead of taking Ella from her, they would share her since "a child should have two parents. Two people should share the load and since the child didn't have a father, she [Maydene] and the Parson would act as father, something like godparents" (48). In her respect for the people in Grove Town and her desire to treat them like equals, Maydene establishes her position as a member of their community.

Maydene's visit to Amy also establishes the connection between Ella's and Anita's stories. As Walker-Johnson argues, "Her [Anita's] case, like Ella's, demonstrates the anxiety engendered by the responsibility of bringing up a girl child. Anita's visitation

by the poltergeist is another way of representing the psychological stress which accompanies the changes of outlook which the educational process requires. It also symbolizes the sexual pressures exerted on the girl moving beyond puberty, which threaten her educational advancement, and her strange experiences are thus linked with Mass Levi's fantasies" (59). When the reader is introduced to Anita, she is being harassed by someone throwing stones on her roof while she studies. This grows worse every night, and Anita and her mother think it is a boy trying to get her attention. However, when Ole African shows up, "they knew. This was no human hand. This was no young man courting or young boys teasing. For Ole African only went where there was a spirit let loose needing to be cut and cleared" (34). Anita goes to live with the Holnesses after this because Teacher realizes that she is now a woman with "smooth black skin, [and a] high chest," and he asserts that "Too much work [has] gone into her for some stupid district boy to take her and send her with yam to market" (31).²² Thus, what conditions her move from her mother's is a concern for sexual purity. However, once she gets to Teacher's house, her sexuality is exactly what is threatened by a nightly visitor whom she pleads with not to touch her (58). When Reverend Simpson considers Anita's case, he realizes that she is also the victim of a kind of spirit thievery, this time by Mass Levi who uses obeah on her to try to regain the virility he lost when he had a stroke. Mass Levi's exploiting Anita for his own gain aligns him with the "hoodoo, voodoo" men that the spirits recall sold out their own people. Not only does Mass Levi seek to regain his

²² I find it particularly interesting that a desire to keep Anita sexually pure is what motivates Teacher to take her to his house since that is also one of the primary reasons why Mary agrees to let Ella go to the Brassingtons'. She knows the "district children still [call] her all sorts of names [and] . . . that that meant they were curious about Ella. It worried her that some little boy's curiosity would one day get the better of him and the next thing she would know is that Ella would come home with her clothes torn off her back and something in her belly" (48).

power through obeah, or bad magic, but he also wields a patriarchal authority over the women in the district and assumes his male privilege in subjecting Anita to his sorcery for the sake of his own sexual needs. As such, “Mass Levi’s relationship with the women of the Grove Town community highlights the complexity of *Myal*’s sociocultural critique; the novel not only attacks the binary logic which organizes colonialism in general, but it also deconstructs the analogous logic underpinning patriarchal authority” (Hutchings 112).

Anita is vulnerable to Mass Levi’s conjuring precisely because of her education. The first night that the stones are thrown, Anita is studying: “The kind [of studying] that splits the mind from the body and both from the soul and leaves each open to infiltration” (28). Thus, she, like Ella, allows her education to separate her mind from her body. Moreover, she studies the extra lessons that Teacher provides for her in the hopes that she will be permitted to become a “pupil teacher” since “her age [is] up in school” (30). Though the reader knows very little about Teacher aside from his interest in Anita, the narrator does inform us that he picked the Kipling poem that Ella recites because it teaches “History, Geography and Civics! And better still, love for the Empire” (27), thereby implicating him as someone who, to some extent, colludes with a colonial educational agenda, which, as Ella discovers, seeks to inculcate self-hatred and reliance on imperial “protection.” In fact, when Reverend Simpson (Dan) hears about Anita’s situation, he vows to teach them ““how to fight this little spirit thief. Someday maybe, you be strong enough and learn to fight the bigger one”” (68). Like the colonial education that makes Ella vulnerable to a psychic split, “Through obeah practices a very bright girl’s [Anita’s] mind is made to sustain his [Mass Levi’s] waning forces. The

operation is all the easier since colonial education, intrinsically, is based on self-denial, on the disruption of one's identity. . . . Manipulation seems to derive naturally from this harmful separation, from the destruction of wholeness" (Maximin 54).²³ The illness that Ella experiences later reveals that the "bigger one" is the kind of exploitation that seeks to dominate and alienate an entire people from themselves, whereas Anita's situation involves Mass Levi's attempting to steal only her spirit.

Though Reverend Simpson makes the vow to help Anita and Amy, Miss Gatha, who deals "in drums and spirits" (77), is the one who actually enacts the "exorcism" that kills Mass Levi and rescues Anita by swapping places with her so that "her face changed to that of a beautiful fifteen-year-old and back again to that of a woman of Miss Gatha's sixty odd years and back again and back again and back again until she was silent, her limbs quiet and she was fifteen years old" (73).²⁴ Puri's reading of this scene indicates that "After losing a battle with those who seek to possess Anita's spirit in order to free it from his control, Mass Levi dies. He is found with his pants down and a doll, made in Anita's image, that has been knifed at the crotch. We can now understand Anita's nightly cries of 'Let me go' as cries against nightly rape/possession by Mass Levi. In this powerful instance, sexual possession and spirit possession—domination of body and domination of mind—become inseparable. Since *Myal* conceives of domination as that which halves, that which severs the mind from the body, it becomes doubly important for the novel to be able to think [of] mind and body together" (102). Immediately after

²³ The idea of education disrupting wholeness makes Teacher's name—Holness—somewhat ironic in this context and perhaps serves as a critique of his complicity in the colonizing project of education.

²⁴ I find it telling that the people in Miss Gatha's Tabernacle celebrate this event by saying "'Thank the Lord,' 'Telephone from earth to heaven, telephone'" (73) since this missing connection to the spirit of her ancestors is exactly what Clare laments and seeks to rectify in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

Miss Gatha heals Anita, she acknowledges Maydene not only as her messenger that “The spirit thief is gone” (77) but also as a fellow spirit of an animal in the colonial school book when she calls her “‘White Hen.’ [This indicates that] The spirits had finally acknowledged each other” (77). Maydene’s initiation into this group of spirits suggests that the people in Grove Town are “just about to be ready” to fight the “big spirit thief” of colonization that has separated them from themselves so that they participate in colonial constructions like racial hierarchies seen in the way that they treat Ella. In fact, it is Ella who bears the scourge of this legacy in her body, not only in her looks but in her illness as well.

Ella tells Selwyn that what happened to Anita induced Reverend Brassington to send her to Port Antonio where she met Mrs. Burns, who brought her to America where she then met and married him [Selwyn] (54). Thus, as Walker-Johnson contends, “The Brassingtons’ protective custody may be seen as analogous with British Colonial office paternalism directed at the colonial society. Their behaviour towards each other, in relation to Ella, also shows correspondences with that of the Colonial Office towards Jamaica [which] . . . gave way, in certain sectors of the society, to a more accommodating policy towards United States’ interest in Jamaica” (58). Though this assessment holds true for William, Maydene cannot be held at fault since “Ella’s migration from the manse,” which leads to her trip to America, is “a William project” (90). Moreover, William sends Ella away “to be out of Maydene’s influence” (88) since he refuses to accept her explanations about her initiation as White Hen, believing instead that she is “having an early menopause” (88) or that she belongs to a coven (90). In refusing to

accept Maydene's connection to the spirits and, by extension, his own cultural heritage, William sends Ella to her fate.²⁵

Ella's marriage to Selwyn and the way that he exploits her memories constitute the "big" spirit thievery that results in her illness. Selwyn comes from a well-to-do family of doctors and chemists, and he seeks to expand "the family interest" into a new line of motion pictures, but "Until it came, Selwyn occupied himself with one production: the making of Ella O'Grady" (43). Selwyn sees Ella as an easy target for his manipulation because of her innocence about the world as well as her place in it, since he is the one "who explained to her in simple terms that she was coloured, mulatto and what that meant, taking her innocence with her hymen" (43). Shalini Puri asserts that "Selwyn controls Ella's sexuality just as he controls her story; yet again we see the conjunction of physical and mental domination. . . . Selwyn plunders Ella both physically and mentally for novelty" (106). Fittingly, Selwyn stages his "production" of Ella on her body through her sexuality. Selwyn thinks of Ella as his creation, the live embodiment of his story, and "Ella played well. She had a lifetime of practice" (43). That is, Ella's willingness to live in make-believe the majority of her life makes her susceptible to Selwyn's manipulations, and he sees in her "A marvelously sculpted work waiting for the animator" (46). Selwyn's interest in Ella as an exotic grows to the point that "his whole

²⁵ William automatically equates Maydene's change to a failing of her body (an early menopause) or to her inappropriate gendered behavior (joining a coven). As I argue later, Maydene experiences her connection with the community as self-empowerment, so William's reliance on stereotypical ideas to explain her "aberrant" femininity align him once again with Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions*, who reacts in a similar way to Nyasha's independence, and also to the people in *Abeng* who blame Hannah's insanity on menopause rather than accepting their role in the conditions which drive her to madness.

career now depended on animating that doll” (47),²⁶ and he marries her so that he can have her alone to himself to tell him all of her stories about Grove Town.

After their marriage, Selwyn manipulates Ella into telling him all of her memories about her life in Jamaica, which he considers “delightful theatre” (55) and which he eventually turns into a play called *Caribbean Nights and Days*, “the biggest coon show ever. He was going to travel west with it. And there were the movies. Somebody sure would back it” (80). Though his interests in Ella are purely selfish, her connecting with her memories and through them with the *actual* people in her homeland causes Ella to reconnect with her body. In fact, Brodber presents this connection as a sensual experience associated with having sex with Selwyn when the narrator says “With her hymen and a couple of months of marriage gone, there was a clean, clear passage from Ella’s head through her middle and right down to outside” (80).²⁷ While this is initially a positive experience, Ella tells Selwyn *everything* about herself so that “after a couple of months of marriage there was no gauze at all and Ella seemed to be draining perpetually” (81). Thus, he not only first perceives of her as his puppet to be animated so that she tells her stories, but he ultimately turns her into a kind of doll, leaving her dry and empty.

After Selwyn has gotten all that he wants from Ella, he ensures that she will not get pregnant: “he and prophylactics became the best of friends . . . and he felt himself at

²⁶ Notably, Mrs. Burns also thinks of Ella as a kind of doll that she can dress up and take places with her, and she uses Ella for her amusement when she employs her as a pawn in her game with Selwyn over whether or not he can spend time with her (47). So, Ella is objectified and exploited by her as well as Selwyn since Mrs. Burns is the one who essentially gives her to Selwyn as a kind of prize.

²⁷ I find it significant that when Maydene begins to make a connection with the people in Grove Town, she and William also begin to make love more than they ever have before. In a way, then, a connection to their (Ella’s and William’s) past frees them to experience the sensual (reality) of their bodies.

other times Onan's ²⁸[sic] own personal self" (80) because "even he knew that one could take a joke too far" (80). Since his interest in Ella is predicated solely on what he can get from her, once he has it, all he looks for is a way to extricate himself from their marriage so that he can have "In-laws with real pedigree . . . who could appear in the flesh" (80). Even as he takes from Ella what he wants in terms of her memories, which he commodifies as exotic theater, he is unwilling to share any of himself with her by giving her a child or allowing her to become a permanent part of his life. Ella does not understand this revelation of Selwyn's behavior and longs for a child since, according to her reasoning, "If a passage has been opened in you, if substance had been drained from you, then your body was being purified to prepare you to produce. Selwyn was her architect. If he could not show her how to fill the spaces he had created and give her too, a chance to create, then what was the point of all this draining She would be pleased to see what had been done with all that had left her body. But she wanted to make something inside, not outside of it" (82). Though Ella has reconnected to her body through sharing her memories with Selwyn, he denies her the agency to create through her body in the form of a pregnancy. As Kortenaar argues, "In 1918, Ella, the voracious reader, had no indigenous narrative to balance her love of British texts. This lack is remedied when she creates her own narrative. However, telling her story to another person opens Ella to manipulation by the one who receives the story. Ella is not long divided within, but now there exists a version of her self outside herself in Selwyn's racist imagination" (65). Since his "racist imagination" also "created" Ella, she believes

²⁸ Though Brodber spells the name differently, this certainly is a reference to Onan in Genesis 38:9 who "spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring."

her inability to connect fully with her body is related to her race when she wonders if she cannot conceive because she is mulatto (82).²⁹

The night that Ella sees Selwyn's play, she realizes that the connection she has made to her body through sharing her memories of her family and of Jamaica with him has been exploited in his representation of them. The narrator explains that

Ella had told her stories well and Selwyn had listened well But this Grove Town in which Selwyn set his play, had to be the most fruitful place in the whole world and one which respected no seasons. There were breadfruits at the same time as there were star-apples as there were mangoes. Selwyn knew nothing about Easter as star-apple time; mid-summer for mangoes and the end of summer, the breadfruit season It was unnatural. (83)

Similarly, the characters who represent the people in Ella's life are also unnatural since they are all "polished, wet, polished again and burnished. The black of their skins shone on stage Everybody's hair was in plaits and stood on end and everyone's clothes were the strips of cloth she had told him Ole African wore" (83). Selwyn's play thus "grievously [misrepresents] Grove Town as a tropical heart of darkness against which white America can constitute itself" (Kortenaar 65). Selwyn's lack of respect for the natural state of things in Jamaica as well his portrayal of all the people in Grove Town as exactly the same recalls Reverend Brassington's desire to make all of his parishioners the same and constitutes the most despicable "spirit thievery" portrayed in the novel. Not only does Selwyn steal the spirit of Grove Town, he also steals Ella's spirit when he portrays her with "flowing blonde hair" running from "black hands grabbing at her" (83-84), thereby reducing her to a stereotype of the white woman having to protect herself

²⁹ Ella's equation of her status as mulatto to that of sterility—she later calls herself "Mary's mulatto mule" (84)—recalls essentialized and racist notions of a hybridity which figured people of mixed races as different species who would, like mules, be sterile as a result of miscegenation.

from the violence of blacks. Walker-Johnson notes that “Selwyn’s transformation of Ella’s cultural experience, in his portrayal of it, invites comparisons with the misrepresentations of black experience by white journalists and travel writers” (58), and aligns Selwyn with the colonizers who also misrepresent black experience in the story about the farm animals which equates blacks with animals and which Ella learns to teach against when she returns to Jamaica.³⁰ Ella responds to this spectacle by saying, “‘It didn’t go so’ And these were the last words that escaped her lips for sometime” (84). Narrain notes that “Selwyn’s probing becomes akin to a violent penetration and betrayal (or rape) when Ella sees how he violates her story by transforming it into minstrelsy” (109). Selwyn’s exploitation and “spirit thievery” corrupts Ella’s body as well as her mind by inducing schizophrenia and multiple personalities which carry on conversations with each other, mostly in the form of accusations (84). This fragmentation manifests itself on her body through a psychosomatic pregnancy which is nonetheless also a real physical affliction. However, the conversations between her two personalities bring about clarity for Ella concerning the way that she worked in collusion with Selwyn by allowing him “to take everything” (84), and this understanding prepares her for the physical healing that follows.

The cure that Ella receives under Mass Cyrus’s care causes her to expel a “grey mass of muck” (4), and “Cook say it was like twenty thousand dead bull frog, the scent that escape from that chile’s body. That had to be the hand of man, Cook say to herself. Then what come out of her! Colour grey . . . she marvel that a body coulda hold so much

³⁰ It is worth noting also that the sense here of stereotyping, especially in written form, as a kind of spirit thievery would support my reading of Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* as someone who continues to exploit Africans like Vercueil by writing about him only through stereotypical images of black masculinity.

stuff" (94). This rotten, stinking mass exorcised from Ella's body also recalls the afterbirth that Mrs. Curren cannot give birth to in *Age of Iron*. Ella, however, does expel the mass, and this opens a new kind of connection between her and the people in Grove Town when she becomes a teacher, as well as between her mind and body, which new connections ultimately lead to resistance.³¹

When Ella becomes a teacher at the local school, she encounters the story of the farm animals whose spirits inhabit Reverend Simpson and the others. Ella comes to understand that the relationship between the farm animals and Mr. Joe represents the relationship between the British Empire and the people they have colonized. She also recognizes that the animals are treated "as sub-normals who have no hope of growth" and that by learning this story "The children are invited into complicity" (97). When Ella seeks advice from Reverend Simpson on how to deal with this situation, he confirms her assessment that the author of the book has taken the character's "knowledge of their original and natural world away from them and left them empty shells—dupies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out" (107). Having experienced this kind of zombification herself, Ella does not want to teach this story, and Reverend Simpson tells her, "You have a quarrel with the writer. He wrote, you think[,] without an awareness of certain things. But does he force you to teach without this awareness? Need your voice say what his says?" (107), thereby

³¹ I find it worth noting that Maydene also experiences a kind of liberation when she becomes part of the spirit group represented by the farm animals. William notices the change: "Then he took a good straight look at her and saw that his wife was thinking. Her own thoughts. Her spirit was not there at ready waiting to take his orders" (89). William does not know what "to do with this thinking praying Maydene who continued to be earth's best wife, but one whose spirit had, as it were, grown a body" (90). Connection to Grove Town's history and people empowers Maydene and gives her a new found connection to her body as well.

empowering Ella to speak her own thoughts and to teach *against* the text rather than allowing her voice to be used for someone else's purposes the way that she did when she allowed herself to be "animated" by Selwyn who saw her as his puppet. As Hutchings notes, "Willie's 'metaphor of healing' [learning enough of the colonizers' ways to imagine an antidote] unsettles the traditional colonial binary equation by suggesting that the implicit referents of 'disease and cure'—the discourse of colonialism and revolution respectively—are interrelated rather than essentially distinct" (110). Thus, if colonization which exploits becomes the disease, then people like Maydene who represent the British community can serve as an antidote to that same disease.

Significantly, Reverend Brassington also begins to see the negative message in this story along with Ella. He tells Maydene that "she is bright. How many times have I inspected schools and heard them read that piece and never seen it . . . It is a negative lesson. She has picked up that. I see that May. And now like her, I wouldn't want to teach that lesson" (103). He seeks out Reverend Simpson's council as well, though up to this point he has avoided him. When the spirits meet after Ella's and William's meetings with Reverend Simpson, they recognize that the change in Ella and William is exactly the antidote they envisioned when Reverend Simpson as Dan told Maydene as White Hen that what makes him happy is that

Two people understand . . . My people have been separated from themselves . . . by several means, one of them being the printed word and the ideas it carries. Now we have two people who are about to see through that. And who are these people, White Hen? People who are familiar with the print and the language of the print. Our people are now beginning to see how it and they themselves, have been used against us. Now, . . . we have people who can and are willing to destroy what should be destroyed, replace it with what it should be replaced and put us

back together, give us back ourselves with which to chart our course to where we want to go. (110)³²

Thus, Ella and Reverend Brassington represent the power inherent in resistance, and their new political consciousnesses signal hope for the rest of the people in Grove Town. As Nelson-McDermott asserts, “When Ella begins to teach ‘the text in terms of what it inculcates’ . . . she begins to strengthen her school children’s psychic immune systems so that they may fight the systematic disease, ‘carried’ by the voodoo men of the British Museum, which eats away at their self-worth” (60). However, this moment of connection is only the beginning of a greater change since “the awakened consciousness of these new people was just one little coral and what needed to be made was a rock” (110). Ella’s and William’s resistance does not get played out in the text, as is the case with most characters in the texts considered in this project. Moreover, Selwyn intends to “immortalize it [his play] into film. He of course was a man on the make, a man of success who could not now be stopped: Ella’s spirit and with it that of Grove Town would be locked into celluloid for the world to see for ages on end. There was no immediate way to fight that” (92).³³ Just as apartheid does not end with Mrs. Curren’s death in *Age of Iron*, all of her society’s ills cannot be cured through Ella’s healing. It will be a long time, then, before the people of Grove Town and of Jamaica can find a way to turn their resistance into independence from the colonial forces in their country.

³² Teaching resistance *against* colonial education is also what Clare does in *No Telephone to Heaven* when she returns to Jamaica and teaches her students their true history that has been excluded from colonial texts.

³³ In another interesting connection between this text and *No Telephone to Heaven*, what Clare and her comrades fight at the end of the novel is a movie about Nanny, which also constitutes a misappropriation of someone’s spirit for financial gain.

Further, Ella's resistance does not result from a self-determined decision to act; she does not find the solution to her problem with the story on her own. Instead, Ella goes to Reverend Simpson for help because

It had to be Reverend Simpson whether he liked it or not, for a solution had to come and quickly. Ella did not want to go back to where she had been and all this thinking and no solution could take her there. There was a chance that, on her own, she could do it. That would mean turning the thing over in her mind, rolling it and thinking, rolling it and thinking. It would mean a long journey with much staring and she did not like it one bit to get back home and find people looking furtively at her and worrying that she was getting mad again. That risk she couldn't take. (105)

While she can be commended for recognizing the urgency in her community's situation, her resistance might prove more effective if she had come to her solution as a result of her own empowerment rather than her relying on a male, patriarchal figure to tell her how to act. Nevertheless, despite her lack of self-determined action, Ella's resistance does serve as the foundation for communal healing. The use of illness manifest as a false "pregnancy" conceived by the corruption of a colonial legacy in both of these novels works directly against the Conradian notion of Africa and the female body as sources of mental and physical disease. Further, by having her female protagonist actively resist colonial and patriarchal forces, Brodber's text serves as an important paradigm of reclaiming the female body and an individual voice. This paradigm is particularly important to the novels considered in the following chapters wherein other female characters become aware of the corrupting influence of aspiring to English, colonial values, especially through education, and who also find variously effective ways of enacting resistance through their bodies.

Chapter Three

Dying for Control: Bulimia as Self-Empowerment in Tsitsi Dangarembga's

Nervous Conditions and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in colonial Rhodesia where she lived until the age of two when she moved to England with her parents. She returned to Rhodesia in 1965 and entered a mission school in Mutare. In a further move, Dangarembga "completed her secondary education at an American convent school" in Rhodesia (Coundouriotis 118). Given this transitional life, Dangarembga often felt isolated as a child and turned to writing as a way to cope. Though she read extensively from the English classics at school and at home, Dangarembga's interests shifted to African and African American literature when she returned to Rhodesia, after going to Cambridge in 1977, shortly before it gained independence in 1980.³⁴ Edwidge Danticat was born in 1969 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Both of her parents went to America in search of a better life (her father when she was two, her mother when she was four) and left Danticat to be raised by her aunt and uncle until she joined her parents in America at the age of twelve. Danticat experienced some difficulty adapting to America as a result of her language and accent barrier, and she, like Dangarembga, turned to writing as a way to cope with her feelings.³⁵ These authors' first novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, are semi-autobiographical novels in which the first person narrators, Tambu and Sophie, respectively, tell not only their own stories but the stories of the other women in their lives as well. Both texts are coming-of-age stories in which the main characters are faced

³⁴ All biographical information for Dangarembga was taken from Coundouriotis' entry in *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*.

³⁵ All biographical information for Danticat was taken from Sara Scott Armengot's entry in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature*.

with a crisis of identity due to abrupt and, to varying extents, traumatic separations from the places of their birth and the mothers who nurtured them and removal to a world defined by Western values concerning education and strict patriarchal ideas regarding sexuality and “proper” gender behavior. In these new “worlds,” Tambu, as well as her cousin Nyasha, whose narrative is intimately connected to Tambu’s, and Sophie seek to forge self-determined identities that are ultimately characterized by resistance to the Western values and the patriarchal control they face in their new environments. Thus, these novels conform to what Elaine Savory defines as writing from a position of ex/isle wherein

isle is not only the literal island [and, I would add in Tambu’s case, the homestead] but original cultural identity and connection, an identity which is based complexly in first self-definitions in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, generation. Ex/isle is the condition of separation from that identity, a separation in which, however, a new identity is reconstructed. Desire to make this new identity coherent with original subjectivity, never fulfilled but always pursued, works on fragments of memory: language itself becomes the agency for desire, and that is what brings the commitment to writing into being. (170)

Writing their own stories, and for Tambu, Nyasha’s story as well, both narrators enact this desire to construct a new, coherent identity. This identity can, however, never be fully realized, for the body, restricted by poverty, class, race, and gender becomes the limitation for the identity each character seeks. As a result, the body becomes the site of their resistance as the characters attempt to wrest control for themselves through eating disorders.

Additionally, not only are these characters' physical bodies the sites of resistance, the bodies of the texts that they write also serve as a kind of "writing back"³⁶ or resistance literature, since the characters' personal growth coincides both with a growth in their own political consciousness and with political advances in their countries of origin. Tambu's and Sophie's texts also afford them control by being able to speak their own stories. Dangarembga and Danticat thus challenge the Western body of historical knowledge concerning their countries and customs by including the stories of such strong women as well as the folklores and traditions that define their homelands.

This reading does not ignore Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's concern that

the indivisibility of gender relations from race and class, the intricate connections between sexual mores, skin pigmentation, and class mobility, the poverty and political repression that has left women's bodies exposed to abuse and exploitation—seem alien to the concerns of Euro-American theoretical thought This is nowhere more clear than in the frequent misreadings of the striking materiality of Caribbean women's depiction of the female body. Theorizations of Caribbean texts more often than not insist on interpreting bodies as symbolic constructs with cultural significance Female bodies and the perils to which they are subjected are often read as metaphors for some condition imposed on us by pro-, virtual, or postcoloniality. The experience of many Caribbean women, historical experience as well as experience translated into literary texts, denies the body's existence as mere symbolic construct Indeed most third-world women writers 'read' and 'write' the female body, from a materiality grounded in specificities of history that set Caribbean writing apart from Euro-American theories of the body as text. (163-164)

Indeed, these novelists do write about female bodies grounded in the materiality of history as my analysis of how poverty and race influence normative gender behavior will show. However, as McClintock's work argues, the history of colonized countries has

³⁶I take this phrase from the title *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin.

been told and defined by the bodies of women, both literal and metaphorical.³⁷

Therefore, my analysis must focus on both aspects of how the body is used in these works. Here Elaine Savory's contention that "Caribbean [and I would also add in this instance African] women's writing, of whatever ethnic affiliation, is also part of history . . . in the sense that the construction of subjectivity, desire and love, is achieved in the shadow of consciousness of four hundred years of oppression and resistance" (170). Thus, these characters' desire to seek a unified identity and to renew connection with the land and mother takes the form of textual articulation and bodily inscription in their acts of resistance through eating disorders.

For Nyasha and Sophie, bulimia serves as an act of resistance, and the onset for both occurs after an abusive encounter with the patriarchal authority in each character's life, Babamukuru for Nyasha and Martine for Sophie. Babamukuru and Martine accuse Nyasha and Sophie, respectively, of inappropriate sexual behavior. In both cases, Babamukuru and Martine assert their rights over their daughter's bodies because of the need to maintain proper appearances. Babamukuru believes he has to maintain a particular kind of image for the white colonial missionaries at the school he runs for native children in Rhodesia. Martine, in turn, carries on the Haitian tradition of "testing" her daughter into her neo-colonial life in America where she constantly struggles to leave behind traces of the class and racial markers that identify her as a poor Haitian immigrant. Therefore, the eating disorders experienced by Nyasha and Sophie and the struggle for control they represent serve as a rejection not only of the patriarchal authority asserted by Babamukuru and Martine but also as a rejection of the colonialism that

³⁷ See Introduction for a fuller discussion of this concept.

anchored its power in myths about the native female body as hyper-sexual and dangerous—the exact fear that fuels Babamukuru’s and Martine’s desires to ensure chastity and “proper” female sexual behavior in their daughters.

Notably, both Nyasha and Sophie face skepticism regarding their eating disorders when they are told that bulimia is a Western disease that cannot afflict Africans or Haitians. By ascribing their characters “Western” pathologies, Dangarembga and Danticat challenge the Western medical body of knowledge that assumes privileged understanding about the nature of all disease. Nyasha’s and Sophie’s eating disorders do not manifest themselves in the same way or for the same reasons that they do in Western patients with bulimia or anorexia, which Susan Bordo illustrates in her excellent analysis of eating disorders as symptoms of Western culture’s compulsion to discipline their own bodies. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo contends that eating disorders in Western cultures grew from a Victorian ideology advocating that the appropriate behavior for a woman was to be a “compliant, refined, and thoroughly domestic lady.” In that ideology, “food refusal was an appropriate symptom . . . with its rigid prohibitions, both metaphorical and literal, against female appetite and desire” (51). Indeed, Babamukuru’s and Martine’s assertion of control and obsession with their daughters’ sexuality could be seen as strikingly Victorian, as is the idea they share that women should be compliant and domesticated. However, in neither case are these Victorian ideals manifest in the desire for denial of food as the grounds of proper feminine behavior. In fact, both Babamukuru and Martine seek to “fix” or cure their daughters’ illnesses by forcing them to eat. Here cultural context comes into play. In the poor societies of Rhodesia and Haiti, not eating and the resulting slenderness are

not signs of decorum or a well-disciplined appetite but, rather, an embarrassment as they testify to the poverty of the family. Instead, plump, well-fed bodies are preferred as they are a sign of prosperity and health—images that Babamukuru and Martine take great pains to assert to the white authorities around them.

Bordo also notes that in Western culture, the typical anorexic or bulimic patient seeks control over the body's appetites, such as hunger, in the same way that early Christians sought to control sexual desires (146). For women in Western culture, then, "thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body, and the thin body (that is to say, the nobody) is associated with 'absolute purity, hyperintellectuality, and transcendence of the flesh'" (147-148). In this configuration of overcoming bodily desires, "sexuality is [often] brought into this scheme of associations, and hunger and sexuality are psychically connected" (148). In fact, the desire to avoid any appearance of sexuality is often associated with anorectic behavior, which is often linked to sexual abuse. While both Nyasha and Sophie experience the onset of their eating disorders as a result of an accusation of inappropriate sexuality, their attitudes tend not to line up with the desire to control bodily appetites through their eating disorders. Rather, these characters seek to control their own identities and fates by breaking away from a controlling parental force that dictates all of their behaviors. They also seek to break away from the parental control over their bodies that uses those bodies as markers of their own prosperity and respectability—ideas influenced by their parents' internalizing the derogatory ideas associated with race, class, and gender under colonialism.

Bordo does acknowledge that for many women who develop anorexia or bulimia in Western cultures, control is a factor. However, for such a woman, "the anorexia

syndrome emerges, not as a conscious decision to get as thin as possible, but as a result of her having begun a diet fairly casually, often at the suggestion of a parent, having gotten hooked on the intoxicating feeling of accomplishment and control” (149). As my analysis will show, the anorectic/bulimic behaviors in *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* do emerge as conscious decisions by Nyasha and Sophie to work *against* parental control of their bodies and their identities rather than in subconscious collusion with a shared desire for a more socially acceptable body. In this way, the eating disorders examined here do develop from cultural influences—as conscious protests against patriarchal and colonial control—but these cultural influences are decidedly different from the Western cultural influences placed on Western white women to obtain unrealistic body shapes in order to be accepted.

Bordo also makes a connection between hysteria and eating disorders, saying that both often grow (for Western Women) out of resistance to the kind of socially accepted feminine behavior that allows “no freedom of thought, no chance of making any progress in leading the kind of active, creative life her body and soul crave It is indeed essential to recognize in this illness the dimensions of protest against the limitations of . . . ideal . . . female domesticity” (159). Indeed, Nyasha’s and Sophie’s eating disorders are also manifest as protests against a rigid code of gender appropriate behavior. However, Bordo goes on to say,

we must recognize that the anorectic’s protest, like that of the classical hysterical symptom, is written on the bodies of anorexic women, not embraced as a conscious politics—nor, indeed, does it reflect any social or political understanding at all. Moreover, the symptoms themselves function to preclude the emergence of such an understanding. The *idée fixe*—staying thin—becomes at its farthest extreme so powerful as to render any other ideas or life projects meaningless. (159)

This ultimate obsession with slenderness at the expense of any kind of political consciousness cannot be said of Nyasha and Sophie's eating disorders. Rather, these acts of resistance become a metaphorical protest against colonialism as well as a literal protest against the kind of patriarchal control of the female body that emerged in Rhodesia, Haiti, and other countries as part of a colonial legacy. Moreover, both characters choose this behavior after they experience a growing political awareness of their own histories and how these are connected to the histories of their countries.

Despite the actual and symbolic resistance enacted by these women, however, Bordo's caution that this kind of protest is "counterproductive [and] tragically self-defeating (indeed, self-deconstructing)" (176) cannot be ignored. Ultimately, Nyasha and Sophie's rebellions are only a limited resistance because of the self-destructive nature of their protests. Indeed, these characters' protest against colonialism, while also depending on the benefits of colonialism such as education and a kind of prosperity afforded through that education, underscores Bordo's contention that "the pathologies of female protest function, paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, reproducing rather than transforming precisely that which is being protested" (177). This assertion, in Bordo's context, builds upon the fact that in Western culture "one source of potential for resistance and rebellion is pressed into the service of maintaining the established order" (177) wherein the anorexic or bulimic woman ends up reinforcing social ideas about feminine desirability by trying to remain thin. However, this assessment can also be applied to the novels under consideration here. In choosing self-destructive behavior, Nyasha and Sophie are continuing the cycle of violence enacted on

women's bodies through colonialism and patriarchy. In fact, the tools of colonialism—particularly education—provide the impetus for these characters to question colonialism's harmful qualities. However, that same education serves as the reason for each character's separation from her family and the land as well as the resulting loss of "self."

The double bind that education entails makes it impossible for Nyasha and Sophie to categorically reject colonialism or the bond with the patriarchal parent without harmful consequences in the same way that they are unable to unconditionally reject food without harmful consequences. In writing the stories of women and celebrating a maternal connection, each seeks a solution that "draws strength from her matrilineal links by listening to the stories passed down from her mother, grandmothers, and aunts, and empowers herself by retelling their tales along with her own" (Begum 21). Unfortunately, neither author is able to imagine a resolution to this problem beyond the resisting behavior. Both novels end with only a beginning to the question of identity. Neither Nyasha nor Sophie has overcome her bulimia, and neither narrative imagines a way to connect with the land and the mother while still living in a world defined by colonial and patriarchal control.

The Resisting Body: *Nervous Conditions*

In this novel, Tambu's and Nyasha's identities are intimately connected to issues of race, class, and gender. Indeed, much of the narrative focuses on Tambu's change in economic/class status through education and the beneficence of her uncle, Babamukuru, who was the first person in her family to overcome poverty by virtue of his education. Sadly, Babamukuru's education began a legacy of separation from the land and

traditional culture through the pursuit of education and, by extension, colonial values.

Education is a necessity that comes with many benefits, but it also carries severe consequences in that it isolates people from their “roots” and ultimately turns them against each other.

This, then, is the “nervous condition” of the book: those who receive a Western education become more and more critical of the “fact of their blackness” as they seek to be more and more like the whites (Fanon 18). The education that Babamukuru, Maiguru, Nhamo, Nyasha, Chido, and Tambu all receive is always figured as a kind of separation from their traditional culture and a distancing from a pre-colonial history that at least Tambu’s grandmother still remembers. This is especially true for Babamukuru who wields a kind of “white” authority by assuming control of the whole family, usually at the expense of women.³⁸ As Derek Wright notes, “His is the ‘nervous condition’ of the ‘native’ in the Fanonian title, his compensative domestic power-complex fuelled by colonialism’s long suppression of traditional male authority in Africa” (14). Nyasha bears the brunt of this power-complex and therefore resists Babamukuru’s authority the most.

For her, the way to overcome her father’s “colonial” control is to expel food from her body—the site of the struggle—and by so doing to expel the myth of the body that colonialism and patriarchy have tried to impose on her. Nyasha’s time in England and her cultural hybridity suggest that her eating disorder might be a Western affliction, but as Heidi Creamer argues, “By rebelling with food, she [Nyasha] is not just acting anglicized, she is using symbols similar to those used by Mainini, Maiguru, and Tambu”

³⁸ For example, when Babamukuru visits the homestead, he usually takes Jeremiah away from the fields to discuss family matters, leaving more work for Tambu, her mother, and her sisters. Additionally, Babamukuru and the other patriarchs of the family are the only people allowed in the secret meetings, or *dare*, that often decide the fate of women like Lucia, Mainini’s independent sister who never married.

(357). Thus, resistance through the body becomes the best recourse for all of these women, including Tambu's mother, who is most closely associated with a traditional heritage because of her lack of education. The narrative posits that what must be expelled is actually not Babamukuru's authority but, rather, the "disease" of Englishness, since as Hershini Bhana notes, "English colonialism, buttressed by certain Shona patriarchs, is seen as the real disorder, and society's illness must be cured before the native can be healthy" (24). Healing here gets figured as a reconnection with the land and a matrilineal heritage. Tambu's narrative posits that this reconnection can and should happen through a kind of hybridity that embraces the syncretism of the benefits of education without allowing the separation that results for the others. However, this end is never fully realized in the novel.

Tambu's road to a better education at her uncle's home at the mission serves as the basis for the first half of the novel wherein she seeks to transcend her underprivileged status as well as the limitations for her sex in Rhodesia's patriarchal culture. She begins the narrative by saying, "I was not sorry when my brother died . . . [;] my brother's death . . . put me in a position to write this account" (1). Nhamo's death opens the door for Tambu to replace him at the mission school since she is the next eldest child and there are no boys in her family of educable age. Thus, she lays the ground work for her story about her "escape and Lucia's; about [her] mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion" (1). In other words, this is the story of women and how they interact with and resist their position in oppressive colonial and patriarchal society. In fact, Tambu's inspiration for getting an education comes from her grandmother.

Tambu's grandmother tells her the family history and how the whites, whom she calls "wizards," came into their land "from the south and forced the people from the land" (18). Later, "she heard that beings similar in appearance to the wizards but not of them, for these were holy" (19), had come to establish missions. She sent Babamukuru to them from the family farm so that they could educate him in their ways. She knew that these "wizards" would soon have the power, and she, "being sagacious and having foresight, had begged them to prepare him for life in their world" (19). Significantly, Babamukuru works on the whites' farm during the day in exchange for his education at night. Thus, Tambu hears from her grandmother about the first separation in this family of someone from the land that had sustained their livelihood and lifestyle for the pursuit of colonial ways. Notably, Tambu, speaking as the adult narrator looking back on her feelings about this story, recognizes that "[i]t was truly a romantic story to my ears, a fairy-tale of reward and punishment, of cause and effect. It had a moral too, a tantalizing moral that increased your aspirations, but not beyond a manageable level" (19).

Education is a way to overcome adversity and to achieve a certain level of accomplishment, but in colonial Rhodesia, the limitations of race still trump those of class status achieved through white education. Further, this education cannot provide her with the history that her grandmother tells her, which is an important part of who she is and who she will become.

Significantly, the life that the grandmother remembers and life on the homestead for Tambu and her family are intimately connected to the physical body and how that body is sustained by a connection to the land, specifically through the production of food for survival. Thus, it is important that throughout the novel, education, and, more

specifically, books, gets substituted for food. Not only is an English education a kind of separation from the land, but the books that represent it are endowed with the kinds of sustaining qualities usually only associated with food. However, as Derek Wright notes, “the colonial education at issue turns out to be constricting and repressive, with each new freedom a form of alienation, and, as ‘food,’ it proves to be ill-nourishing and spiritually deadening rather than healthful and life-giving” (9-10). When Babamukuru and Maiguru return from England with their master’s degrees, Tambu’s father announces his brother’s return by saying, “Our father and benefactor has returned appeased, having devoured English letters with ferocious appetite. Did you think degrees were indigestible? If so, look at my brother. He has digested them!” (36). Tambu notes that she hardly recognizes her cousins, and that Nyasha and Chido can barely speak Shona anymore. They have an education, but as Wright’s analysis shows, they no longer have a connection to their extended family or their traditions. Additionally, Babamukuru’s ability to digest books is depicted as a particularly masculine conquest since it is presented in contrast to Tambu’s request to grow her own mealies to go to school. Jeremiah tries to dissuade her from doing so when he tells her that she will not be able to cook books and feed them to her husband (15). Though he values education for Nhamo and Babamukuru, he does not value it as an appropriate pursuit for a girl since it does not further her domestic training.

Tambu’s mother also cautions her not to have too many aspirations when she tells her, “this business of womanhood is a heavy burden . . . How could it not be? Aren’t we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can’t just decide today I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make

them And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other” (16). Tambu has an illusion of Maiguru as exempt from these burdens by virtue of her education and says, “I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood” (16).³⁹ To that end, Tambu decides to pursue her desire for an education, even without her father’s approval or help since “There was no way of pleasing my father, nor was there any reason to. Relieved, I set about pleasing myself, which antagonized him even further”(33). In this way, Tambu resists her father’s patriarchal authority, exhibiting a desire not only to break out from under poverty but also from gendered constraints even before she goes to live at the mission where Nyasha’s rebellion against the same forces influences her.

Though Mainini encourages Tambu’s efforts to pay for her own education locally, she objects to her moving to the mission and says that she will not sacrifice any more of her children to English education after Nhamo’s death (56). Significantly, Mainini is the first character to attempt not eating as a way to resist Babamukuru, since she does so when he comes to take Tambu home with him. Tambu does move to the mission, though, thereby causing another separation in her family.

An important revelation for Tambu at the mission where she will be educated is the abundance of food available. She says, “I remember feeling slightly intimidated by the dining-room, with its large, oval table That table, its shape and size, had a lot of say about the amount, the caloric content, the complement of vitamins and minerals, the

³⁹ Khani Begum makes similar points in “Construction of the Female Subject in Postcolonial Literature: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*.”

relative proportions of fat, carbohydrate and protein of the food that would be consumed at it. No one who ate from such a table could fail to grow fat and healthy” (69). In Tambu’s economy, education and the attendant wealth are the ways to overcoming poverty, oppression, and hunger—to her the primary problems of colonization and, for women, of patriarchy as well. Her relationship with Nyasha, however, indicates that this may not necessarily be the case.

Before Tambu goes to the mission, she believes that Babamukuru has not “cringed under the weight of his poverty. Boldly, Babamukuru had defied it. Through hard work and determination he had broken the evil wizard’s spell. Babamukuru was now a person to be reckoned with in his own right. He didn’t need to bully anybody any more. Especially not Maiguru . . . [n]or could I see him bullying Nyasha . . . [;] [h]e didn’t need to be bold any more because he had made himself plenty of power” (50). However, her later reflections reveal that Babamukuru was not as rich as her childish eyes had perceived him to be, nor was he as free from the “evil wizard’s spell” as she believed since most of his dealings with his family are designed to maintain good standing with the whites at the mission. Michelle Vizzard contends that Babamukuru is what Homi Bhabha calls a mimic, that he is only able to “play out a repetition or mimicry of colonial discourse within his family . . . because of the status accorded to him by that family” (206). In his immediate family, Maiguru ensures Babamukuru’s status by completely “effac[ing] [herself] in order to preserve his sense of identity and value” (Dangarembga 102) and by supporting his insistence that Nyasha behave as a traditionally obedient daughter, despite that fact that she does not know how to perform this role after her long stay in England.

Nyasha tells Tambu that “[w]e shouldn’t have gone The parents ought to have packed us off home Maybe that would have been best. For them at least, because now they’re stuck with hybrids for children. And they don’t like it. They don’t like it at all. It offends them. They think we do it on purpose, so it offends them” (78). The best illustration of Nyasha’s refusal to conform occurs at Tambu’s first dinner with the family. Serving Babamukuru in the traditionally respectful and ceremonious way, Maiguru holds the plate “respectfully with both hands” (80) while he helps himself to the choicest portions of all the food available. Nyasha begins to serve herself from the first dish before Babamukuru finishes, however, which prompts Babamukuru to reprimand her saying, “What about your mother, here? . . . Do you think she doesn’t know what she’s doing, waiting on me like this?” (81). In this instance, he uses food to reinforce his patriarchal hierarchy, and, later, also to enforce control when he argues with Nyasha about reading *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

Nyasha realizes this book is missing when she tells Tambu that what helps her to sleep is not food but, rather, a good book. Here, too, Nyasha substitutes education for food, though she will later reject the English values attendant to that education when her father seeks to impress them into his service. When she realizes that her parents have taken her book because they consider it unsuitable and because her reading it suggests that she has, in Babamukuru’s words, “no sense of decency” (81), she questions their authority. Babamukuru replies, “I expect you to do as I say. Now sit down and eat your food I want to see you eat all of it” (83-84). Her obedience in this moment will be demonstrated in her cooperation since, as Derek Wright contends, “‘playing with boys’ [or any other behavior deemed sexually inappropriate] is linked with turning up her

[Nyasha's] nose at his food, identifying puritanism as the principal ingredient of the colonial education diet that he [Babamukuru] forces upon his children" (9). When she refuses, she asserts her own will and her own desire for control, and "by saying 'I'm full' . . . Nyasha shifts the site of battle from the dining table controlled by Babamukuru to the territory of her own body, which she [struggles] to control" (Hill qtd. in Bhana 21). This, then, serves as the first instance in which Nyasha refuses food as a way of resisting her father's control over her body, which he has implied is potentially sexually dangerous because of her choice to read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As Hill notes, this strategy "will become increasingly more effective for her [as] . . . a weapon of power in an otherwise powerless situation" (82). Though Tambu cannot fully comprehend Nyasha's rebellion, and even to some extent criticizes her, her dream that night suggests complicity with Nyasha's resistance to what Babamukuru interprets as appropriate feminine behavior.

After Nyasha's show of resistance, Tambu dreams that Nhamo reprimands her for smoking and for deserting her husband and children. She also dreams that "Babamukuru and his two ferocious dogs [were] tracking [her] down to return [her] to [her] spouse" (90). This dream indicates that at least subconsciously, Tambu has internalized Babamukuru's ideas about respectable femininity as well as the knowledge that he will enforce those ideas with a relentless and oppressive will—by tracking her down with ferocious dogs.⁴⁰ Her reaction to this dream begins Tambu's close association with Nyasha as well as her sympathy to her resistance.

⁴⁰ There is a striking similarity here between Tambu's subconscious fear of Babamukuru's patriarchal authority and the dream that Sophie has about Martine's control in *Breath, Eye, Memory*.

Despite Tambu's identification with Nyasha, she also wants Babamukuru and the authorities at the mission to think positively of her, so she buries any misgivings she might have about Babamukuru's authority in doing what she thinks she should do in order to appear appropriately grateful. In a somewhat sarcastic adult narrator's voice, Tambu says that the whites who come to Rhodesia as missionaries "were about God's business here in darkest Africa It was a sacrifice that made them superior not only to us but to those other Whites as well who were here for adventure and to help themselves to our emeralds. The missionaries' self-denial and brotherly love did not go unrewarded. We treated them like minor deities. With the self-satisfied dignity that came naturally to white people in those days, they accepted this improving disguise" (103). Though Tambu's child-like innocence colors her perceptions of the missionaries, her adult allusion to *Heart of Darkness* suggests an indictment against them since she posits their superior position as a "disguise." Tambu goes on to say that she loved the missionaries because she wanted to love and defer to anyone who was superior to her, and that she liked the young missionaries because they had "smooth, healthy, sun-brown skin. This took away most of my repulsion towards white people I used to feel guilty and unnatural for not being able to love the Whites as I ought. So it was good to see the healthy young missionaries and discover that some Whites were as beautiful as we were. After that it did not take long for me to learn that they were in fact more beautiful and then I was able to love them" (104). This transformation in Tambu's attitude from seeing her own people as beautiful to seeing whites as just as beautiful and eventually to *learning* to see them as more beautiful outlines the process of colonial indoctrination that

takes place at the mission and suggests how this incited Babamukuru's own self-hatred which leads to his separation from his family and mimicry of colonial values.

Tambu's English education (she reads all of Nyasha's books including the Brontes), along with the good food at her uncle's house, initiates (or so she believes) her first menstrual period, which she says results from her mind and body being relaxed (95).⁴¹ Tambu's menstruation coincides with rumors about Nyasha's inappropriate sexual behavior and dress at school, which helps Tambu to understand more fully her uncle's prurient ideals about sexuality. Additionally, Tambu does not know how to care for herself in Maiguru's house, which is fastidiously clean and thus requires a kind of secrecy about her body, a contrast to the greater openness of discussion she shared with her cousins and aunts at the homestead.

Nyasha, in turn, understands her parents' anxiety about the body and especially the female body and sexuality, and she tells Tambu that they can use that anxiety to force them to buy them tampons (96). Tampons here serve to take away the clear evidence of the female body and menstruation that Tambu has not been able to hide using traditional methods, and for Nyasha they also serve as a metaphorical way to take her own virginity. Though this is a joke and holds much less serious consequences, this belief can be seen as parallel to Sophie's self-violation with a pestle, which she associates with gaining control of her own body and her own sexuality.

Nyasha's sexuality incites the second major encounter with Babamukuru when she goes to the end of the term party in a dress that he does not approve of and then

⁴¹ Tambu's education, like Nyasha's, will eventually lead her to critique the forces of colonialism and patriarchy, and so I find it important that she begins to menstruate just as she encounters books like *Jane Eyre*, particularly since the onset of menstruation occurs for Clare Savage (discussed in the next chapter) just as she confronts her own political awakening.

comes home late.⁴² Babamukuru's anger stems from his concern about how the whites at the mission will perceive him since he currently holds a position that he takes to be respectable. He tells Nyasha that he "cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore" (114). He needs Nyasha to behave in a particular way because of what it says about *him* if he has a daughter who acts outside of accepted gender boundaries and how that might affect him if his reputation is compromised by her appearance. Therefore, he falls back on the European stereotype and anxiety about the black female body as representative of licentious sexuality. Significantly, their encounter takes place after Nyasha is out with a white boy, which highlights for Babamukuru her potentially "dangerous" sexuality.

Nyasha not only oversteps her gender and race boundaries as a black woman with a white boy, but she also defends herself against Babamukuru's violence—an act that because it defies complete and total submission to his authority marks her in his mind as trying to be a man. Babamukuru says, "She has dared . . . to raise her fist against me. She has dared to challenge me. Me! Her father. I am telling you . . . today she will not live. We cannot have two men in this house!" (115). Significantly, Tambu learns an important lesson here about the constraints of gender even in what is to her the "upper-class" lifestyle of Babamukuru's house. She says,

I was feeling bad for her and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education, or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I thought it had depended on. Men took it everywhere with

⁴² Interestingly, before this incident, Babamukuru is impressed with Nyasha's ability to "buckle down" and study despite the fact that it is obviously self-destructive. This is an interesting dynamic in that Nyasha wants to defy her father, and though her obsessive studying seems to be about control, it is a kind of control that pleases Babamukuru in that her loss of appetite during that time is sanctioned by him.

them . . . [;] what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (115-116)

While she understands the oppression of patriarchy, she does not acknowledge here how patriarchal control gets used in the service of colonialism. Just as the colonists used "aberrant" native, and particularly female, sexuality as a justification for their civilizing mission, so, too, does Babamukuru hold up that image as the reason why he must maintain control over his daughter. He must contain her "excessive," dangerous sexuality in order to maintain his position of respect at the mission.

This encounter with Babamukuru causes Nyasha to stop eating again and to withdraw completely. Though Babamukuru believes "Nyasha was sulking because she had not been able to have her own way," Tambu discerns "the conflict that she was going through of self versus surrender and the content of sin" (118). For Tambu, Nyasha's refusal to eat is not a childish assertion of will. Instead, it is a conflict over what is right and where she should place her allegiance since she believes that "You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do" (117). Nyasha also experiences a kind of separation or doubling of herself during this period in that her body is present in the house, but in order to protect herself from the caustic environment that the house represents, "she stopped talking to us . . . [;] she was growing vague and detaching herself from us. She was retreating into some private world that we could not reach" (118). Unable to negotiate her position the way her father

sees fit, Nyasha withdraws as yet another way to escape Babamukuru's crushing tyranny.⁴³

While Nyasha resists her father's control and insistence that she uphold the ideal of "traditional" femininity, she also seems to recognize that there is something in her traditional culture that she needs, and she relies on her relationship with Tambu to provide her with the connection she wants. Nyasha wants to make clay pots but not in the same way that she and Tambu used to make them before she went to England—"these days our pottery was smaller and daintier and finished with delicate designs" (149). Tambu says that "as far as I was concerned, people only made clay pots when they were very young and playing at being grown up, or when they were grown up because they had to have pots for storing water and *mahewu* and the like. But we used two-and five-gallon drums for water these days and I had never seen anybody make a proper *hari* although we had several in the house. So these pots were definitely Nyasha's craze, not mine" (150). Nyasha's desire to make clay pots positions her as what Fanon calls "an intellectual . . . [who] wishes to attach himself [sic] to the people; but instead . . . only catches hold of their outer garments That extremely obvious objectivity which seems to characterize a people is in fact only the inert, already forsaken result of frequent . . . adaptations" (223-224). Although Nyasha's attempts to find a "pure" native culture are futile, her desire for connection more firmly entrenches Tambu's position as her link to traditional culture. Conversely, Nyasha's willingness and

⁴³ Like Tambu later in the novel, and Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, withdrawal also acts as a kind of rebellion for Nyasha here. Additionally, after this episode, Nyasha begins her period nine days early, suggesting that like Tambu and Clare Savage, her growing political awareness is also inscribed on and experienced through her body.

ability to question unfair practices also influences Tambu's relationship with Babamukuru, which leads to her own bodily rebellion.

Babamukuru declares that the only way for Tambu's family to overcome their financial troubles is to have a Christian marriage in the Western style. Instead of recognizing the colonial conditions that have helped to perpetuate his family's poverty, Babamukuru adopts a colonial attitude about his family and convinces them that their troubles are a result of their "heathen" behavior that must be repressed by having a Western wedding.

Tambu, in turn, understands that this wedding makes a mockery of her culture and her parents, but she also internalizes a kind of self-hatred because Babamukuru declares her parents' union a sin. She then reasons that she and her sisters are also covered in that sin. Unable to reconcile Babamukuru's judgments about her family with her adoration for him as a benefactor and provider, Tambu stages a somewhat involuntary bodily revolt. At any mention of the wedding, she gets physically ill, and on the day of the wedding, Tambu refuses to get out of bed to attend her parents' wedding. At first, Babamukuru interprets Tambu's action as illness, which Deepika Bahri notes "is an adroit linking in the novel of the major themes, revealing the nexus of relations between illness, body, labor, colonialism, patriarchy, and the female subject" (paragraph 12). However, he quickly changes his mind when Tambu refuses to speak to him as well and decides that she is making a scene and challenging his authority, being ungrateful for everything that he has done. Like a true "mimic man,"⁴⁴ he believes that his colonial-inflected ways and ideas are the only proper way to do things and that any protest against

⁴⁴ See earlier discussion of how Vizzard interprets Babamukuru as a mimic in Bhabha's terms.

them, no matter how well-founded, is merely ingratitude—not proper “native” thankfulness for the “gift” of “civilizing” Western values.⁴⁵

Babamukuru releases Tambu from having to attend the wedding but forces her to make up for her disobedience through her body by performing domestic duties that not only reinforce her submission as a woman but, because Anna, the housekeeper, usually performs the work she does, also relegate her to the condition of “native” once more.⁴⁶ Nyasha aligns herself with Tambu in her rebellion by helping her with her chores, and she commends Tambu for taking a stand for what she believes in despite her initial disapproval of the way that Tambu handles the situation. Thus, Nyasha and Tambu provide solidarity and support for each other against what they perceive to be their common enemy.

However, Tambu’s acceptance to the convent school and her move disrupt this camaraderie and contribute to Nyasha’s physical decline. Tambu fails to realize how her move will affect Nyasha since to her mind the convent represents another step in distancing herself from the poverty of her childhood. She says, “I would go. I was sure of myself. I was not special like Nyasha. How could I possibly forget my brother and the mealies, my mother and the latrine and the wedding? These were all evidence of the burdens my mother has succumbed to. Going to convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens were light . . . Still Nyasha was not

⁴⁵ This incident occasions Tambu’s sense that she leaves her body and views the scene from outside of herself. Though this is not a sexual moment the way it is for Sophie when she doubles, I have to wonder if there is some kind of connection of this sort of bodily resistance to patriarchal oppression since she describes it as going “somewhere where he could not reach me” (166).

⁴⁶ When Tambu first arrives at the mission, she hopes that she can share a room with Anna, whom she feels more connected to than Nyasha. However, after only a short while at school and in their house, Tambu can no longer imagine that she ever felt that way.

impressed. ‘Really, Tambudzai . . . there’ll always be brothers and mealies and mothers too tired to clean latrines. Whether you go to the convent or not. There’s more to be done than that’” (179). Nyasha, who is more educated and concomitantly more able to criticize Anglophone values, recognizes the risk of assimilation in education. Tambu notes, however, that Nyasha can afford to have that outlook because her class status has already been raised by a similar education, thereby proving again that a person has to have the education to be able to critique the problems that it poses for native culture and its resistance to colonization.

Babamukuru, in turn, objects to Tambu’s going to the convent because he feels that she needs to be considering her future as a wife and mother, and being around the white people there will spoil her moral fortitude—as he believes it has done to Nyasha (180). Tambu’s response to the prospect of marriage is “I had nothing against it in principle. In an abstract way I thought it was a very good idea. But it was irritating the way it always cropped up in one form or another, stretching its tentacles back to bind me before I had even begun to think about it seriously, threatening to disrupt my life before I could even call it my own” (180). Tambu defers more to Babamukuru’s position of authority by not voicing her protest, but she, like Nyasha, also desires a self-determined identity, not one bound by societal regulations about her appropriate role.

Maiguru, however, opposes Babamukuru’s stance saying that she was also considered “loose” because she was well educated and it is not fair to be prejudiced against women in this way since nothing has shown these attitudes to be true (181). Babamukuru’s ideas about education reveal an interesting double standard here that posits that whiteness does not corrupt his own decency but it does corrupt female

decency. Once again, women are responsible for maintaining pure, uncorrupted native culture, while the men reap the benefits of colonial education without penalty.

Babamukuru wants the girls to have as much education as he sees fit for them but not to expect anything like equal treatment or opportunities as a result because they are automatically inferior by virtue of their sex. This thinking mirrors the colonialist ideas about education for blacks like Babamukuru since the British wanted to cultivate him and other Africans like land and educate them insofar as it was useful for colonial purposes so long as Babamukuru and others did not expect equal treatment or opportunities as a result since they were inherently inferior by virtue of their race. Here, the women suffer a double oppression as they not only get an inferior education to that of whites but also to that of black males.

Despite Babamukuru's double standard, Tambu still views education positively as "Another step away from the flies, the smells, the fields and the rags; from stomachs which were seldom full, from dirt and disease, from my father's abject obeisance to Babamukuru and my mother's chronic lethargy" (183). When Babamukuru gives her permission to go to the convent, though, she loses her appetite and does not want to eat the food her mother prepares. Like Babamukuru, Maiguru, and Nyasha, Tambu no longer longs for the food that a better education and the attendant class position will provide. Instead, education replaces her need for food. Again, Tambu's mother is the one who sees the danger in such thinking since English education can only serve as a less fulfilling substitute to the sustenance of her native culture.

When Tambu's mother hears that she is going even farther away and will be separated from her for even longer, she says,

‘Tell me, my daughter, what will your mother say to you when you come home a stranger full of white ways and ideas? It will be English, English all the time . . . I’ve had enough, I tell you, I’ve had enough of that man dividing me from my children. Dividing me from my children and ruling my life. He says this and we jump. To wear a veil, at my age, to wear a veil!’ . . . My mother declined so rapidly after that . . . [;] she ate less and less and did less and less, until within days she could neither eat nor do anything, not even change the dress she wore. (184).

Thus, Mainini also uses her refusal of food as a conscious protest against Babamukuru’s control in her life. She, like Nyasha, has little control over anything but her own body, so she takes it out of the service of men like Babamukuru. This act, like Nyasha’s protests, has farther reaching implications for Babamukuru’s appearance and reputation. If she does not do all of the work to keep up the homestead, Jeremiah, her husband, will not, and Babamukuru will be shamed by a family that does not keep the traditional home of his youth running properly. What helps her to overcome this lethargy is female solidarity, especially the attentions of Lucia, who, according to Heidi Creamer, “incorporates the symbolic power of food into her healing; she insures that Mainini eats meat and milk which are usually served only to men during holidays” (354). Through traditional food that also empowers her and through female solidarity, Mainini begins to recover.

While female solidarity helps Tambu’s mother, losing Tambu’s company to Sacred Heart causes Nyasha to have another conflict with her father when she comes in late from school, and he once again implies that she has somehow behaved indecently. As with the other battles of will between these two, Babamukuru again seeks to assert his authority over Nyasha’s body by forcing her to eat. She does so in the form of a binge, “gobbling the food down without a break” (189). She concedes control to Babamukuru

at the table, and “the atmosphere lighten[s] with every mouthful she [takes],” but she does not accord Babamukuru lasting control because when she leaves, “she [goes] straight to the bathroom” (190) and gags herself with a toothbrush.

Nyasha explains to Tambu that her refusal to eat food is “how it comes out, but really it is all the things about boys and men and being decent and indecent and good and bad. Sometimes I look at things from his point of view, you know what I mean, traditions, expectations, and authority, that sort of thing, and I can see what he means and I try to be considerate and patient and obedient, really I do. But then I start thinking that he ought to look at things from my point of view and be considerate and patient with me, so I start fighting back and off we go again” (190). Nyasha acknowledges that she rebels by regurgitating food, but she also understands that she does so in retaliation to *all* of the aspects of decent, native, female behavior that Babamukuru forces on her. By refusing food, she assures that he cannot have control over at least *one* of the things that in some way represents obedience, gratitude, self-effacement.

After Tambu leaves for Sacred Heart, Nyasha writes her all the time and includes one especially serious letter about how she cannot get along or fit in with the girls at school and how she is trying to be less antagonistic to Babamukuru. She says that Tambu “is essential to [her] in bridging some of the gaps in [her] life” (196). Since she is not fully Zimbabwean, but also not fully English, she feels out of place and unable to communicate with the other girls at school. Tambu does not answer this letter because she is too distracted with school, and Nyasha’s next letter is back to being happy except that she announces “that she had embarked on a diet ‘to discipline the body and occupy the mind’” (197). Thus, one could argue that the serious onset of her disorder—by the

time Tambu gets home she is very thin—might have been avoided had she been offered the same kind of female solidarity from Tambu that Lucia gave to her mother. By extension, Tambu's desire for education and the resulting separation have caused her to fail Nyasha in a way that Lucia did not fail her mother. I am hesitant to *blame* Tambu for Nyasha's disorder, but there seems to be something significant about the fact that Tambu does not answer the one letter from Nyasha that is an obvious cry for help. As Pauline Ada Uwakweh contends, "In Nyasha's plight, . . . Dangarembga seems to project this social implication: that the female quest for awareness, and resistance to traditional female subordination, cannot be sustained if it lacks the necessary support base" (82). Without Tambu at the mission, Nyasha's condition continues to plummet.

When Tambu returns to the mission on break, she realizes at the first meal they share together that Nyasha's slenderness does not result from a diet; rather, it results from a full-blown eating disorder that gets played out in a "horribly weird and sinister drama" (198) every time the family eats together. Babamukuru forces Nyasha to eat, and she does so in the form of a binge, "shove[ling] the food into her mouth, swallowing without chewing and without pause When Nyasha's plate [is] empty they both [relax] and the atmosphere [returns] to normal" (198). Babamukuru knows that Nyasha is getting thinner by the day; he also knows that she is starving herself. He seems worried about her—even to the point that he lets Tambu stay with her for a few extra days instead of going to the homestead right away—but he is not concerned enough to help her because he thinks *he* has the situation under control since "she does eat her supper when [he] has time to supervise her properly It is not so serious. What she needs is rest" (199).

Despite all of Nyasha's protests and her self-destructive behavior, Babamukuru is still unwilling to relinquish his control and to admit that Nyasha has a serious problem.

Later that night, Nyasha gives voice to the source of all of the anxiety at the root of her eating disorder when she tells Tambu

'They've done it to me,' she accused, whispering still. 'Really, they have.' And then she became stern. 'It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did,' she whispered. 'To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good.' Her voice took on a Rhodesian accent. 'He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir,' she informed in sneering sarcastic tones. Then she was whispering again. 'Why do they do it, Tambu,' she hissed bitterly, her face contorting with rage, 'to me and you and to him? Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. . . . She rampaged shredding her history book between her teeth 'Their history Their bloody lies They've trapped us. They've trapped us. But I won't be trapped Look what they've done to us. . . . I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you' (200-201).

Though presented as a kind of hysterical fit, Nyasha's speech fully articulates the "nervous condition" of colonization that affects her entire family—that of abject separation. Moreover, as Derek Wright contends, "Nyasha's shredding of the history books with her teeth is, at the same time, a parodic reenactment of the colonial subjects' hungry devouring of imperial knowledge, eagerly swallowing its falsehoods, and an actual act of demolition which tries to reverse the existing pattern of cultural consumption" (16). Nyasha thus recognizes that her whole family has been subject to colonial indoctrination through their education, which has alienated them from her traditional culture while still withholding full acceptance into its own.

After this incident, Babamukuru concedes to taking Nyasha to a doctor, but she once again faces colonial oppression when the white doctor refuses to validate her condition by saying that Africans could not suffer from such an illness and that Nyasha is

simply making a scene.⁴⁷ Nyasha's full understanding of her disorder as a conflict with colonial indoctrination illustrates that her bulimia is in fact not the Western disease that the doctor believes she describes but, rather, a dis-ease caused by the kind of thinking that permits him to dismiss her as yet another African who needs white guidance and control to overcome her condition as aberrant native.

Despite this encounter, Nyasha does get help and is sent to a hospital where "slowly, with the aid of doses of Largactil and the practical attention of her aunts who lived in the city, [her] condition improve[s]" (201-202). Again, female solidarity and a connection to family are what help to begin the process of recovery. Though she has begun to recover, Nyasha's fate still hangs in the balance at the end of the novel, as does Tambu's. Tambu is confused by all that has happened and cannot understand how someone so privileged could suffer so much. Though she does not understand what has happened, her mother offers a very definite explanation when she tells Tambu that "It's the Englishness It will kill them all if they aren't careful" (202). These words scare Tambu, and she wonders if she has been careful enough, but she also says that she "banished the suspicion"; however, she acknowledges as well that she "was young then and able to banish things, but seeds do grow Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story" (203-204). At the

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Heidi Creamer contends that the psychiatrist's dismissal of Nyasha's condition as something Africans cannot have "suggests that African women might not have psyches at all" (357).

novel's end, hers is only the beginning of consciousness, much like the political consciousness in Rhodesia at this time.

The book, and Tambu's struggle, follows the history of Zimbabwean independence that began with a fight for equal education.⁴⁸ Colonial policies forced Western education but failed to foresee that this education would not come without suspicion, questioning, and, eventually, rebellion. These stirrings of rebellion eventually led to independence, but at the book's end, this has not yet taken place. Thus, like Tambu's unfinished story, the story of Zimbabwe as an independent country also remains unfulfilled. However, Tambu asserts again at the end that she tells her own story, and, according to some critics, "by narrating her story, she is writing women's problematics into Rhodesian history" (Torti, Kilb, and Stein). Her narrative thus serves as a written record of the history she received as oral tradition from her grandmother as well as an important revisionist account of who she and her people are, uninfluenced by the brainwashing of the lies of English history. Hers and her family's story is the story of how they began and how the Rhodesian people began (again) to be their own people after colonization.

The Empowered Body: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Myriam Chancy notes in her book *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* that on the heels of Haiti's hard-won independence "followed imperial colonization in the early 1800's and the concomitant inescapable and harsh realities that continuous neocolonial subjugation bring into being: poverty, hunger, illiteracy" (106). Sophie Caco's coming-of-age narrative in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

⁴⁸ See the introduction for a fuller explanation of this history.

charts the difficulties, especially for poor, uneducated women, of forming a self-determined identity in the face of the harsh realities of a colonial and patriarchal history. In this way, Chancy writes, “the physical text becomes the manifestation of the social forces at work in Haiti over the span of three generations of Haitian women” (Chancy 120). As Sophie struggles for some kind of control in her life, she learns that these harsh realities are often passed from one generation to the next in very painful ways. The effects of patriarchy and colonialism leave their imprint on Martine, Sophie's mother, through the psychological damage of a brutal rape, which results in Sophie's birth. Martine passes this psychological damage on to Sophie who, from the age of twelve, is forced to live a life haunted by her mother's nightmares and the reality of her conception.

For instance, as a result of her rape, Martine becomes obsessed with protecting Sophie's sexuality. This obsession causes her to continue the cycle of her abuse by her “testing” Sophie when she turns eighteen and starts dating Joseph. Sophie responds to this control of her body by seeking to assert her own self-determined identity. She does this by violently taking her own virginity with a pestle. This assertion of control over her own body also acts as the catalyst for the onset of Sophie's eating disorder, which affords her continued control over her body after she has left her mother's house and married Joseph. While both acts are self-destructive, they are also psychologically empowering. By deciding what will and will not enter her body, Sophie asserts her own authority over her sexuality and her material self. Ultimately, however, this kind of control is a limited solution to self-identification. Sophie comes to realize that her mother, grandmother, and aunt are also products of a patriarchal and colonial ideology which centers on the female body. As Heather Hewett notes, “in this novel, the body is symptomatic of the struggles

of history and of culture, manifesting disease both internally . . . and externally” (306).⁴⁹

With an understanding of the cultural ideology at work in the lives of women in her family, Sophie is able to confront her mother’s ghosts, to find solidarity with the women of her family, and to celebrate the strength she shares with all of Haiti’s daughters. As such, Sophie’s quest for identity is more successful than Nyasha’s, but it is also incomplete, since a solution to Sophie’s eating disorder and her future with Joseph are still left unresolved at the end of the novel.

Sophie does not develop bulimia until she has lived in the United States for almost seven years, and when she tells Martine about it, Martine does not understand it. Like the white doctors in *Nervous Conditions* who refuse to accept Nyasha’s condition, Martine also dismisses Sophie’s problem as an “American” problem. Additionally, like Tambu, Martine is unable to understand how anyone can have such a disorder when food was so scarce for her in Haiti. She tells Sophie that she has “never heard of a Haitian woman getting anything like that. Food, it was so rare when we were growing up. We could not waste it You have become very American” (179). However, when Martine tells Sophie about her own struggles with food when she first came to America she says, “food was a struggle. To have so much to eat and not eat it all . . . [;] [w]hen I first came, I used to eat the way we ate at home. I ate for tomorrow and the next day and the next couple of days. I ate reserves. I would wake up and find the food still there and

⁴⁹ Hewett continues with this line of argument noting that “for the first two generations of women living in Haiti, dis-ease manifests itself as bodily sickness and growth. Sophie’s Aunt has a lump in her calf . . . and her grandmother . . . also suffers from physical ailments [a pineapple sized lump] that seem to be echoed in Martine’s illness, her breast cancer” (307). Hewett concedes that these ailments might be seen as the effects of poverty. “Yet,” she goes on to say, “these physical ailments also suggest another layer of cultural dis-ease. They are also the markings of womanhood in a society that circumscribes and regulates female value and sexuality” (307). These bodily ailments also recall the illnesses discussed in chapter one, which result from corrupt social forces as well.

I would still eat ahead anyway” (179-180). Though she does not purge the way Sophie does, her eating also stems from a need for control since she wants to ensure that her body will not go hungry.

Martine also tells Sophie that she gained sixty pounds but lost it when she got cancer, which suggests a corruption suffered in internalizing Western ideas about race the way that Martine has since coming to America. In fact, Martine’s own struggles with food suggest a much more Westernized response in terms of Bordo’s analysis than do Sophie’s. For instance, at one point she tells Sophie that she is a “fat woman who is trying to be thin” (189), which indicates that she seeks a particular kind of controlled, disciplined body like the women in Bordo’s analysis. Thus, it is actually Martine who has become very American. In contrast, Sophie’s assertion of desire for bodily control through food surfaces while she is still living in Haiti with Atie and only when she faces the prospect of living in America. M. M. Adjarian asserts that Danticat’s text “could be read as an [allegory] of national occupation wherein the white (North American) colonizer is the implicit cause of deep and damaging internal conflict as well as of cultural disruption and community fragmentation” (99). Sophie’s separation from Haiti and her traditional culture as well as her resulting loss of identity while in America bears out this principle.

Until the age of twelve, Sophie lives with her Tante Atie who agreed to raise her when Martine left to go to America to escape the memories of her rape in Haiti. Atie exemplifies for Sophie what it means to be a strong independent woman. She raises Sophie by herself without the help of a man or of her mother. Though she stubbornly refuses to learn her letters from the children at Sophie’s school, Atie encourages Sophie

to take her education seriously so that she may have some control over her life—a luxury Atie and Martine were never afforded because of their poverty. Atie tells Sophie, “‘your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body.’ She pounded her fist over her chest and stomach. ‘When my father died, my mother had to dig a hole and just drop him in it. We are a family with dirt under our fingernails’”(20). As Heather Hewett notes, “The female body, then, is a site of struggle for control between generations” (308). It is also the site of struggle for control against patriarchy and a colonial history that defines relationships between those generations.

Atie’s concern for Sophie is not only that she acquire a good education but also that she have a strong sense of who she is and where she comes from. She tells Sophie the origins of the community potluck dinners and about her own childhood working in the cane fields. Atie also takes care to build up Sophie’s image of herself when she tells her that she has no father because she “‘was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of the sky’” (47). In contrast, Sophie’s absent mother seems unreal to her because she can only imagine her in the photograph by the bed where “‘She witnessed everything that went on in the bougainvillea, each step, each stumble, each hug and kiss. She saw us when we got upset at each other. Her expression never changed. Her grin never went away’” (8). Not only is her mother a smiling but essentially unemotional observer, Sophie also inherently mistrusts Martine. This is revealed in Sophie’s dreams of her mother as a controlling figure who “‘would chase me through a field of wildflowers as tall as the sky. When she caught me, she would try to squeeze me into a small frame so I could be in the picture with her. I would scream and scream until my voice gave out,

then Tante Atie would come and save me from her grasp” (8). In Sophie’s mind Atie is not only real, but she is also her rescuer and the only one who truly loves her.

Because of Martine’s lack of emotion, her absence, and her desire for control that Sophie fears from her dreams, Martine comes to represent a kind of symbolic patriarchy. Martine also values Sophie’s education, but in a very different way than Atie does. Martine, while not completely cutting Sophie off from her Haitian culture, associates Haiti with her rape and therefore does not preserve a positive image of it for Sophie. Instead, Martine internalizes racist American ideas about Haitians. She seeks to control her racialized body by buying “some face cream that promised to make her skin lighter” (51), which, as Heather Hewett notes, is a way to make “the past disappear by creating a new body” (309). Martine seeks to distance herself further from her Haitian heritage when she attempts to remove the markers of poverty such as a lack of education in her speech (223), a heritage of lack that she does not want Sophie to have to experience. Instead, Martine wants Sophie to get a good education so that she can, as Martine puts it, “raise our heads” (44). Martine explains to Sophie that in order to earn that kind of respect, she must learn English as quickly as possible so that she will not be associated with the American stereotypes of Haitians as having body odor and AIDS. In this way, Sophie is associated with a communal body that also gets regulated and controlled by prejudice. Because of her self-hatred, Martine exhibits not only a patriarchal authority but a kind of neo-colonial authority as well, which ultimately causes Sophie to internalize Martine’s self-hatred and lose all sense of who she is or what she wants to be.

Interestingly, the quintessential symbol of colonialism, the (imported) daffodil, is most closely associated with Martine, who favors the flower precisely because of its

power to adapt (21). Martine, who becomes like a daffodil in her own assimilation into American life, also seeks to transplant Sophie when she sends for Sophie to live in America with her. Thus, Martine becomes a stand-in for neocolonial and patriarchal authority. Not surprisingly, the move to America serves to alter Sophie's relationship to Haiti. As Jana Evan Braziel argues, "like migratory or diasporic subjects, daffodils take root in new soil, but the flowers, the roots, the soil, like the people are altered in the process" (113). Like Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, Sophie's migration to America for a better education is, in Myriam Chancy's words, "connected to a life of exile," and only "the language of the ancestors, which grows increasingly difficult to access, is the key to each woman's freedom" (121). Sophie's return to Haiti and her matrilineal heritage later in the novel will serve as the beginning of her search for that language.

Despite her limited control over her fate, Sophie's response to being told that she will have to leave Haiti is to refuse food. As Myriam Chancy notes, "only later do we learn that her inability to eat the bowl of food is symptomatic of what will become a cycle of bodily abuse" (122). While this is a precursor to Sophie's bulimia, it is also an assertion of her control over herself in a situation wherein she feels helpless, a situation which is signaled by the arrival of the ticket to take her to America. Thus, her refusal to eat could be seen as the first assertion of her right to control her own body and her own fate.

This need for control continues over the week that follows the night of the potluck and Sophie's departure for America. Sophie eats the following morning only because she prefers that to having to talk to Atie about what she has learned the night before. She

says, "I did not feel like eating, but if I did not eat, we would have had to sit and stare at one another, and sooner or later, one of us would have had to say something. I picked up the spoon and began to eat" (18). In this instance, eating becomes a way for Sophie to control the situation. On the day Sophie leaves Haiti, Atie makes her breakfast and tries to convince Sophie that she will be happy with her mother in America. Sophie again refuses to eat and, thus, to acknowledge that Atie may be right that it is best for her to leave. By not taking in her food, Sophie also refuses to take in the idea that she will enjoy leaving behind the only life she has ever known. The first five chapters, then, set the stage for Sophie to think of Atie and Haiti in terms of belonging and connection, while she thinks of her mother as someone with whom she will have to match wills. This desire for control is manifest by the fact that Sophie refuses to eat on the three occasions in Haiti in which her coming separation from Atie is foregrounded.

As in Tambu's case in *Nervous Conditions*, this separation is necessary for her getting a better education as well as for the revolutionary potential in that education. On the way to the airport, Atie and Sophie witness students protesting the Duvalier regime and his brutal practices, which emphasizes the revolutionary and important potential of education. However, since Sophie witnesses these protesters only when she is leaving, they also underscore for her the dangers inherent in separation from the land and her mother figure. Unlike Tambu, though, Sophie resists this separation and American culture.

When Sophie arrives in the States and is taken to dinner by Martine and her boyfriend, Marc, she immediately rejects American culture as well as Marc and Martine's claims to her body. Marc takes them to a Haitian restaurant, and while they are there, he

gets into an argument with a Haitian woman when he says that “all the brains leave” Haiti (54). The woman stands up for herself and her sister who is still there when she tells Marc that “she [is] tired of cowardly men speaking against women who were proving themselves, women as brave as stars out at dawn” (55). With his ego bruised, Marc tries to assert control over Sophie by discussing her educational future with Martine. He also asserts a claim to her body when he tells her that “food is luxury . . . but we can not allow ourselves to become gluttons or get fat” (55). In previous confrontations over her fate, Sophie has demonstrated her desire for control by rejecting food. However, being told that she should not eat too much prompts Sophie to eat “like I had been on a hunger strike, filling myself with the coconut milk they served us I tried to stuff myself and keep quiet pretending that I couldn’t even see them” (56). By stuffing herself with Haitian food, Sophie symbolically rejects Western values about body image (that she must not get fat) as well as the patriarchal control Marc and Martine seek to assert over her body and her future. When she first comes to America, Sophie retains all of her independence and self-determination about her body through her control of food.

However, she cannot reject the psychological damage of Martine’s rape that she passes on to Sophie as self-hatred about being female and about being Haitian. Early in their relationship, Martine questions Sophie about her experiences with boys and asks if she has been a “good girl.” By this Sophie understands her to mean “If I had ever been touched, if I had ever held hands, or kissed a boy” (60). Martine tells Sophie that it is her right as a mother to ask and tells her about how her own mother used to “test” her and Atie when “She would put her finger in our very private parts to see if it would go inside” (60). The trauma of being tested was replaced for Martine with the greater trauma of

being raped. Further, Martine implicates Sophie as a source of her pain when she tells her “A man grabbed me from the side of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body I did not know this man. I never saw his face. He had it covered when he did this to me. But now when I look at your face I think it is true what they say. A child out of wedlock always looks like its father” (61). Martine’s callous way of replacing Atie’s story about Sophie’s birth causes Sophie to internalize Martine’s trauma as her own and eventually to turn on her own body.

In this novel, as in *Nervous Conditions*, Sophie is taught that good girls do exactly as they are told in order to maintain respectability—most notably in terms of the body. By the time part two of the novels opens when Sophie is eighteen, the two concerns of her life are the same two concerns that Martine has enforced and almost hysterically guarded since her arrival in America. These are her education and her sexual purity. Martine not only teaches Sophie to guard her sexual purity, she also tries physically to protect her. Sophie says, “When she came home during the day and saw him [Joseph, their neighbor] sitting on his porch steps next door, she would nod a quick hello and walk faster. She wrapped her arms tighter around me, as though to rescue me from his stare” (68). Unfortunately, this is not as far as Martine’s physical protection of her daughter’s body will go.

Though he is old enough to be her father, Joseph interests Sophie because of his maturity and understanding and because he represents a connection for her to her past. He tells her that they speak a similar Creole since he is from Louisiana, and he highlights their shared African heritage rather than the differences that embarrass Sophie like her

Haitian accent, which she has struggled to hide.⁵⁰ Joseph's assertion that they are connected suggests an acceptance of productive hybridity since it celebrates syncretism as well as the homogenous aspects of their cultures. This sense of connection appeals to Sophie who, though damaged by Martine's psychological abuse, still tries to think of her life through the lens of lessons she learned from Tante Atie in Haiti.⁵¹

Of falling in love she says, "Tante Atie once said that love is like rain. It comes in a drizzle sometimes. Then it starts pouring and if you're not careful it will drown you. I was eighteen when I fell in love" (67). In Joseph, Sophie finds someone who respects her on her own terms and who considers her a *woman*. When she listens to him playing his keyboard, she feels "the notes and scales were like raindrops, teardrops, torrents. I felt the music rise and surge, tightening every muscle in my body. Then I relaxed, letting it go, feeling a rush that I knew I wasn't supposed to feel" (76). Though the sound of Joseph's music recalls for Sophie Atie's words about falling in love being like rain, the corresponding physical sensation causes her to feel ashamed, recalling Martine's attitudes about sexuality. Martine further enforces this shame by implicitly calling her a whore when she begins "testing" Sophie after she has been out late one night with Joseph.⁵²

While Martine is testing Sophie, she tells her the story of the *Marassas* who

⁵⁰ Sophie's embarrassment over her accent suggests that in her separation from Haiti through Martine and education, she has learned to internalize some level of self-hatred as well.

⁵¹ This is evident after she marries Joseph as well since Sophie spends time and shares her story only with other formerly colonized people. Her doctor is Indian, her counselor has been ordained as a Sontoras in the Dominican Republic, and the other girls in her therapy group are from places like Ethiopia. These women embrace their diversity, but the make-up of the therapy group suggests that they also share a kind of Diaspora consciousness that seeks solidarity with other formerly colonized women. Despite the comfort Sophie finds in her sexual therapy group, the third section of the book suggests that the only way for her to have truly productive connection and female solidarity is to return to Haiti.

⁵² This is almost exactly the same reaction Babamukuru has after Nyasha has been out late and has asserted her independence. As a man, he does not have this kind of access to Nyasha's body, but he does physically abuse her.

were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two . . . [;] when you love someone, you want him to be closer to you than your Marassa. Closer than your shadow. You want him to be your soul. The more you are alike, the easier this becomes. When you look in a stream, if you saw that man's face, wouldn't you think it was a water spirit? Wouldn't you scream? Wouldn't you think he was hiding under a sheet of water or behind a pane of glass to kill you? The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man who you didn't know the year before. You and I we could be like *Marassas*. You are giving up a lifetime with me. Do you understand? (85).

The testing serves as another way for Martine once again to assert a patriarchal and colonial control over Sophie's body. M. M. Adjarian says of this scene that "Martine assumes an almost masculine position when she suggests to Sophie that sexual purity will allow mother and daughter to become like *Marassas*, whom she characterizes not as twins, but as inseparable lovers" (84). Martine's position is not only masculine; it is also that of a conqueror. Heather Hewett's analysis of this scene illustrates that "the hymen is like a national boundary protecting virgin land: the internal, corporeal border of the hymen guards a woman's private, internal body from the outer world . . . [;] [thus, testing] becomes the mother's colonization of the daughter's body" (313). Martine seeks complete control of Sophie, which requires her to be completely dependent on Martine and not to exercise her own sexual agency. Despite her masculine and colonial position during these tests, Martine, unlike Babamukuru, inherently understands her guilt in perpetuating this kind of abuse. Her shame, which is evidenced by her "walk[ing] out of the room with her face buried in her hands" (85) and by the breakdown in communication that follows, indicates that there may be a chance for reconciliation between them, though it will not happen until many years later.

When Sophie decides to make the testing stop by taking her virginity with her mother's pestle, she tells herself the story of "a woman who walked around with blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin. This went on for twelve long years . . . [;] finally, the woman got tired and said she was going to see Erzulie to ask her what to do" (87). Erzulie tells her that the only way to stop the bleeding is to give up her right to be a human being. The woman chooses to be a butterfly: "The woman was transformed and never bled again" (88). Significantly, in this story, the woman bleeds even though her skin is unbroken. Sophie who is also still a virgin and therefore "unbroken" suffers the affliction of her mother's tests. The woman in the story is willing to give up her life/shape to be free, and Sophie is willing to give up the life she has known until now to be free from her mother. By taking her virginity, Sophie enacts her own butterfly-like metamorphosis into becoming a self-determined woman free from her mother's abuse. In fact, Sophie describes what she does as "like breaking manacles, an act of freedom" (130).⁵³ While this act does serve as Sophie's way out from under her mother's control—Martine kicks her out of the house—there are consequences. Sophie has damaged her body so badly that she is unable to enjoy sex with Joseph, who marries her the night she leaves home. Sophie's psychological barrier to sex as well as the painful nature of it after she is married causes her to develop bulimia as yet another way to exert control over her body. Thus, Sophie's desire for a self-determined identity is still impeded.

Though Joseph helps Sophie break free from her mother and the oppressive control she exerts over her, he also functions as a patriarchal figure in her life. She feels an obligation to him in their marriage to have sex with him in order to fulfill her duties as

⁵³ The wording here links Sophie's act with colonial politics as well.

a “good” wife, despite how painful both physically and psychologically it is for her.⁵⁴ She recalls this sense of obligation while watching Eliab (a small boy living with her grandmother) flying a kite. She describes how Eliab tries “to maintain his balance and keep his kite in the air” (130) in the midst of other kites with razors and glass in their strings trying to cut his. She says that he “slowly released his thread, allowing his kite to venture closer to the clouds” when another kite “swoop[s] down like a vulture” and cut his down (130). Eliab’s kite serves as a perfect metaphor for Sophie’s own quest for freedom amidst the “razors” of limitations and expectations she feels as Martine’s daughter and Joseph’s wife. The image of the kite descending helplessly portends the sense of desperation Sophie will feel about her marriage—the desperation that sends her to Haiti to seek guidance from her grandmother, Ife, and her aunt, Atie.

The text posits that reconnection to her place of birth and the female solidarity Sophie finds with Ife and Atie are the only way she can heal, and this healing begins through language. When complimented by a bus driver on how well she has retained her knowledge of Creole since most people who leave forget, Sophie tells him that she “need[s] to remember” (95). Thus, she begins to reclaim her Haitian identity and accent which previously embarrassed her. She also observes an important ritual of liberation and female solidarity/concern between the “female street vendors [who] called to one another as they came down the road. When one merchant dropped her heavy basket, another called out of concern, ‘Ou libere?’ Are you free from your heavy load? The

⁵⁴ On their first night together, Sophie gets pregnant, which moment Heather Hewett understands to be the beginning of her eating disorder because Sophie seeks to escape her sexualized, maternal body.

woman with the load would answer yes, if she had unloaded her freight without hurting herself” (96). Sophie seeks this kind of solidarity and freedom with Ife and Atie.

Brigitte, Sophie’s child, looks like Martine’s child according to Atie, and Ife says of her, “the tree has not split one mite. Isn’t it a miracle that we can visit with all our kin simply by looking into this face” (105). Positing Brigitte as the bearer of the family tree invokes the idea of a female identified lineage, which notion Sophie supports when she says that Brigitte is a Caco woman, thereby denying Joseph’s name. Sophie also wants to give Brigitte the fond memories and Haitian culture of storytelling that Atie gave her so that she will form her identity through folk stories and female-authored tales rather than through the official education to which Ife objects.

Ife’s opposition to education and the “Englishness” attendant to it suggests that she, like Tambu’s mother, recognizes education as a kind of separation and alienation of people from their folk ways and traditions. For instance, she refuses to listen to Sophie and Martine speak English (which they automatically revert to when they are with each other) because she says that it sounds like clanking. That this “Englishness” also serves as the root of Sophie’s problems becomes clear in this visit. Though Sophie complains about her body in Haiti, Martine’s and Joseph’s absence makes it possible for her to eat all of her meals, which are comprised solely of Haitian food. Moreover, she has no bulimic episodes during her stay.

Though she does not feel the compulsion to binge and purge in Haiti, she makes a direct connection to her bulimia and the sexual abuse by her mother when she says that she thinks sex is evil (123) and that the testing was a “humiliation” that made her “hate [her] body. [She is] ashamed to show it to anybody, including [her] husband” (123).

Like Nyasha's joke that she would have to promise not to enjoy her wedding night, Sophie experiences a kind of shame that is brought on through control. She has been accused of being overly sexual and then taught to internalize the feelings of disgust at her sexuality that eventually manifest in hatred for the body and self-destructive behavior. In response to Sophie's confession, Ife tells the story of the girl and the lark.

In this story, a girl is lured away from her home by a lark who promises to give her pomegranates. However, he tells her she cannot go with him without her heart. She goes back to her village to get it, but she never returns. As Nancy Gerber suggests, "This story, like the larger narrative which frames it, encodes the conflict between female autonomy and filial obligation and thematizes the . . . narrowness of choices for women" (191). This storytelling also suggests Ife's concern that Sophie always leaves her heart in Haiti. Though she can leave just as the girl was willing to do, her heart should stay behind regardless of enticements to do otherwise. As such, Ife's story can be seen as a caution about Sophie's position as a woman but also as counsel for how to negotiate her exile to America. Significantly, what lures the girl to the bird are empty promises and token items, which seems similar to what happens between Sophie and Martine. Martine is supposed to be rich because she sends back money for her family, but when Sophie arrives in America, Martine is revealed as obviously poor and her body looks as if she has never left the cane fields. Martine carries her past with her in the same way that Sophie must, and each must find a way to come to terms with it.

Other stories that Ife tells Sophie during her visit reveal the kind of patriarchal ideology that governs the lives of women, especially poor women. Ife tells Sophie that when boys are born, a lantern is put outside and that if there is a man he will stay awake

all night with the new child. But, when girls are born, no lights are lit and the mother is left alone in the darkness to hold her child (146). Tante Atie also tells her that girls are raised to understand their purpose by their ten fingers: “Mothering, Boiling, Loving, Baking, Nursing, Frying, Healing, Washing, Ironing, Scrubbing.” She goes on to say that “her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born. Sometimes she even wished she had six fingers on each hand so she could have two left for herself” (151). Though Atie cannot help her situation, she, like Sophie, longs to have some control over her own body.

Ife’s account of the legend of a rich man who married a poor girl for her purity suggests that this self-control is virtually impossible. When the rich man’s bride failed to bleed on their wedding night, he cut her “between her legs to get some blood to show.” The girl bled to death, and “at the grave site, her husband drank his blood-spotted goat milk and cried like a child” (155). Ife tells Sophie this story as a way to justify why mothers test their daughters when she says, “From the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me” (156). The story and the testing reveal how deeply entrenched patriarchal/Victorian ideals about female sexuality are in this society and why the women go to such lengths to ensure that their daughters are pure—because otherwise her husband can return her and bring shame on the whole family. Again, the female body becomes the site wherein family respectability lies since a woman is not only responsible for herself but also for the rest of the family. This kind of oppression requires women to abuse other women the way that Ife and Martine abuse their own daughters.

Sophie, in turn, tells her grandmother how much damage the tests have done to her, and Ife tries to make amends when she gives Sophie a statue of Erzulie and tells her, “my heart, it weeps like a river . . . for the pain we have caused you” (157). Ife shares responsibility because she has also tried to control her daughters through testing. The story of a girl wanting to marry a star but then finding that she has married a monster (164) recalls Martine’s image of a man who “is hiding under a sheet of water or behind a pane of glass to kill you” (38). After her reconciliation with Sophie, Ife calls Martine to come and take Sophie back home so that they can also resolve their problems. While Martine is in Haiti, Sophie overhears a conversation between Martine and Atie in which Martine says, “We come from a place . . . where in one instant, you can lose your father and all your other dreams” (165). This revelation of how little control Martine has had in her own life is combined with Martine’s apology to Sophie for testing her when she says, “I did it . . . because my mother had done it to me. I have no greater excuse. I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related. The one good thing about being raped was that it made the testing stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day” (170). This acknowledgement causes Sophie to realize how her mother’s abuse was in a way continuing a cycle of abuse that had been passed on to her. Having her mother and grandmother apologize to her for their part in her pain allows Sophie to begin to heal, a process that begins with the absence of her bulimic symptoms discussed earlier.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Sophie’s visit to Haiti changes her perceptions of what she calls home since she refers to Haiti as home when she goes back to Joseph in America. Joseph notes that she has “never called it that since [they] have been together. Home has always been [her] mother’s house, that [she] could never go back to” (195). This redefinition of home seems to suggest the beginning of healing in the company of women and traditional values.

Though Martine's visit does bring about some reconciliation between herself and Sophie, she still holds to colonial values that Sophie has come to Haiti to escape. Sophie remarks that her "skin was unusually light, a pale mocha, three or four shades lighter than any of ours." When Ife comments on this, Martine is embarrassed and blames it on the cold which "turns us into ghosts" (160). Martine's capitulation to Western ideals of beauty suggests a double meaning in this statement in that she has also become a kind of ghost to her "true" (dark) self.

At the same time that some reconciliation occurs, Martine continues to refuse to understand Sophie's bulimia and tries again to assert her control over Sophie's body when she tells her that "We'll have no more of that bulimia. I'll cure it with some good food" (182). The fact that Martine cooks spaghetti for Sophie along with Martine's assertion that she could not eat Haitian food when Sophie left draws a further connection between how food works for both of them as a way to control their emotions and their pain by controlling what food they eat (183). Though Martine still wants control over her body, her claim to that control is limited since she has to tell Sophie that she is pregnant with Marc's child. Martine, in fact, wants an abortion because the pregnancy is making her nightmares about her rape more intense. Martine tells Sophie that she sees the baby in her dreams and that he talks to her and calls her a whore. All of Martine's internalized self-hatred about her body and her sexuality are thus manifest in her hallucinations about her baby, and when Sophie convinces her to have the baby, she asks for her help.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Despite Sophie's best efforts to help her mother, however, Martine cannot bear the psychological trauma of her rape that her pregnancy brings to the fore. In an effort to kill her child, whom she believes is the spirit of her rapist now haunting her, she stabs herself in the stomach and kills herself.

Sophie's return to America and Joseph after reestablishing her relationship with Martine triggers all of Sophie's problems with sexuality, her body image, and her need for control. She doubles⁵⁷ during sex with Joseph, which she sees as a kind of rape, thereby also reconnecting her to Martine's trauma. Sophie's doubling is also not that far from what she sees in her mother—"it was like two people. Someone who was trying to hold things together and someone who was falling apart" (218). As Heather Hewett notes, "While Sophie's doubling allows her to escape her own body, it also leads to repeating the terrible experiences of her mother's body . . . [;] history repeats itself on the bodies of impoverished Haitian women, whether in the cane fields, in their homes, or migration" (319). After this, Sophie feels ashamed and binges and purges for the first time since Haiti. Significantly, what incites her bulimic behavior is American food along with Joseph forcing himself on her. Though she feels powerless to control whether or not she has sex, she can control the food she consumes and then rejects.

Martine's death and the following trip to Haiti afford her another opportunity to confront both her mother's demons as well as her own. Despite the problematic history they share, Sophie feels exceptionally out of control when her mother dies (225), and so she seeks to give herself and her mother another kind of control when she picks out her burial clothes so as to make her like Erzulie who overcomes the power of men on her body (227). M. M. Adjarian also notes,

rather than prepare her mother for an afterlife in a Euro-Christian heaven, Sophie prepares Martine for an afterlife in Guinea, which according to *vodou* tradition, is the (African) land of departed ancestors . . . Sophie thus helps Martine overcome the gender disempowerment [to which she has been] . . . subjected . . . Red, and

⁵⁷ A psychological coping mechanism wherein she can separate herself from her body and imagine she is somewhere else during moments of physical trauma.

by extension the *vodou* love-goddess herself [Erzulie], thereby become synonymous with a freedom that Martine, as a black female from the lower classes, could never fully experience in either Haitian *or* North American societies. (90)

Empowering her mother through the image of Erzulie brings about yet another connection to Haiti. When she returns for the funeral, Sophie not only feels at home but is also treated accordingly since “People [greet] me with waves and smiles on the way to my grandmother’s house. It was as though I had lived there all my life” (229).⁵⁸

At Martine’s wake, they sing a song that makes Sophie realize that she is also a daughter of this land, as is her own daughter, whom she deliberately includes in all the rituals. From this song, Sophie concludes that “it was neither my mother nor my Tante Atie who had given all the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories they told and all the songs they sang. It was something that was essentially Haitian. Somewhere, early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of this land” (230). Recognizing this deep tie with her mother prompts Sophie finally to “confront” the place where her mother was raped.

Watching Sophie pound the ground in the cane field where so much of her and her mother’s pain began, Ife asks Sophie the question that the street vendors ask: “‘Ou libere?’ Are you free from your heavy load? The woman with the load would answer yes, if she had unloaded her freight *without hurting herself*” (96 emphases added). Ife says that now Sophie will know how to answer. This symbolic act of exorcising her mother’s ghosts on her behalf suggests that Sophie can also be liberated from her own ghosts and can therefore answer yes.

⁵⁸ Clare also experiences this feeling of belonging in *No Telephone to Heaven* when she finally returns to Jamaica and, like Sophie, is greeted by the local people as if she had never left.

By finding solidarity with her mother and the other matriarchs of her family, Sophie is able to forgive them for what she was made to suffer and to realize that they were all strong and brave for being able to live in a world in which they were accorded limited control. Sophie is at last able to celebrate her mother's strength and bravery. She realizes that what Atie told her as a child about why her mother loved daffodils—"because they grew in a place that they were not supposed to. They were really European flowers, French buds and stems, meant for colder climates A strain of daffodils had grown that could withstand the heat, but they were the color of pumpkins and golden summer squash, as though they had acquired a bronze tinge from the skin of the natives who had adopted them" (21)—speaks to the strength of the women in her own family to survive and adapt under a history littered with colonial and patriarchal violence, not because these experiences irreparably changed them but because they, too, had taken strength from the land where they lived. Like the *cacos* before them, who Nancy Gerber notes "were slaves who resisted the French during Haiti's struggle for independence" (191), these women are strong and have resisted the forces which continue to oppress them. In this way Sophie's poem celebrating her mother as a daffodil—"My mother is a daffodil, limber and strong as one. My mother is a daffodil, but in the wind, iron strong" (29)—becomes a celebration not only of Atie, for whom it was originally written, but of Martine, Ife, and Sophie as well.

Sophie realizes, then, through connection to her homeland and the women of her family that she can celebrate their strength and the strength of the women in that history who are as "brave as the stars at dawn" (234). However, Sophie and her daughter will also carry their history "like the hair on [their] head" (234). Hers is, that is, still not a

complete victory or self-willed resolution. Though she has unloaded her freight, she has not done so without hurting herself. Like Nyasha and Tambu, unloading the heavy burden of colonialism and patriarchy exacts a high price from those who seek to do so. At the conclusion, for instance, Sophie's daughter and husband still live in America, where most of her psychological problems with body image and control are centered.⁵⁹

Though Sophie's struggle is not completely successful, she does manage to give voice to her own story and that of the Caco women. As M. M. Adjarian contends, "Seen allegorically, the signifier *caco* points to an anterior historical referent . . . Sophie's story is therefore implicitly figured as one outcome of the Caco repression. That Danticat affiliates the term with a (narrating) woman further suggests the foregrounding of a previously suppressed female element within the peasant community to which the Caco (male) rebels were tied" (96). Like Tambu, Sophie draws from a female, oral tradition to write a revisionist account of her own history, which includes the history of her country. And it is through and within her own body that Sophie experiences, rebels against, and eventually reconciles with this history.

⁵⁹ The caution to the hope that the final pages provide is once again presented through the image of a balloon. Just before she returns to Haiti on the trip during which she confronts the spot of her mother's rape, Sophie finds a balloon that one of the women in her support group had released containing a note with all of her indictments against her abusers as a gesture of letting go. Sophie says, "It was in a tree, trapped between two high branches . . . We thought it had floated into the clouds, even hoped that it had traveled to Africa, but there it was slowing dying in a tree right above my head" (221).

Chapter Four

Embodying History: Performing Mixed-Race Identity in Zoë Wicomb's *You*

Can't Get Lost in Cape Town and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and

No Telephone to Heaven

Zoë Wicomb was born in 1949 in rural Cape Province, and like her protagonist, Frieda Shenton, she and her family were classified as “coloured” under the newly-established apartheid laws. Though Wicomb’s parents were Afrikaans speakers, they, like the Shentons, “understood the ‘snob’ value” of the English language and encouraged her to speak it (Sicherman 111). Wicomb studied English literature at “the ‘Coloured’ University of the Western Cape [and,] like Frieda, she left South Africa in 1973 for Britain” (111) where she, again like Frieda, experienced the disillusionment of British racism.⁶⁰ Wicomb continues to live and work outside of South Africa. Like her protagonist, Clare Savage, Michelle Cliff was born in 1946 in Kingston, Jamaica. Three years later, the light-skinned Cliffs emigrated to New York where they were encouraged to pass. However, they never completely acclimated to life in New York, and the family returned to Jamaica in 1956. On their return, Cliff, like Clare Savage, was sent to St. Andrews private girls’ school where she received a colonialist education. In similar fashion to her protagonist, Cliff’s family returned to New York in 1960, and she, like Clare, was educated in the United States and in Britain, receiving degrees in European and Renaissance history. As is the case with Clare in *Abeng*, Cliff began her own writing

⁶⁰ All biographical information for Zoe Wicomb was taken from Carol Sicherman’s essay, “Zoe Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*: The Narrator’s Identity.” *Bucknell Review: A Scholarly Journal of Letters, Arts and Sciences* 37.1 (1993): 111-122.

through journals, which she began keeping after being moved by Anne Frank's diary. Cliff resides outside of Jamaica to which she has not returned "since 1975, believing that there she might not have been able to write" (Agatucci 95).⁶¹

Like *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* discussed in the previous chapter, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, *Abeng*, and *No Telephone to Heaven* are semi-autobiographical novels. Additionally, the protagonists in these novels, Frieda Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and Clare Savage in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, also suffer a crisis of identity as the result of parents who valorize white ideals and values. However, unlike Tambu, Nyasha, and Sophie discussed in the previous chapter, Frieda and Clare are mixed-race characters, making them culturally as well as racially hybridized. As such, these character's bodies reflect the history of racial intermixing and the concomitant racial hierarchies established as a result of miscegenation in their respective countries. Moreover, not only do Frieda's and Clare's parents aspire to white ideals in terms of education the way Babamukuru and Martine do in *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, respectively, but also, because of their white ancestors and higher class positions as mulatto or coloured, Frieda's and Clare's parents actually encourage a move toward whiteness, most disturbingly demonstrated in Boy's [Clare's father's] invocation of slave-owning ancestors to legitimate his claims to a white identity when he tries to pass after the Savage family moves to America (57). Thus, these characters exemplify what Patrick Colm Hogan identifies as those who are "privileged relative to people of fully indigenous ancestry, [and, thus, who] can aspire to

⁶¹ All biographical information for Michelle Cliff was taken from Cora Agatucci's entry "Michelle Cliff," in *Contemporary African American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Emanuel S. Nelson. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. 94-101.

a higher station than ordinary 'natives' and can be used by the colonizers" (5). Not surprisingly, these intermediate characters ultimately experience, in Hogan's words, an "'alienating hybridity,' the estrangement from both traditions, the paralyzing conviction that one has no identity, no real cultural home, and that no synthesis is possible" (17). While, as Hogan notes, "the condition is [often] linked with madness" (17), Frieda and, to a greater extent, Clare find a way to embrace their hybridity in a productive rather than a destructive way. These characters are able to find this productive application of their hybridity by realizing the betrayal inherent in their parents' pursuit of "whiteness," which Wicomb and Cliff both write about in their non-fiction works.

In "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire," Cliff asserts that she looks back "to try and see when the background changed places with the foreground. To try and locate the vanishing point: where the lines of perspective converge and disappear. Lines of color and class. Lines of history and social context. Lines of denial and rejection. When did *we* (the light-skinned middle-class Jamaicans) take over for *them* as oppressors?" (62). Cliff goes on to explain that the class and color system in Jamaica is supported by those light-skinned Jamaicans' aspirations to become white (72-73). Similarly, in "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," Wicomb argues that coloureds in South Africa also bought into a privileged status demarcated by race when she condemns the "failure" of coloureds who voted "against non-racial democracy" (94). In doing so, they overlooked "the *volte face* of the National Party's false appeal to a shared culture centered in the Afrikaans language, the Dutch Reformed Church, and mutton bredie" (99). The shame of their vote against non-racial democracy, she continues, "lies not only in what we have voted against . . . but in the

amnesia with regard to the National Party's atrocities in maintaining apartheid" (99). This amnesia, Wicomb says, is an "effacement of history" that results in a "failure or inability to represent our history in popular forms and consequently [to] the total erasure of slavery from the folk memory" (100). Wicomb traces the presence of "shame" in literary representations of coloureds whose "assumed cultural loss [lack of a "pure" black culture] is elevated to the realm of ontology" (100) so that the coloured person is characterized as unable to know fully or understand "what others in her own community intuitively know" (101), thus constructing coloured identity as one of lack. Wicomb embodies this sense of lack in Frieda, who, like Clare, is a conflicted character. As Cliff argues, "We are a fragmented people. My experience as a writer coming from a culture of colonialism, a culture of Black people riven from each other, my struggle to get wholeness from fragmentation while working within fragmentation, producing work which finds its strength in its depiction of fragmentation, through form as well as content, is similar to the experiences of other writers whose origins are in countries defined by colonialism" (15). Finding this wholeness for Frieda, and more concretely for Clare, is possible in what Wicomb describes as "the intersection of image and text [where] there is a space where people can resist received racial descriptions, while they make their own meanings . . . and . . . new discursive spaces in which modalities of blackness can wipe out shame" (106).

In order to find these spaces wherein their characters can resist "received racial descriptions," these authors must attend to the histories of oppression in their respective countries. Published in the same year, both authors' novels detail approximately the same time span from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, politically relevant years during

the histories of both countries. Wicomb, who uses a mostly first-person narrative, is more closely aligned with the authors discussed in the previous chapters who also seek to tell their own stories; however, in telling her own story, Frieda does not seek to recuperate the voices of the other marginalized women in her family the way the authors discussed in the previous chapter do, nor does Wicomb's text comply with a strict adherence to autobiography as the death and later resurrection of Frieda's mother illustrates. Rather, Frieda's narrative serves as a representative account of a coloured person who slowly becomes conscious about the repressive nature of apartheid's racial divisions, even for those who, like Frieda's family, have been accorded a modicum of privilege. While Frieda experiences only a small measure of political consciousness within the text, Wicomb writes her stories (which are self-reflexively also Frieda's stories and which we learn in the last chapter have been published) in such a way as to expose the lie behind the fixed categories of race that apartheid made law. The text thereby suggests what Marcia Wright characterizes as an implicit caution for coloureds about the danger of acquiescing to this racist system (xvi).

While Wicomb's narrative is, like those in the previous chapter, a first-person one, Cliff employs a third-person narrator to tell not only Clare Savage's story but also the untold history of the Jamaican people. As Wicomb does in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Cliff also exposes the pretense inherent in fixed notions of race, which, like those in South Africa, have become entrenched in Jamaica's social fabric to the advantage of an elite few. Thus, as Françoise Lionnet contends, "Cliff is . . . an *autoethnographer*, because her narratives belong in a new genre of contemporary autobiographical texts by writers whose interest and focus are not so much the retrieval of

a repressed dimension of the *private* self but the rewriting of their ethnic history, the re-creation of a *collective* identity through the performance of language” (39).

Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and its relation to mimicry, which works against fixed ideas about race, informs my reading of these texts.⁶² With regard to the concept of mimicry, Bhabha says that “what emerges between mimesis [an exact reproduction] and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable” (125). In choosing to write works informed by the marginalized histories of colonial texts, Wicomb and Cliff refuse to align themselves properly with the texts of the white education their characters receive, thereby evidencing an important slippage in the mimicry that the characters’ parents encourage in their daughters. Therefore, these texts can be understood to employ what Bhabha terms “the metonymic strategy” which “produces the signifier of colonial *mimicry* [in these texts, education and complicity in hierarchical structures of racial identity] as the affect of hybridity—at once a mode of appropriation [here education as a tool for writing] and of resistance [the use of that tool to decry the received colonial education]” (172). As this “discrimination [here the colonized characters in these texts] turns into the assertion of the hybrid, the insignia of authority [in this context, the power and privilege accorded in proportion with ‘whiteness’] becomes a mask, a mockery” (172). Understood in these terms, it becomes clear that these authors seek to expose the performativity of race by embracing hybridity, thereby undermining the power vested in supposedly fixed

⁶²For a full discussion of Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, see “Signs Taken for Wonders,” and for mimicry, see “Of Mimicry and Man” both in *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge University Press, 1994.

categories of domination. As such, these texts show that “cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated” (Bhabha 163).

In addition to exposing the performative nature of race, both authors are deeply concerned with the ways that race and gender inform and mutually construct each other as “fixed” categories. Thus, Judith Butler’s ideas regarding the performance inherent in gender are also relevant to a reading of these texts.⁶³ Butler notes, “gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effects—postures as an imitation” (138). Thus, like Bhabha’s conception of mimicry which exposes the performance in racial identities, so, too, does parody expose the performance inherent in gender identities. This is particularly relevant for these texts given that for Frieda and Clare’s parents the proper form for Frieda’s and Clare’s gender role is that of a “lady,” which figuration represents for them the ideal of white values and behaviors. By exposing how “proper” gender performance is another tool used in the service of racial and class oppression, Wicomb and, more explicitly, Cliff show the political value in understanding that performance and in choosing to work within those categories (by choosing black, un-“ladylike” identifications) to combat the oppression on which these categories rely. As Claire Colebrook asserts, “power relations, including relations of gender, are nothing more than acts of creation . . . [;] gender has no reality outside its political performance Gender is social and political, not because it is an imposed overlay, but because it is the fulfilled and proper form, the correct art, of the body whose

⁶³ For a full account of these ideas, see Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

potential it realizes” (31, 37). Thus, these authors make use of the resources of their respective cultures that do not replicate a structure of oppression.⁶⁴

The Historical Body: *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*

You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town by Zoë Wicomb is the story of Frieda Shenton's negotiation of identity as a mixed-race person classified as “coloured” in South Africa. The book itself, which defies simple categorization—not exactly collection of unrelated short stories but also not a novel —reflects Frieda's own fragmented identity and struggle to find a place of belonging. As such, “the stories negotiate what [Bessie] Head once called ‘divisions and signs’ Wicomb's stories trace the fragmentation Head spoke of, but her characters are not nearly destroyed by it Her writing bears witness to a history of deprivation, yet it also suggests ways which subvert this history: not through political or economic change but through a psychological change whose major route is in rewriting representation” (Driver 45). As a “coloured,” Frieda's history is written onto her body since she contains both a black and a white heritage. The social expectations associated with this complex background cause Frieda to perform various roles through her choices of language, education, lovers, and even family relationships. As Meneesha Govender notes, “It is evident that in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* one of the major impetuses for Frieda's narrative is her desire for self-definition as well as her need to come to terms with her South African heritage (which has proved to be extremely repressive, considering her status as a ‘coloured’ woman in a society where patriarchal ‘whiteness’ defines the hegemonic discourse of the day)” (42). In many ways, Frieda and her family exemplify what Wicomb herself has categorized as the “shame” of “coloured”

⁶⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Allen Dunn for the wording here.

identity in South Africa. Wicomb asserts that “the shame is located in the very word *coloured*, a category established by the Nationalist government’s Population Registration Act of 1950, when it was defined negatively as ‘not a White person or a Black’ How, one is tempted to ask, do people who live in communities inhabit, spookily and precariously, a rim of in between reality?” (101). Alternately throughout the text, Frieda’s parents attempt to occupy this position by trying to overcome the “shame” of their association with their black ancestors by valorizing white and, more specifically, English ideals and values. They do this primarily on and through the female body.

As with the main characters in previous chapters, the pursuit of English ideals separates Frieda from her family, her place of birth, and herself, as she seeks to find a sense of identity. Each chapter highlights Frieda’s problematic relationship to her position as a “coloured” woman in a society governed by the rules of apartheid and patriarchy. Throughout the text, Frieda tries to identify both with white and black characters and with her mother and her father. Frieda also searches for belonging through a sense of place when she moves to England and then returns to South Africa for several visits. While the final chapter in the text holds out hope that Frieda can connect with her Griqua heritage as well as find a new appreciation for her motherland and her mother, the rest of the book posits this moment as only a partial resolution to her hybrid identity. This text illustrates, then, that to be a mixed-race character in apartheid South Africa is to embody a fraught colonial history as well as a difficult and racist present, which, in turn, complicates any notion of coherent self or of belonging. Wicomb’s contention that “surely relegation to such a space [a negative space defined as not black or white] relies on an essentialist view which posits a ‘pure’ reality that is experienced in

the space inhabited by the racially pure” (102) serves as the foundation for Frieda’s ultimate realization—that any notion of a fixed identity is a fictional construct, regardless of a person’s designated racial category.

Marcia Wright’s historical introduction to the book indicates that the classification of “coloured” was not static or even easily applied since “Members of the same families received different racial classifications [and] assignments could be altered” (xix). This constructed and shifting nature of racial classification puts Frieda’s family in what Rob Gaylard calls “an ambiguous position, situated somewhere on a sliding scale between ‘white’ at the one end and ‘black’ at the other” (181). This ambiguous position is revealed in the first story of the book, “Bowl Like Hole,” when young Frieda sees her mother and says, “I turned my head toward the window and through the iron crossbars of the table saw in her two buttocks the opposing worlds she occupied” (4). The idea that Frieda’s mother’s conflict regarding her identity resides in her buttocks underscores Wicomb’s ideas about “coloured” identity and its relationship to shame. Wicomb contends that this shame comes from complicity on the part of those designated as coloured “in their construction, including the stereotype of female sexuality inscribed in the spectacular Bartmannesque behind” (96).⁶⁵ Moreover, the image of the milk separator that Frieda’s mother uses after telling Frieda not to speak Afrikaans (the language associated with the Boers) symbolizes how painful and even violent apartheid’s separations are. Frieda says, “The assembled contraption waited for the milk that it would frighten into separation. I watched her pour the calf’s milk into the bowl and turn the handle viciously Out of the left arm the startled thin bluish milk spurted, and

⁶⁵ See introduction for a discussion of Sarah Bartmann.

seconds later yellow cream trickled confidently from the right” (5). Though Frieda’s parents are complicit in their construction as “coloured” as a way to move closer to whiteness, these two images of how this arbitrary categorization existed under apartheid illustrate that even if the coloured population acted in collusion with white authorities, the consequences are still harmful.

Negotiating between these conflicting worlds causes the Shentons, in Gaylard’s words, to “internalize the racism that is endemic to South Africa and [to] seek to escape (in so far as this is possible) the stigma and shame associated with [their] colour” (181). In doing so, they often align themselves against the blacks, and, therefore, by extension the poor, to try to attain through language, education, etc. a more privileged position that is concomitantly closer to whiteness. The Shentons thus exemplify what Wicomb maintains is a failure by “coloureds” to identify properly with the oppressed minority, which “consequently [results in] the total erasure of slavery from the folk memory [because of] shame: shame for our origins of slavery, shame for the miscegenation, and shame, as coloured racism became institutionalized, for being black, so that with the help of our European names we have lost all knowledge of our Xhosa, Indonesian, East African, or Khoi origins” (100). Frieda’s return to her motherland and her reunion with her mother at the end of the book suggest that recuperating and embracing this black heritage is the way to reconcile her fractured sense of identity. However, since this marks only the beginning of Frieda’s consciousness, a political decision to align herself with her black heritage and to fight against the oppressive system of apartheid is not fully played out in the novel.

The Shentons' internalization of racism and desire for escape is seen in this persistent desire to learn and speak English, as evidenced in "Bowl Like Hole." Here, Frieda's mother praises Mr. Weedon (who serves as overseer for the mines) because he is English and, therefore, "'A gentleman'" (2). This is further evidenced for her by his inability to speak Afrikaans, which separates him from the Boers and more closely aligns him with her family since she forbids Frieda from speaking Afrikaans. However, as Rob Gaylard makes clear, "English is also the language of the colonizer; England is the former imperial power. And in the Western Cape, Afrikaans has become the language of those whose indigenous roots go deepest—the language of the rural farm workers and the mainly 'coloured' urban working class" (179). Moreover, Mr. Weedon's association with the Shentons stems from the fact that Mr. Shenton is the only one who speaks English well enough to serve as his interpreter with the mine workers.⁶⁶ During one particular visit to the mines, Mr. Weedon refers to the mountains being shaped like bowls, which, according to him, make them "very useful for catching the rain" (7). On his return home that night, Mr. Shenton reports to his wife that "'Mr. Weedon said that the mine was like a bowl in the earth. Bowl like hole, not bowl like howl. Do you think he is right?" Mrs. Shenton's immediate response is that since he is English, he must be right. She follows this with a reprimand to Frieda for behaving like "'a tame Griqua'" (9). Thus, her capitulation to English values immediately separates her from her own Griqua heritage which she maligns by referring to it as if it were an animalistic condition that should be

⁶⁶ Meneesha Govender sees Mr. Shenton's education as evidence of the patriarchal arrangement of Frieda's home since "We first meet her mother in the kitchen carrying out her domestic chores for the day, while her father, the local school teacher, not only teaches but also acts as an interpreter for Mr. Weedon, an Englishman. Thus is it evident that the Shenton household is divided into public and private domains which are gendered: the mother is limited to the private sphere whereas the father occupies the more powerful and influential public arena" (44).

“tamed.” Additionally, she is the first to learn the word when she mutters, “Fowl, howl, scowl and not bowl” (9). Frieda notes that she “knew that unlike the rest of us it would take her no time at all to say bowl like hole, smoothly, without stuttering” (9). Dorothy Driver contends that this list of words, which are “absent from the spoken discourse, yet still in the writing, the words *howl* and *scowl* speak, without speaking, of anguish, protest, and pain” (49-50), thereby serving as a subversive moment in Frieda’s written account of a childhood memory. Like Frieda’s mother, her father is also eager to align himself with Mr. Weedon and the Englishness that he represents when he brings her a lump of gypsum because Mr. Weedon had also gotten some for his daughter (9).

Significantly, while Frieda’s parents capitulate to Mr. Weedon’s English values and language, Frieda’s adult narrator tells the story in such a way that she implicitly critiques Mr. Weedon and the English values he represents, exposing him as the hypocritical and disruptive force that the English colonials were in South Africa. This critique occurs from the very first line of the book when Frieda says, “At first Mr. Weedon came like any white man in a car, enquiring about sheep or goats or servants” (1). Thus, while her parents hold him up as a model to be emulated, Frieda’s adult narrator reveals the truth that his interests in South Africa are the same as those of all the other white men—control of resources and labor for their own ends. As Rob Gaylard asserts, “It is the Englishman, Mr. Weedon, whose capital makes possible this spectacle of colonial labor relations” (180). Moreover, Frieda’s account of how Mr. Shenton learns the pronunciation for bowl reveals Mr. Weedon’s ignorance rather than the sophistication and intelligence her parents attribute to him. This incident also exposes Mr. Weedon as

disconnected from and unconcerned for that land as well. At the mines, the image of two opposites is once again presented when the narrators says,

Two prosaic mounds rose on either side of the deepening pit. One of these would ultimately blend in with the landscape; fine dust cones would spin off it in the afternoons just as they spun off the hills that had always been there. There was no telling, unless one kicked ruthlessly and fixed an expert eye on the tell-tale tiredness of stone, that this hill was born last year and that had always been. (6-7)

This image of one mountain which had always been and one that has asserted itself so skillfully that it looked like it had always been there serves as the perfect metaphor for the colonizing presence of the English, who established their hold in Africa as well as their legacy so effectively that they secured the complicity of people like Frieda's parents in their self-serving ventures. Also, the narrator's implication that only a ruthless kick would expose the false nature of their presence suggests the need for decisive and even aggressive resistance to their power.

Immediately following this image of the English's unnatural occupation of the land, Mr. Weedon tells Mr. Shenton his idea about the mines being shaped like bowls to receive the rain, which Mr. Shenton recognizes as his ignorance about the land he is stripping through mining when he reflects, "So he had no idea that it never rained more than the surface of the earth could hold, enough to keep the dust at rest for a day or so" (7). Mr. Weedon's lack of knowledge of or interest in the land that he exploits undermines his position as a "gentleman" while Mr. Shenton's decision not to translate the error for the miners furthers his capitulation to Mr. Weedon's unnatural and controlling interest in the land. The narrator also reveals that Mr. Weedon's attempts to align himself with Mr. Shenton by discussing their wives' shared condition of asthma only proves his further complicity in the colonial project. His wife goes to the Bahamas,

another British colony, to treat her condition, showing that Mr. Weedon's interest in colonial countries exists only in so far as they benefit him. Additionally, since Mr. Shenton's wife must remain in South Africa, this discussion also illustrates the failure inherent in his mimicry of Mr. Weedon since he is barred from full participation in the privilege of English power.

The next selection in the book, "Jan Klinkies," reveals that Mr. and Mrs. Shenton's valorizing of whiteness and particularly Englishness is an ideological practice shared by their extended family as well. Frieda's uncle Jan seemingly goes insane when he is forced from his land under the Group Areas Act, and he resists this enforced separation by refusing to work, choosing to collect and arrange cans instead, and by refusing to keep up his house or land. While the family assumes that his behavior marks him as insane, Frieda again writes this story in such a way as to undermine such simple explanations by opening with the line "Perhaps Father's cousin, Jan Klinkies, was not so strange" (11) and by asserting, "I suspected that careful aesthetic considerations had been at play" (16) in the way he arranges his cans. Thus, Frieda assigns him a "creative role of meaning-maker; an active and dissident engagement with the history that has been imposed on him gives a new meaning to his existence" (Driver 48). Jan also rejects Rooibos tea as a symbol of the Boers since the box features "figures alongside [a] wagon . . . in Voortrekker dress" (17) as well as coffee, which he calls Boerpoison.⁶⁷ In his mind, taking in these substances is equivalent to taking in the values of those whom they

⁶⁷ Though this act of opposition is small, it does recall Tambu's mother's refusal to work her land or to take in food as an act of resistance against Babamukuru's English education and the resulting separation it causes in her family.

represent, and since “the label on the package idealizes the relations between the Afrikaaner Voortrekkers and the land they invaded and called their own,” Jan’s rejection of it serves as a means for him to reject “symbolically the Afrikaaner myth whereby the existence and rights of the indigenous inhabitants were denied” (Driver 48).

While Jan Klinkies is marked as eccentric, the family’s main concern is that of maintaining a “proper” image, which they do by visiting him regularly to do chores and upkeep on his house and farm. Significantly, when Frieda and her father take their turn in the rotation of visiting Jan, Frieda is actually the one responsible for the chores when her father tells her that they need to smear the floor, which Frieda understands to mean “that I should, since I am a girl” (18). As in *Nervous Conditions*, domestic labor is reserved for females, just as the responsibility for family appearances, as in *No Telephone to Heaven*, is relegated to the female body. Frieda’s father and his siblings criticize Truida, Jan’s wife, because, “in spite of her light skin, [she] came from a dark-complexioned family There was no doubt that the little hairs in the nape of her neck were rolled up tightly like fronds unfurled by the cautious hot comb. Truida had in other words made a good marriage and Jan had regrettably married beneath him” (14). The family’s attitudes about race are thus inscribed and maintained through the female body, as the following story, “When the Train Comes,” reinforces.

In this story, Mr. Shenton seeks to de-emphasize any features that might associate them with their African or Griqua heritage after Frieda’s mother has, presumably, died. Frieda notes, for instance, how she struggles with her hair when she says, “I check my preparations: the wet hair wrapped over large rollers to separate the strands, dried then swirled around my head, secured overnight with a nylon stocking, dressed with Vaseline

to keep the strands smooth and straight and then pulled back tightly to stem any remaining tendency to curl” (26). Just as Truida’s hair marked her as “beneath” the family, Frieda takes pains to ensure that she maintains their proper class status through her own hair, which is not only marked by its straightness but also by being pulled back, which her father forces her to do since “it is a mark of honesty to have the forehead and ears exposed” (26). The female body thus serves as the site where the family integrity is marked.

This use of the female body is more fully displayed in the way that Mr. Shenton monitors Frieda’s relationship with food. He tells her that she must eat because “[they] are not paupers with nothing to eat . . . [;] you don’t want cheekbones that jut out like a Hottentot’s” (24). In this way, food not only becomes a means to cover racial markers, like distinctive cheekbones, but also a way to achieve upward mobility which is associated with whiteness on the sliding scale of racial classification. While Babamukuru and Martine, discussed in the previous chapter, want their daughters’ bodies to represent an acceptable form of blackness, Shenton takes this one step further by conforming Frieda’s body to a kind of “whiteness.” Bordo’s contention that those with eating disorders often seek to “kill off its [the body’s] desires and hungers” (145) through controlling food can be applied here as a desire to “kill” the “savagery” inherent in the black body through the control of food.

Additionally, food serves as a means of domination for Mr. Shenton who ensures that “the habit of obedience is fed daily with second helpings of mealie porridge” (24). Shenton has so much control over her that Frieda acknowledges that she “eat[s] everything he offers” (24) despite the fact that she has “long since come to despise [her]

size” (24). Mr. Shenton’s desire for Frieda to be plump and well fed aligns him with Babamukuru and Martine, who also want their daughters’ bodies to speak of a class position that is aligned with whiteness and privilege. Carol Sicherman contends that the fact that “the boys do not look at [Frieda because she is] . . . fat” (22) suggests that Shenton “frees her from the prison of her gender. In South Africa, ‘the kind of girl whom boys look at’ is confined to a strictly conventional and subordinate role” (113). However, given Shenton’s desire to inspire obedience and control of her racial position, it seems more likely that he seeks to control Frieda’s sexuality by controlling her food intake. Again, like Babamukuru and Martine, Shenton sees Frieda’s body as well as her education as a way for him to improve his class and therefore his racial status since, as Gaylard contends, “clearly *education* is seen here as the way out of oppression—as the way to improve one’s status and achieve ‘respectability’” (181).

“When the Train Comes” illustrates, in turn, how this desire for upward mobility is manipulated in the complicated allegiances characterizing relationships between whites and “coloureds” throughout South African history. In this story we learn that Frieda’s family has been forced to move by the Group Areas Act implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite these kinds of betrayals, the South African government also encouraged those classified as “coloured” to believe that they had certain privileges and that they could be upwardly mobile in ways that black Africans could not. Despite his anger at being relocated to a place where he will have “no room to stretch the legs” (29), Shenton believes that he will not have to endure the housing situation for long since there is “not a wasted drop of Scots blood in [him]” (29).

Additionally, Shenton sees Frieda's acceptance to the recently desegregated St. Mary's school as a "generous offer" (32). We see, then, that though "coloureds" are subject to the brutalities of apartheid, they are also patronized with offers of education and the thought of improving their class position. For instance, Frieda's father tells her that her higher education will spare her from having to be a maid for a white woman.⁶⁸ In this way, Frieda experiences something similar to Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* and Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* through the double bind of education, which can help her achieve upward mobility and class status but which also occurs at the expense of "native" identity, or, in Frieda's case, political consciousness or activism. Shenton's idea is also like Martine's in that Frieda's education in his mind makes "the world [theirs]" (31). Due to the change in class position Frieda's education provides, like Tambu she is also separated from her native culture and the land. Moreover, her collusion in white manipulation also alienates her from lower class "coloureds" who work for the school. However, despite Frieda's initial lack of political consciousness, her education ultimately has a kind of ambivalence in Bhabha's usage since it brings about her writings, which we learn in the last story have been published and can therefore serve to subvert her father's and others' ideas.

The following story, "A Clearing in the Bush," is one of only two stories in the collection not told exclusively from Frieda's first-person perspective. Rather, the first part of the story is told by a third-person narrator and focuses on Tamieta, who is also coloured but from a different class position than that of Frieda and her friends. Tamieta's

⁶⁸ Significantly, working for a white woman (which is considered "black" work) is intimately connected in Frieda's mind with the body since she envisions having to wash out menstrual rags. Just as in *Nervous Conditions*, "native" and, in this book, lower class culture are intimately connected to the body and its presence.

life and occupation as a cook in the cafeteria serves as a sharp contrast to the privileged position Frieda holds through her education. Despite this privilege, however, Frieda is not immune to racism as her struggle to write her essay about *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for her white professor named Retief illustrates. Frieda knows that whatever excuse she offers for not having her essay completed on time will not matter since "he does not know me, doesn't know any of us, and will not recognize me the next day" (40). Retief's name aligns him with Piet Retief who led the Great Trek, and his unwillingness to know or learn about his students suggests that even in this integrated school, racism is still very much at work. Moreover, not only does Retief represent white racist authority, he also represents patriarchal authority. Frieda inherently mistrusts his interpretation of Tess but knows that she must write an essay that recapitulates his lecture, thereby "betraying her [Tess] on the page" (56). Not only does Frieda betray Tess, she goes along with the boys' plan to boycott Prime Minister Verwoerd's funeral despite the fact that they do not include the girls in the plans but merely assume that they will go along with them as they are told; as Govender notes, "in this simple act, patriarchy is actively asserted in the resistance movement and appears to be condoned in the name of the fight for a higher cause" (43). Frieda, through her acts, shows her complicity with native as well as white patriarchal authority. Moreover, Frieda does not boycott the funeral out of any sense of political obligation, but, rather, she does so in order to have the time to write her essay and turn it in on time. Thus, while her education has provided her the opportunity not to be a servant (like Tamieta), it has also distanced her from her own people (she does not even acknowledge that she knows Tamieta, nor does she think to tell her about the boycott [Richards 98]), and it has distanced her as well from their political causes,

thereby proving that “her political consciousness is as yet still quite unconscious” (Govender 43).

Frieda’s higher education allows her to go to university, but the promise of equality is once again shown to be a fiction in the title story “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town” wherein Frieda has an illegal relationship with a white boy named Michael which results in her pregnancy and need for an abortion. Meneesha Govender contends that “Frieda’s relationship with Michael, her white lover, marks an amalgamation between patriarchal as well as political repression” since it “points to the repressive nature of the state in dictating with whom one is allowed to form personal and particularly sexual relationships” (45). When she goes to the abortion clinic, Frieda is forced to lie about her race and say that she is white so that she can have the abortion. Understanding the absurdity of her lie, Frieda realizes that the white woman believes her because “the educated voice, the accent [had] blinded her. I have drunk deeply of Michael, swallowed his voice as I drank from his tongue” (78). While Frieda can momentarily pass into the white world her family has wanted her to aspire to throughout her life, the fact of her abortion demonstrates that this would be impossible permanently, since the child would also be mixed.⁶⁹ The inherent inequality in this situation not only stems from Frieda’s need to have an abortion but also from the fact that Michael offers her no assistance in procuring it, leaving Frieda to travel in the “coloured” section of the bus and mocking her concern that she might get lost, thereby asserting a privileged knowledge about the land (64-65). The image of Frieda and Michael at the beach where the “Indian and the Atlantic

⁶⁹ There is a connection here to Clare’s miscarriage in *No Telephone to Heaven* discussed later in this chapter since neither woman can bear a child “contaminated” by the racist system that contaminates these relationships as well.

[are] fighting for their separate identities” (75) illustrates the truth of racism that prevents their union. Frieda says of this spot, “it is said that if you shut one eye and focus the other carefully, the line separating the two oceans may rear drunkenly but remains ever clear and hair-fine” (75). This image captures the permanent separation between people with racial classifications determined by apartheid and by extension between Frieda and Michael. Ironically, the line separating the oceans is described as “hair-fine,” recalling to us that Frieda has spent the majority of her life trying to achieve the fine hair that would separate her from her African heritage.

The feeling of being hopelessly separated and isolated does not apply only to Frieda’s relationship with Michael. The upward mobility promised by education has left Frieda on the outside of a white identity, and it has also served to alienate her from her own family. In “Home Sweet Home,” Frieda prepares to leave for England and goes home to visit her family before she does so. During this visit she laments that she finds it “hard to speak to those who claim [her] as their own” (94), and she longs for a time when she “could be a child once more, young and genderless as [she] roamed the banks alone, belonging without question to this country, this world” (93). Caught between the conflicting promises of apartheid South Africa to “coloured” people and bound by the constraints of “proper” femininity that her family espouses, indicated by their first warning that “a lady must never be seen without her handbag” (83), Frieda feels as though she no longer belongs to her own country. As Gaylard notes, “the story’s ironical title points to the fact that her familial home is in reality the last place where Frieda is likely to feel she belongs. Growth into adulthood—and, we can infer, her privileged education in Cape Town—has brought alienation from those closest to her” (183).

Additionally, her experience on the train the night before when the white conductor forces her to share a compartment with a black man illustrates that even with her education, she cannot escape her double constraints of race and gender: “fear of both men leaves [her] lying frozen in [her] bunk” (88).

When Frieda tries to escape the family’s warnings and platitudes regarding appropriate gender behavior, she takes a walk to visit the places of her childhood and thereby reveals how alienated she truly is. She cannot find the places where she spent her childhood, nor can she look in the cylinder where as a child she used to “watch [her] framed face in the water below” (97) since it has been sealed off. Further, Frieda’s inability to identify with the mirror image of her childhood suggests that her “true” identity is off limits to her now. Frieda’s inability to find the landmarks of her childhood also illustrates the fiction of any “true” identity since it undermines her assertion in the previous story that in the “veld of [her] childhood, . . . the red sand rolls for miles, and if you stand on the koppie behind the house the landmarks blaze their permanence” (73). She therefore resolves to go to England and never return. Though Frieda feels disconnected from her family, at the same time, her move to England suggests that she has internalized many of their fantasies about it as a kind of “motherland” by her seeking it as a place of escape and betterment.

“Behind the Bougainvillea” reveals, however, that England is not the escape Frieda has been searching for, since she also faces there the feeling of being different and isolated. Frieda later acknowledges that she returns to visit South Africa because she is

“tired of being stared at by the English” (111)⁷⁰ and because she feels as if she is in the “wrong hemisphere” (112). Frieda’s idealized notions of the English are torn apart, and the colonial roots of apartheid and racism are revealed in the continued racism of England. Since Europe has failed to live up to the image it held in her childhood, Frieda seeks to identify with the African part of her heritage. However, as Marcia Wright contends, “Living in Britain from 1972 to 1984 . . . [has] removed [Frieda] from the main cut and thrust of the confrontations of students and of an increasingly aroused populace with the enforcers of apartheid” (xv).⁷¹ When Frieda goes to the doctor’s office where she, like the other non-white patients, is forced to wait in the yard rather than inside, she realizes this distance. Here she reconnects with Henry Hendrikse, a boy she was prevented from playing with as a child because he was “almost pure kaffir” (116), and her confusion about the language he and the others speak demonstrates her continued isolation from black South Africa since she believes that they are speaking Zulu. Frieda’s reaction to learning that Henry and the other black people are, in fact, speaking Xhosa “induces faintness and alternating light- and heavy-headedness” (119). This faintness which began earlier stems from Frieda’s inability to deal with the heat; with her misconceptions unmasked, it clearly symbolizes her separation from South Africa and its people as well.

Frieda experiences her alienation through her body and attempts to assuage her guilt over her childhood relationship with Henry as well as her inability to connect with

⁷⁰ This idea of traveling to Europe as a way of “reconnecting” with white ancestors only to find herself still out of place is strangely reminiscent of Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* in which Helga Crane, who is also a mixed-race character, travels to Denmark only to find that she is still out of place there.

⁷¹ See the introduction for a fuller discussion of these political tensions, particularly the Soweto school riots of 1976.

“her” people by putting her body into the service of identifying with blackness by having sex with Henry in a maid’s room where he takes her to escape the heat. However, Henry’s question about Frieda’s childhood friend, Olga, after they have had sex reveals that the racial barriers between them cannot be so easily erased. In this moment we learn that Frieda had dismissed Henry when she was young because he is a “native.” Physical relationships, then, are not the easy solution to solving the painful racial divisions that Frieda has been negotiating throughout her life, and she acknowledges that she has “always miscalculated the currency of sex” (124). Moreover, as Constance Richards contends, “While Frida [sic] seems embarrassed by her discomfort among Black South Africans, she cannot see what Henry represents as a viable option Black nationalism, in this novel, is embodied in Henry who represents the progressive so-called ‘coloureds’ who rejected this racial classification, embraced Black identity, and dedicated themselves to the liberation of all Black South Africans. In terms of Fanon’s developmental phases, Frida [sic] cannot move directly from reification of colonial culture, which is the stuff of her childhood, to the ‘fight phase’ that the adult Henry represents” (Richards 24). Richards also asserts that Frieda’s betrayal of Henry in their childhood is in a way repeated when “the chapter ends with Frida’s [sic] father repeating a rumor that Henry is a spy for the apartheid government” (24). Frieda cannot experience any sense of identification until she is willing to commit herself to overcoming the social conditions that underpin her own feelings of alienation.

Frieda’s visit to her old school friend Moira in “Ash on my Sleeve” illustrates yet another level of growing political consciousness in terms of Frieda’s race and her gender. She tolerates Desmond’s (Moira’s husband) comment that she is “looking wonderful, so

youthful. Turning into somewhat of a swan in your middle age hey!” (146) since she is a guest in their home. However, unlike her reactions when she was in school with Moira and avoided even walking across the room for fear that the boys would look or whistle at her, Frieda acknowledges her impatience and determination not to submit to this kind of sexism by saying, “I am a guest in their house; I must not be rude. So I content myself with staring at his jaw where my eyes fortuitously alight on the tell-tale red of an incipient pimple” (146) thereby subjecting his body to the same kind of scrutiny he has imposed on hers. Frieda’s account of the visit implies that Moira does, in fact, submit to Desmond’s patriarchal authority in the way that she tends to the house and to the children. Additionally, their discussion about servants and Frieda’s biting reprimand that they have people in England who “[do] for those of us who are too sensitive or too important or intelligent to clean up our own mess. We pay a decent wage, that is for a cleaner, of course, and not to be compared with our own salaries” (149) suggests that Frieda also believes that she has a commitment to racial and class equality that Moira does not share.

However, Frieda learns that Moira attends a “black-culture group [which is] . . . affiliated with the UDF” and that this group is also concerned with “consciousness raising [since] women’s lib [has] crept over the equator” (158). Thus, we learn that Frieda’s initial perceptions of Moira have been inaccurate and that, in fact, Moira is breaking apartheid laws by housing people in her servants’ quarters who have no passes (162). Significantly, Frieda sees one of these men and assumes he is the gardener, suggesting that despite her indignation over the class inequalities with servants, she still retains the notion that black people in South Africa must be servants. Moreover, Moira’s

says that “Coloureds haven’t been around for that long, perhaps that’s why we stray. Just think, in our teens we wanted to be white, now we want to be full-blooded Africans. We’ve never wanted to be ourselves and that’s why we stray . . . across the continent, across the oceans and even here, right into the Tricameral Parliament”⁷² (156). This statement serves as an indictment against Frieda’s racial and gender consciousness which she has not yet committed to the service of her own people in her own country as well as an assertion that fixed categories of white and black do not exist, thereby precluding them as being relevant for a sense of identity and necessitating instead the need for coloureds to embrace their hybridity. In this way, Moira has the potential to help Frieda connect with her homeland and its people in the same way that Harry/Harriet helps Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Unfortunately, at this point, Frieda is still not ready to commit to those causes, and the last line of this section is “I wait” (162).

“A Trip to Gifberge,” the final story in the book, posits a partial resolution to Frieda’s inability to commit to South Africa’s political causes. In this story, Frieda returns to South Africa after her father’s death and reunites with her mother, who has been presumed dead in earlier stories. Dorothy Driver notes in “Transformation Through Art: Writing, Representation, and Subjectivity in Recent South African Fiction” that “Wicomb has spoken about the mother’s reentry into the collection in terms of the resurrection both of the maternal principle . . . and of the reemergence of a voice suppressed by the father: ‘In a sense I have to kill off the father, in order for her to speak’” (50). Several critics have commented on the need to foreground Frieda’s

⁷² Marcia Wright notes that the Tricameral Parliament established in 1983 “provided for a separate chamber where coloureds would legislate on their ‘own affairs’” (xv), thereby instituting it as an attempt to construct what Wicomb calls “brownness” as a stable category, as opposed to Black consciousness wherein “Black became a metaphor for nonwhite, a very suitable one for a struggle against the white racist regime” (xv).

relationship with her father in her childhood so that Wicomb could explore the implications of being a female in a patriarchal system further complicated by issues of race and class. In these interpretations, Frieda's mother's returning at the end of the book symbolizes not only recuperation of her voice as a woman but also of her Griqua heritage which stands in contrast to the way that her father valorized English/white culture and values in earlier stories. Carol Sicherman, for example, asserts that "Whereas in earlier stories Mrs. Shenton is a woman who kowtows to the English element of her husband's family, now we learn that Mrs. Shenton's English-identified father-in-law had disparaged her as 'a Griqua meid.'" She goes on to say that "Thanks to apartheid, Frieda and her mother now identify not only with the mixed-race Griquas but with people who are unequivocally African, the Namaquas who inhabited the interior of the Cape when the Dutch pushed northward in the eighteenth century" (118). However, the earlier stories as well as Frieda's actions and thoughts in the final story suggest that such an easy resolution to the problem represented by the dichotomy between a dead father and a newly resurrected mother and sense of heritage is not so easily achieved.

When Frieda sees her mother at the beginning of the story, she is sitting in the yard like a "painterly arrangement alone on a plain. Her house is on the very edge of the location. Behind her the Matsikamma Range is interrupted by two swollen peaks so that her head rests in the cleavage" (164). This image of Frieda's mother on the edge of the location with her head in between two peaks continues the image of her in the first story in which "her two great buttocks [represent] the opposing worlds she occup[ies]" (4). Again, in-between status is inscribed through the image of a female body—breasts instead of buttocks this time. However, since this image does not present the conflicting

worlds of the first story, and since her status as “in-between” posits her as a kind of liminal character, there is hope that she and Frieda can embrace their hybridity as well as its revolutionary potential. However, when Frieda sees her mother in this position, she remembers her as she was in her childhood when she aspired to the European standards of beauty by wishing Frieda’s eyes were wider and telling Frieda that they would “have to put a peg on [her] nose” (164) so that she would be pretty enough for someone to marry her. In this memory, Frieda’s mother is revealed as someone who not only “kowtowed” to her husband’s English-identified way of thinking but who was herself English-identified, taking pride in her straight hair and high-bridged nose while also seeking to alter her daughter’s wide “African” nose. Just like her father, Frieda’s mother wants her daughter’s body to speak of their class and racial position as well as her gendered position since “white” looks will presumably help her to attract the right kind of husband.

Frieda and her mother are able to overcome some of their racial self-hatred when they take a trip to the mountains. On this trip, Frieda mocks her mother for wanting to take a protea bush—South Africa’s national flower—back for her garden. Frieda tells her, “then you can hoist the South African flag and sing ‘Die Stem’ [South Africa’s national anthem]” (181). Just as she did with Moira, Frieda assumes her position on this issue is more enlightened than her mother’s, which she understands to be upholding white values by valorizing “their” national flower. In a much-critiqued response, Frieda’s mother tells her,

Don’t be silly; it’s not the same thing at all. You who’re so clever ought to know that proteas belong to the veld. Only fools and cowards would hand them over to the Boers. Those who put their stamp on things may see it in their own histories

and hopes. But a bush is a bush; it doesn't become what people think they inject into it. We know who lived in these mountains when the Europeans were still shivering in their own country. What they think of the veld and flowers is no interest to me. (181).

Here, Frieda's mother pointedly rejects Eurocentric ideas and makes a connection to the land where her ancestors once lived. She also opens a door for Frieda to reconnect with her heritage through nature since, as Dorothy Driver argues, "Book-learning gives way here to a different kind of knowledge. And so it is, at the end of the story, that the narrator takes direction from the Southern Cross, as if reentering the world of her Griqua ancestors who lived in the hills and doing so without jettisoning science: 'I find the long axis and extend it two and a half times, then drop a perpendicular, down on to the tip of the Gifberge, down on to the lights of the Soeterus Winery. Due South' (181)" (50). Like the characters in the previous chapters and like Clare Savage, Frieda must reconnect not only with her mother but also with her "motherland" if she is to feel that her fragmented identity can be made whole.

Indeed, Carol Sicherman celebrates this trek into the mountains and this moment as one "modeled on a previous Griqua trek, also over the Drakensberg, that resulted in the founding of their nation in 1860. In so doing, Mrs. Shenton lays claim to her Griqua heritage, to the land and the proteas" (119). This is an important turn for Mrs. Shenton's character, and Frieda tells her after the trip, "I wouldn't be surprised if I came back to live in Cape Town again" (182). However, one cannot discount the fact that on the way up to the mountains Frieda and her mother have had to deliver some sheepskins to a white shop owner and that Mrs. Shenton addresses the store owner "in someone else's voice" (175). When Frieda confronts her about this, her mother explains that "there are

some things you just have to do whether you like it or not” (176). Thus, Mrs. Shenton still capitulates to white authority, which directly contradicts her position on power in her speech quoted above, suggesting that she may not be fully ready to reclaim her past and resist colonial authority.

Furthermore, their trek is not a complete success. They are barred from going to the edge of the mountain, and for Frieda’s mother, “the trip is spoiled. Here, yards from the very edge, the place of her imagination has still not materialized” (179). Frieda’s response is that “at her age [she] ought not to expect the unattainable ever to be anything other than itself” (179). Thus, any notion of a fully realized reconnection with the land and heritage is complicated and remains unfulfilled. Moreover, their failure to reach a place in Mrs. Shenton’s imagination illustrates the impossibility of a fixed sense of self or culture that can be reclaimed. In the same way, Frieda’s assertion that she may move back to Cape Town stands in contrast to her claim the night before that she hates this country; she also acknowledges that if she does move back her mother “won’t approve of [her] here either” (182). While this final selection in the book does hold out hope that those identified as “coloured” can reclaim part of their heritage and identity, demonstrated in Frieda’s choice to wear an afro that her mother calls a “bush” (178) rather than continuing to emulate white standards of beauty by straightening her hair, in the apartheid South Africa of the 1980’s that the characters inhabit, this can only be a partial resolution. Instead, what can be claimed through a political commitment to align with the oppressed majority does not get played out in the novel, making identity and an attendant sense of belonging a tenuous achievement at best, especially if those like Frieda remain unwilling to accept their responsibility in the cause of social change, a call which

Michelle Cliff makes clear is imperative in her two novels about Clare Savage, who, like Frieda, has been the beneficiary of the inherently unjust system of class and racial hierarchy.

The Revolutionary Body: *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*

Abeng opens with the following lines: “The island rose and sank. Twice. During the periods in which history was recorded by indentations on rock and shell. This is a book about the time which followed that time. As the island became a place where people lived. Indians. Africans. Europeans” (3). These opening lines establish that this book is concerned with history. However, the history recorded in this book will serve as a revisionist history of the colonial version taught to Clare, the protagonist, at school and by her father. The narrator’s interruptions throughout the narrative seek to fill in the gaps of that colonial history by telling the stories of those (such as Indians, Africans, and women) who were left out of colonial accounts, thus challenging the usual way that certain aspects of history are privileged since Europeans are accounted for last in the list of the island’s inhabitants. This is not to say that the history included in this text simply reverses the hierarchy of European accounts of history by excluding or marginalizing whites, but *Abeng* does serve as a text which unearths the forgotten and untold histories of Jamaica. Significantly, Clare’s narrative in this book spans the years from 1956-1958 when Jamaica began the process of independence.⁷³ These dates coincide with Clare’s own growth of political consciousness which occurs through her friendship with Zoe and her brief encounter with Winifred Stevens at the end of the novel.

⁷³ In 1958 Jamaica joined the Federation of the West Indies. This is discussed in more detail in the introduction.

Much of Clare's political awakening happens as a result of her own crisis of identity wherein she struggles with her position as the white-looking daughter of mixed-race parents. When the novel opens, however, Clare's sense of identity is rooted in her father's ideals and racism. Significantly, Kitty (Clare's mother) sanctions Boy's (her father's) misrepresentation of his past to Clare because Clare *looks* like Boy. As a light-skinned, white-looking child, Clare *belongs* to Boy. In direct contrast to the stories Boy and her colonial teachers tell Clare, Cliff's narrator regularly interjects the untold history of Jamaica, especially that of revolutionary women like Nanny and Mma Ali, into the otherwise essentially linear plot. In this way, "Like the abeng, the conch used by slaves to communicate clandestine meetings, the omniscient narration that interrupts a more limited third-person narration . . . communicate[s] the eclipsed history and realities of plantation life buried beneath the mythology. The text becomes a written testament of buried voices and oral histories, including those too gruesome to relate, those more easily forgotten, those that were 'madness to remember'" (Renk 72-73). These interjections imply that knowledge of this history can make Clare a revolutionary woman as well, which is exactly what happens in the sequel *No Telephone to Heaven*.

This "unearthing" of history is established as important early on in the novel when the narrator explains that "in 1958 Jamaica had two rulers: a white queen and a white governor [and] . . . the monetary system of the island was based on the pounds/shillings/pence of the 'mother' country" (5). Living under this colonial rule has caused Clare's parents and most other Jamaicans to be unaware of their own history. The discovery of a coffin (also in 1958) containing "the remains of a hundred plague victims, part of a shipload of slaves from the Gold Coast" (7), illustrates that though it is

forgotten, their history can be recovered from the land. Though an American navy ship is “commissioned . . . [to] take the coffin twenty miles out and sink it in the sea,” (7) thereby implicating America as a complicit neo-colonial force that seeks to continue to suppress history, the presence of the unearthed coffin combined with this “unearthed” history throughout the book suggests a changing consciousness in the Jamaican people which will ultimately lead to their independence, just as Clare’s knowledge of her privileged position as a result of her history will also free her in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

Though both of Clare’s parents are also racially mixed, her father, Boy Savage, is light-skinned and what is called *buckra* in Jamaica, a condition which guarantees him a high class position. As a member of the upper class, Boy considers himself to be white, drawing on and emulating the values of his white ancestors. In fact, “His first name was James, and his middle name, Arthur; in the family and among the friends he kept from school he was called ‘Boy,’ sometimes ‘Boy-Boy,’ an imitation of England, like so many aspects of their lives” (22). Boy’s great-grandfather, who was white, owned a plantation as well as slaves, and Boy and his family go to great lengths to preserve this aspect of history for themselves. Cliff’s narrator explains that

The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the years a carefully contrived mythology was constructed, which they used to protect their identities. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted. They swore by it. It added depth to their conversation, and kept them interested in each other. Only in each other. (29)

Since Clare, his eldest daughter, is also very light-skinned, she is entrusted to his care; “as the inheritor of her father’s cultural and racial whiteness—her father has designated Clare to be the ‘white’ child, to whom he shall impart the ‘gift’ of European history and knowledge—Clare is the ‘masculine’ daughter” (Edmondson 184). Boy takes great pains

to pass on his English-identified values to Clare. He does this by sharing with her his religious beliefs, which are influenced by his own colonial education, by taking her to visit the plantation house that his ancestors used to own, and by sending her to an elitist school, where she will receive a colonial education.

At the age of ten, “Boy won a scholarship to a Jesuit boarding school in Brownstown, in the center of the island” (42), where he received a colonial education as well as a “respect [for] elitism” (45). After being drafted into the cause of the Royal Army during World War I, Boy learned about Calvinism and became convinced that he was one of the Elect, a status he believes “he had been born to” (44). Boy assures Clare that she, too, is part of the Elect since “She was a true Savage . . . Her fate was sealed” (45). Boy’s appreciation for elitism and his desire to emulate white values and behaviors is also reflected in his choice of church, where the family goes on Sunday mornings. At John Knox church, “a Scottish school teacher played Presbyterian hymns at a harpsichord, which . . . had never adjusted to the climate. . . . It seemed that English people must sing softer—or not at all—and that the climate of that place—damp and dreary—surpassed the clear light and deep warmth of Jamaica. They had always thought of their climate as a gift; the harpsichord told them different” (6). Thus, the church and its ministers reinforce the colonial idea in their congregation that English culture is superior to that of the Jamaicans. Additionally, the hymns they sing also support the idea that the English presence in Jamaica is ordained by God since they reflect a “God who would support the travel of the Word to faraway ‘climes’ and distant ‘heathen’ by almost any means necessary—‘marching as to war’” (12). It is not surprising, then, that Boy

chooses John Knox for his church, since it affirms for him his class position as part of the white elite.

Not only does Boy try to convince his daughter that she is white through her religious training, he also takes her to visit the plantation house that his great-grandfather once owned and tells her “about her distinguished [white] ancestor” (24). When they go inside the house, Boy describes for Clare how the house used to be decorated with imported furnishings from “England and Ireland mostly. Staffordshire. Wedgwood. Waterford. Royal Doulton” (25), furthering the constructed mythology of prosperity and whiteness that his family has been telling each other for generations. However, when Boy and Clare walk outside the house, they find “the foundation stones of some of the outbuildings, and faint gullies marking out the earth where others had been. These buildings out back, only a few yards from the great house, had once contained molasses and rum and slaves—the points of conjunction of the system known as the Triangle Trade” (25). Thus, by valorizing and aligning themselves with their white ancestor, Boy and his family become complicit in the violence done to slaves and even to some of their own, unclaimed ancestors. By taking Clare to visit this house and by assuring her that she is “white because [she is] a Savage” (73), Boy invites Clare to share in that complicity. Ironically, the untold history of violence against slaves that the Judge and others like him enacted reveals that instead of “civilizing” a “heathen” nation, the whites who colonized the country and built up their economy through the bodies of slaves were, in fact, the real savages.

Boy’s ideas regarding race and class as well as his version of history is corroborated for Clare by her colonial education at St. Catherine’s School for Girls where

she is taught that “Jamaica had been a slave society. The white and creole mistresses hastened to say that England was the first country to free its slaves” (30), thereby rescuing the reputation of the British slave owners. Moreover, like her father and his family, Clare’s teachers teach very little about Jamaican history since “She knew that there had been Maroons, and that many of them still existed in the towns of the Cockpit Country. But she learned that these towns had been a gift from England in compensation for slavery. Slaves mixed with pirates. Revolution with reward. And a sense of history was lost in romance. This history was slight compared to the history of Empire. The politics of freemen paled beside the politics of commonwealth” (30). Thus, Clare’s sense of her own history is warped and only half complete.

As a result of her father’s teaching and of the colonial education she receives, Clare does in many ways perceive of herself as white since she identifies with white characters in her readings such as Pip from *Great Expectations*.⁷⁴ She also believes that she will have to leave Jamaica since “England. America. These were the places island people went to get ahead” (36). Like Frieda, she believes that she is obligated to go to the “mother” country rather than imagining that she can and should find her purpose and sense of identity and belonging in her own country among her own people. However, despite Boy’s best attempts to indoctrinate Clare into believing that she is white, she knows “that her mother [is] not.” As a result, she experiences her first crisis of identity when faced with the reality that she is not, in fact, white but, rather, mixed. This understanding causes her to question, “Who would she choose were she given a

⁷⁴ In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare also begins to identify with Jane from *Jane Eyre* but in an important realization comes to understand that she is more like Bertha, who is characterized as mixed.

choice To whom would she turn if she needed assistance? From who would she expect it? Her mother or her father—it came down to that sometimes. Would her alliances shift at any given time. The Black or the white? A choice would be expected of her, she thought” (37). Indeed, this choice is exactly what Clare confronts in *No Telephone to Heaven* wherein she chooses her mother.

At this point in her life, though, she exists in the in-between space of Boy’s white-identified position and Kitty’s Jamaican-identified position, and, according to MacDonald-Smythe, “Cliff underwrites the narrative of *Abeng* with these continuing contradictions. Kitty, once named ‘Freeman,’ marries Boy Savage. The daughter of slaves unites with the son of slave master and Freeman becomes Savage” (50). Not surprisingly, these differences between her parents and by extension their “worlds” are encoded into a dichotomy of the city versus the country since “the family traveled between St. Elizabeth and Kingston, bringing back to town things from the country, and bringing to country things from town The places reflected the separate needs and desires of the two parents. It seemed to Clare that Kitty came alive only in the bush, while Boy armed himself against it” (49). These separate parental identifications with the city and the country serve as an extension of the metropole/colony dichotomy that existed under British colonization wherein people from the city were sent to “civilize” the “savages” in the colonies. In fact, much of Kitty and Boy’s relationship can be understood as a metaphor for the relationship between England and Jamaica.

The narrator explains that Kitty and Boy met after the war, that their marriage happened “much too fast,” and that Clare was born soon after (130). This, along with Kitty’s claim that she had to marry Boy, indicates that Clare was conceived out of

wedlock; however, the narrator's description of the sexual encounter which resulted in Kitty's pregnancy suggests that Clare might also have been a product of rape since "there was no stopping Boy" (130). If so, this further aligns Boy with his great-grandfather, who also raped his female slaves. In this way, "the near-white daughter they engender represents more than the forced coupling of different cultures and histories; she represents a convergence of social and economic opposites. As the writer inscribes Clare's adolescent body within Jamaica, she also inscribes Jamaica within Clare's body. The connection Cliff thereby establishes is not just between the developing identities of woman and nation but, more specifically, between the main character's body and the figurative body of Jamaica" (Adjarian 50). Additionally, the fraught relationship between Kitty and Boy further suggests a parallel between Jamaica and England. Kitty complains "that his [Boy's] presence in her life as her husband had essentially been an error—but she seemed to have no desire to change the situation" (51). Thus, Kitty upholds the lessons preached at her church to "bide [her] time" and "be patient" (15), which also refer to the larger colonial situation in Jamaica. The hymns sung at Kitty's church reflect this situation as well, since they suggest "the necessity of deliverance. A belief in their eventual redemption. In the balm of Gilead" (12).

Like Boy, Kitty forms much of her identity and how she relates to her country through her religious beliefs. Significantly, the congregation at the church Kitty chooses to attend consists "for the most part of Black women—sitting and singing in groups and pairs and alone" (12). Kitty's choice of church also reflects her belief that "God and Jesus were but representations of Nature, which it only made sense was female, and the ruler of all" (53). Her respect for nature is demonstrated in her knowledge about the

medicinal qualities of many plants that are indigenous to Jamaica. Kitty's understanding of and respect for her homeland results from her "sense of Jamaica that her husband would never have" since "she [thinks] that there [is] no other country on earth as beautiful as hers" (52). Unfortunately, Kitty does not articulate her beliefs to Clare the way that Boy does, nor does she teach her what she knows about the land and its plants when they go "into the bush, . . . where they would go barefoot, and hunt for mangoes or avocados out of season" (53). Kitty not only has an understanding of her land, but she also knows the songs from Africa in an "old language" that she learned from the old women as a child, but, again, rather than teaching them to her daughters to ensure their survival, she is merely "moved that such things had survived" (53) when the family hears one of these songs on a trip to the bush.

Kitty withholds this valuable information from Clare along with her affection since "she [doesn't] believe in too much physical affection between parents and children. It had not been her experience at all, and she never thought to change" (52). More disconcerting than Kitty's refusal to share her knowledge of her land and traditions with Clare, however, is her refusal to tell her about the true origins of her name,⁷⁵ conceding, instead, that Boy named Clare "after the college his grandfather attended at Cambridge University" so that Clare would never know "that her namesake was a living woman, a part of her mother's life, rather than a group of buildings erected sometime during the Middle Ages for the education of white gentlemen" (141). By denying Clare all of these

⁷⁵ Clare is named for Clary, a "simple-minded dark girl who fought for her and refused to leave her side" (141) when Kitty was sick as a child and her own distant mother would not accompany her to the hospital in town, sending Clary instead.

valuable aspects of her heritage and identity, Kitty becomes complicit in Boy's attempts to continue his legacy of "whiteness." In fact, the narrator tells us that Clare

Had been handed over to Boy the day she was born Maybe Kitty never questioned this decision of her to keep darkness locked inside. Perhaps she assumed that a light-skinned child was by common law, or traditional practice, the child of the whitest parent. This parent would pass this light-skinned daughter on to a white husband, so she would have lighter and lighter babies Better to have this daughter accept her destiny and not give her any false notion of alliance which she would not be able to honor. Let her passage into that otherworld be as painless as possible. Maybe Kitty thought that Clare would only want this thing, to pass into whiteness, looking as she did, speaking well because of her lessons at St. Catherine's, reading English books and English descriptions of history. Perhaps she thought it would be best for her. (128-129)

Like the rest of her family, Kitty capitulates to the class and race system in Jamaica that accords more privilege to those with lighter skin. The narrator points out that "The Freemans did not question this structure or the fact that the white people brought money and seemed able to buy themselves any place on the island that suited them. The Freemans fit themselves into the structure and said that yes they were red people, and that was nothing to be ashamed of. At the same time preserving their redness" (54). While they do not aspire to whiteness the way that the Savages do, Kitty and her family do not question the class/racial hierarchy established through colonization, nor do they attempt to alter it, since they seek to maintain their own relatively privileged position as "red" (mixed race) rather than black people. Perhaps this is because Kitty thinks of the black people on the island as victims "so that her love of darkness [becomes] a love conceived in grief The revolution had been lost when the first slave ships arrived from the west coast of Africa, and she felt Black people were destined to labor under the oppression of whiteness" (128). Since, like Boy's, Kitty's perception of race is fixed, she seeks to spare her fair-skinned child from the oppression attendant to her conception of blackness

by giving Clare what she believes to be the most advantageous position—the position of whiteness, which of necessity denies Clare the history not acknowledged by the colonizers.

Even though Boy's and Kitty's beliefs ensure that Clare will learn history only from her white teachers at St. Catherine's, she could have had an opportunity to learn something of her unrecorded history from Kitty's mother, Miss Mattie, whom Clare visits in the summer. At Mattie's, she is surrounded both literally and figuratively by some of her history in this house, the "spine" of which is the remains of her Granny Judith's life. Many of the items used in Mattie's church service once belonged to Judith, whose grave lies at the side of the house (13). Clare conceives of her great-grandmother as "mysterious" and is fascinated by her "life and death," but she is told only that she "had become a 'bitter old woman'" (13). Just as she had withheld from her children her own history, which is a history characterized as "the kind of slavery which had followed on emancipation," because "she had fixed shame to this part of her past" (141),⁷⁶ Miss Mattie also withholds it from Clare, thereby widening the gap between Clare and any heritage she does not receive from Boy and the Savages.

Like Kitty, Miss Mattie also refuses to share her religious beliefs and traditions with Clare, who helps her to prepare for her services but is not permitted to participate in the ceremony of the all-female church for which her grandmother ministers (13-14). Moreover, Miss Mattie and her friends also subscribe to Kitty's and Boy's beliefs that Clare should embrace only her "whiteness" since she has "good" hair which falls "to her

⁷⁶ I find the use of the word "shame" interesting in this context since it seems to function here in the same way that it does for the Shentons in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and, according to Wicomb, for all people of a mixed-race heritage.

shoulders without any extraordinary means” and since she “inherited her father’s green eyes—which all agreed were her ‘finest’ feature.’ Visibly she was the family’s crowning achievement, combining the best of both sides, and favoring one rather than the other” (61). Mattie and others, like Kitty, assume that Clare *belongs* in a privileged position of whiteness and that she would not want anything else. Cliff’s narrator suggests that the class/race hierarchy which exists in Jamaica and this capitulation to white privilege as a position to be aspired to by those who can results from an ignorance of native history and the revolutionary women in it like Nanny and Mma Ali who fought directly against white authority.

The narrator who introduces aspects of Jamaican history throughout seeks to rectify this problem by frankly discussing the conditions of slavery, the fact that women were raped by their owners (as Inez had been by Boy’s ancestor, the judge), why slavery was abolished—because of “the Victorian mania for cleanliness” which made “the trade in palm oil . . . more profitable than the trade in men and women” (18)—rather than from any kind of compassion on the part of the English as Clare has been led to believe by her teachers, and that “of all the slave societies in the New World, Jamaica was considered among the most brutal” (18). The way that the Judge and others act on the night before emancipation by burning their slaves since “at that moment these people were his property, and they were therefore his to burn” (40), is also evidence of this brutality. Most importantly, however, the narrator relates the history of Nanny, Mma Ali, and Inez.

Significantly, not only are these women revolutionaries, but they draw their strength from their African heritage, and they use their bodies to resist the control of men, most of them white. Of Nanny, the narrator says that she “could catch a bullet between

her buttocks and render the bullet harmless” (14). The narrator is also careful to point out that Nanny “was from the empire of the Ashanti, and carried the secrets of her magic into slavery Her Nanny Town, hidden in the crevices of the Blue Mountains, was the headquarters of the Winward Maroons—who held out against the forces of the white men longer than any rebel troops. They 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” (14). As a strong woman who retains her African heritage, Nanny is able to resist claims of white authority over her people and, most importantly, over her own body. Interestingly, in her essay on shame and coloured identity in South Africa, Wicomb points to large African buttocks as the signifier of African female sexual deviance in colonial discourse and therefore the site of shame, but this body part is precisely what Nanny uses, without shame, to disable her attacker’s weapons. Cliff’s narrator is also careful to point out, however, that Nanny’s resistance efforts fail because “Cudjoe refused [her] offer of alliance” against the British, choosing instead to sign “a separate peace with the British governor, in which he was permitted freedom and promised to hunt down other rebels for the Crown” (22). The narrator also makes clear that not long after this failed attempt at alliance, Nanny was killed “by a *quashee*—a slave faithful to the white planters” (14), her fate thereby underscoring the dangers of capitulating to white authority as well as the need for united resistance against such forces. Further, Nanny’s death foreshadows Clare’s death at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven* when she and her group are betrayed by someone who aligns themselves against their cause of resistance.

The narrator, in turn, describes Mma Ali, who lived in the plantation owned by Boy's great-grandfather the judge, as having characteristics similar to Nanny's, as a "warrior woman" who "represented a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them" and who "taught the children the old ways—the knowledge she brought from Africa—and told them never to forget them and to carry them on" (34). Also like Nanny, Mma Ali uses her body as a means of resistance and teaches other women to do the same by showing them how "to keep their bodies as their own even while they were made subject to the whimsical violence of the justice and his slavedrivers, who were for the most part creole or *quashee*" (35); and while she had "never lain with a man" and "only loved women in that way," Mma Ali was a leader for both men and women, also like Nanny.

Inez, who came to the plantation when the judge brought her home after she was betrayed by a *quashee* on her way to buy a gun to help her father protect their land against the whites and creoles, is the third strong woman who also had the courage to resist white authority. She was raped by him for six weeks, and when he left for a trip to England, she went to Mma Ali for help in arranging an abortion after she learns that she is pregnant (34). The narrator describes Inez as "bronze. Her mother was a half-blood Miskito Indian, whose people had come from the mountain chain of Central America. Her father was a Maroon, an Ashanti from the Gold Coast" (33), and though she officially held the position of the judge's mistress, she "was known as a friend of the slaves on the Savage Plantation" (33). Though she seeks help from Mma Ali with her abortion, she is a strong woman in her own right, who "had survived by planning her escape" by using the things she had been taught about "the ways of her mother's people

and the ways of the Maroons” (34). She, too, seeks freedom from white oppression and goes to “the Cockpits to find the mayor of Trelawny Town and speak to him on behalf of the slaves on the Savage Plantation about getting a piece of land for them to farm together after freedom” (39). While most of the slaves died in the fire the judge set at the farm, some did manage to escape and find Inez. Thus, she becomes an example for Clare who will also extricate herself from the false claims of white authority that the Savage family exerts over her at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*.

Significantly, none of these women has any white ancestors, suggesting that maybe they were more able to resist white authority because of their separation from whiteness. However, Cliff’s narrator does not seem to imply that this racial “purity” is a pre-requisite to resisting behavior, but, rather, that a commitment to the causes of those not invested in racial oppression and by extension class politics is. This is made clear in the discussion of Kitty’s failure to share her knowledge with Clare. The narrator says that “Kitty judged her shade with an inner eye. She protected herself against the attacks of the colonialists which threatened her people, her island. Kitty should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Ali, and Nanny too—and had she known of the existence of these women, she might have shared her knowledge, her extraordinary passion, using its strength rather than protecting what she felt was its fragility” (128). Thus, Cliff illustrates the power of knowledge and particularly knowledge of one’s history which can serve as a source of inspiration and strength.

Indeed, it is through another history of oppression that Clare first begins to question her father’s version of her identity, which casts her as white when she

encounters *The Diary of Anne Frank*.⁷⁷ Clare becomes fascinated with Anne as well as with the question of “why did they kill her?” (68). When she asks her teachers at school about the Holocaust, they tell her that “Jews were expected to suffer. To endure. It was a fate which had been meted out to them because of their recalcitrance in belief, their devotion to their own difference” (70). Similarly, when she questions her father about it, he also says that “they brought it on themselves. They should have kept quiet” (73). During her discussion with her father, Clare wonders “how she could be white with a colored mother, brown legs, and ashy knees” (73). Because of her identification with Anne and her conviction that what happened to her and other Jewish people was, in fact, not justified, Clare also begins to question her own privileged position as white. As M. M. Adjarian notes,

These texts [Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* and Kitty Hart’s *I Am Alive*] are central to the development of Clare’s consciousness of herself as a raced subject in a racist colonial society Cliff also uses the books to metonymically represent the history that Clare’s parents will not discuss with their daughter: a history in which their African ancestors suffered the same kind of confinement in the slave ships that brought them to the New World that Anne does in her attic hideout. . . . In other words, both autobiographies become an indirect way in which Clare can access a suppressed past to which she, as a fair-skinned, mixed-blood subject cannot lay claim if she is to pass for white in a racist colonial society” (24).

This connection to historical figures whom Clare can relate to will continue to serve an important role in her ever developing political consciousness.

⁷⁷ Significantly, Clare’s first encounter with this story is in the theatre when she cuts school, which she had never done alone, because “she needed to see this movie of *The Diary of Anne Frank*” (68). By skipping school Clare displays a small level of rebellion against her colonial education while Cliff also establishes the importance and influence of film, which will have a much greater significance in *No Telephone to Heaven* when Clare and her “army” attempt to disrupt production of a film about Nanny that misrepresents her history and, by extension, the history of the Jamaican people. This incident is also an example of how the seasons reflect the level of Clare’s political consciousness and commitment since this incident occurs in March, “the month of the most rain.” Since *Abeng* opens in the dry season, and *No Telephone to Heaven* opens in the rainy season, Cliff seems to make a connection between the fertility of the land and the level of historical awareness and commitment Clare has.

Another incident much more closely connected to Clare's life prompts similar questions when Doreen, who has a "deep-brown body," has an epileptic fit at school and none of the teachers comes forward to help her except Miss Maxwell, who is the "dark physical education teacher" (96). When Clare asks her mother about why the other teachers did not help Doreen, Kitty responds by saying, "you know how Englishwomen are—they think that they are ladies; they are afraid of the least little sign of sickness or anything like that" (98). Clare, who understands "lady" to mean someone who "dress[es] and [speaks] well . . . [,][who] speaks 'properly'" (98-99), wonders what her mother would have done since she "was certainly no 'lady'" (99). Without having to ask the question, Clare knows that "Kitty would not have come forward" (99) in her case because she is someone who can only "hold back" (99). The narrator also explains that though Kitty would not have come forward, the difference between her and the teachers at the school is ultimately tied to "race and shade" (99), and that this pre-occupation with color permeates every aspect of Jamaican life, with those who are lightest awarded the most privilege (100). In this way, Clare comes to understand that race often determines who "wins" throughout history which, in turn, causes her to question her own racial status, even as she learns that race is often connected to "proper" gendered behavior as well since being a "lady" coincides with being white. This latter discovery also causes her to question her gender position.

The first time this gender questioning happens occurs when Joshua and Ben kill the hog and will not let her join them in their very male ritual of eating its genitals for the sake of their own virility (57). Though Ben is light-skinned like Clare and Joshua is dark, they both exercise a kind of power over her at this moment by not including her as they

have done in their games up to this point. Significantly, when Clare looks away from them so that they will not see her crying over not being allowed to participate, she sees the dishpan with the enamel cracks that look like a map (55).⁷⁸ This “map” seems symbolic of the map that the British created in so many places through colonization with the rhetoric of patriarchal penetration and conquering. At this moment Clare becomes like the land which was conceived as feminine so as to be conquered and then excluded from equal authority. By being excluded from the act of consuming their prey, she is also left out of the ultimate act of conquering.⁷⁹

Miss Mattie also seeks to ensure Clare’s “proper” gender behavior when she arranges for Zoe to be her playmate. That way Clare will not bother Joshua, since she “was getting too old to be running around wit boys” (91). She also believes that Clare is “not a girl who should be spending too much of her time on chores” (92), which indicates a capitulation on her part to the class status Clare achieves as a result of her color. Since Zoe’s mother, Ruth, lives on Miss Mattie’s land, she has no choice but to comply with Miss Mattie’s request that her daughter spend time with Clare. This exercise of class position marks Mattie as not only lacking revolutionary potential in terms of combating

⁷⁸ It also seems significant that in the description of the dishpan, Clare says that the map disappears when it has been covered with soap, which recalls the narrator’s assertion that the slave trade ended because of the Victorian obsession with cleanliness and the commercial value of palm oil for making soap. Additionally, the need to change the pan when the pattern is in danger of being a whole suggests that this image is a comment on how easily the Europeans drew borders and changed the map of the world at their own whims or on the strangely expanding and contracting map of the Empire.

⁷⁹ It is on this same night that Clare talks to Clayton’s mother who has gone insane because of his death. Her son, the text implies, was gay and therefore a good scapegoat, while she herself is a poor woman and, so, also a good scapegoat. Significantly, it is just these kinds of people who will show revolutionary potential in *No Telephone to Heaven* by finally acting against those who have oppressed them for so long. We also see here the female body being feared and vilified since Clayton’s mother, Hannah, supposedly went crazy because “she went through the ‘change’ too quickly” (65). This kind of association of the female body with the site of “corruption” that leads to madness recalls the way that Kurtz’s madness in *Heart of Darkness* is attributed to the mystery of Africa and his black female lover. In both cases, the unjust treatments, either received or enacted, respectively, are never considered as possible reasons for mental breakdown; it is assumed that the cause must be Africa and the female body.

racial inequality; she also ascribes to and upholds gender inequalities to some degree.

This is not to say, however, that she has no power; as MacDonald-Smythe contends, “the grandmother has transformed her position as the ill-treated and often betrayed wife into the role of leader of her community church . . . within which she articulates her liberatory theology. The range of her influence is significant. Servitude to her husband is exchanged for community service and the empowering of women” (51). Nevertheless, she does not seem to use that power the way that she “should” in the context of the revolutionary models held up to her in the unearthed, both literally and figuratively, history of the text.

Through her friendship with Zoe, Clare seeks to step outside of the complicated boundaries of her racial position, and though they “had lived all their lives in Jamaica and had been taught about themselves not only by Miss Ruthie and Kitty, but by Lewis Powell⁸⁰ and Boy Savage . . . [they] were well aware that there were differences between them, of course But in their friendship the differences could become more and more of a background, which only rarely they stumbled on and had to confront. They had childhood—they had make-believe. They had a landscape which was wild and real and filled with places in which their imaginations could move” (95). Thus, like Dangarembga, Danticat, and Wicomb, Cliff also asserts that connection to the land is the starting place for moving beyond the boundaries of colonial identity: “this landscape . . .

⁸⁰ Mr. Powell is the teacher in the country school who went to New York as a young man and became acquainted with the Harlem Renaissance (85). But, though he teaches his students poetry by black authors and recognizes the absurdity of using the same manual sent from England for colonial schools every year, he does not teach the social contexts which inspire the protest poems he teaches (89), thereby leaving the students unaware of their own potential for protest.

does not simply contain an unwritten history but also contains the potential to heal that history” (Edmondson 188).

Interestingly, Clare’s understanding of and appreciation for Zoe and the countryside where they play coincides with the development of her and Zoe’s bodies. For instance, Clare learns about menstruation from Zoe, who, in turn, learned from her mother with whom she has a close relationship. And “when the wispy hairs began to grow between Clare’s legs and under her arms . . . it was only Zoe she told, only Zoe she showed them to. And Zoe showed her own hairs” (81). Thus, they also find female solidarity with each other. However, the two stories in the newspaper which capture their attention—one about a disease whereby a girl would gradually be turned into a man and the other about a five-year-old girl in Peru who has a baby (102-103)—suggest that they have little power over their bodies. The events in these stories appear to them to be caused “by some mysterious force over which they would have no control at all. Two unwanted and sudden disasters which would change their lives totally. Two visitations about which they could do nothing” (104). This description of a sudden unwanted force that has the power to change lives forever seems also to explain what happens under colonization as well as the limited control they have as females. More importantly, however, is that these stories, like the incidents which prompt Clare’s racial questions, also illustrate the fungibility of gender constructs.

Clare’s idea to steal Miss Mattie’s gun and to kill Cudjoe the pig is thus an attempt to assert some kind of control, and as the narrator makes clear, this experience is also influenced by “the experience of the hog-killing . . . when she had been told absolutely, by the boys, by the dressed-up women, by Miss Mattie, by Mad Hannah, just

who she was in this place” (114). The hunting excursion could thus have been an important step for Clare in asserting her independence and agency by claiming her own power since she wants “to do something so dem will know we is smaddy” (118). However, Zoe’s indictment of Clare’s actions when the trip fails reveals that Clare has been selfish in her desires and has not considered the implications for Zoe who does not share her privileged position. Zoe tells her,

Wunna know, wunna is truly town gal. Wunna a go back to Kingston soon now. Wunna no realize me have to stay here. Wunna no know what people dem would say if two gal dem shoot Massa Cudjoe. Dem would talk and me would have fe tek on all de contention. Dem will say dat me t’ink me is buckra boy, going pon de hill a hunt fe one pig. Or dat me let buckra gal lead me into wickedness. Or dey will say me t’ink me is Guinea warrior, not gal pickney. But wunna never reckon with dat, Wunna jus’go ahead with wunna sint’ing. Country people dem don’t forget no-t’ing. (117-118).

Clare is chastened by Zoe’s speech, and though she denies being “buckra,” she loses her enthusiasm for the hunt and feels “silly. Stupid” (119) in light of Zoe’s rebuke.

While this might have been a turning point in Clare’s relationship with Zoe and with her own identification as white, gender identity issues intervene when a man violates their privacy and objectifies their naked bodies (the girls go swimming after making up). Thus, Clare resorts to two incongruous sources of power: the stolen gun and her education. She drops her patois and speaks like a buckra. As MacDonald-Smythe contends, “Clare’s method of self-empowerment is also shaped by the patriarchal and imperialist inclinations encouraged by her father. Faced with what she presumes to be a challenge to her subjectivity and sexuality, Clare defends her selfhood with brute force, with the power to wield a rifle, the assumption of the authority of the white man. She

acts like the *buckra*” (MacDonald-Smythe). Clare shoots the gun, despite Zoe’s objection, and ultimately kills Mattie’s bull.

What I find interesting and relevant for my argument is what happens to Clare after she shoots the bull. Miss Mattie condemns her because she believes that the evilness which caused Clare to steal the gun and then shoot her grandmother’s prized bull is rooted in the sense of privilege she has since she is *buckra* like her father. To her way of thinking, Clare has too much white in her and therefore she is as a consequence evil. Mattie no longer allows Clare to stay at her house after this because as a “white” person, she cannot appreciate and respect what Mattie owns, does, and is trying to teach her. However, Mattie’s dismissal of Clare as white may be another example of Mattie’s failing by not teaching Clare her true history. Mattie and her friends have admired Clare and her fine (read white) features like her hair and green eyes until this incident, but Mattie has not allowed her to participate in her traditions or the fellowship of her female friends in her church services. By valorizing Clare’s “whiteness” and not teaching her to understand and appreciate her “blackness,” Mattie can be seen to be just as culpable as Clare for what happens. Additionally, because she has not taught her the empowerment that she has as a woman or allowed her to share in the female solidarity she experiences with those in her church, she invites Clare to seek her own empowerment by stealing the gun, which also marks a denial of her proper gender role. Boy sees this rejection as the bigger crime.

While Boy and Kitty are upset that Clare was irresponsible and as a result cost them money to repay Mattie for the bull, the fact that they send Clare to stay with Beatrice Phillips for the rest of the summer suggests that her biggest failing to their mind

was her refusal to comply with her proper gender expectations, which for Kitty are also tied up in race. She tells Clare that Mrs. Phillips can teach her how to be a “lady” (read white), which Kitty sees as imperative to a proper performance of whiteness. This discussion recalls her telling Clare about why the white teachers at her school failed to help the dark girl who had the epileptic seizure. So, for Kitty (and for Boy), race, class, and gender are all intimately connected in a certain code of conduct that would properly define limits for all three. Here again, though, Kitty complies with Boy’s wishes and assumes that sending Clare to stay with Mrs. Phillips is what is best for her—to learn how to live “properly” inside her skin. This moment is another missed opportunity for her to try to rectify some of the failings in Jamaican history—at least those she has some control over, such as her daughter’s knowledge and understanding of her racial, class, and gender identity.

Beatrice, the woman they send her to live with, epitomizes white bigotry—most clearly in the way that she beats her servants. She provides Clare with an objective look at the ignorance and nastiness of racism that Clare has been unable to see in her father because she loves and admires him. Beatrice cares for her dogs more than for people, she has nasty habits like killing ticks with her fingers, and she shows her cultural ignorance when she claims that a coloratura singer is by definition coloured (157). She tells Clare not to protest because she is not so pure herself. Despite Beatrice’s show of fidelity by letting Clare live with her and sleep in the same room with her, Beatrice still wants to make it clear that she is in control. She thus offers the kind of training that should teach Clare that she is better than those who are considered coloured but not quite good enough, or, to use Bhabha’s words, that she is “white but not quite” (128).

While Clare is staying with Beatrice, she meets Beatrice's sister, Mrs. Stevens, who, according to Beatrice, is crazy. Beatrice explains her condition as having to do with her sister's unwillingness also to occupy a proper gender role—she reads books, wanted to leave Jamaica, and declared that she did not want to get married. When she was forced to marry, her husband left her because he “couldn't endure a woman who wouldn't be a woman” (159). Beatrice tells Clare that when Mrs. Stevens went “through [the] change-of-life,” she “felt remorse because she had no babies to keep her in her old age” (159), and Beatrice says this is when Mrs. Stevens went crazy and stopped washing. Clare reflects on the “change-of-life, and why so many strange things in women's lives were attached to it. She was not sure what it meant at all—except that it could cause insanity, make women develop paunches or beards—bring out the worst in a woman” (159). Again, the female body serves as a site of uncertainty and of contamination. Also, focus on the female body serves as a substitute for facing other issues that people do not want to confront.

Even though Beatrice has forbidden Clare to speak to Mrs. Stevens, she does talk to her and learns that Winifred was not sent to the convent because she refused to marry but because she was pregnant with a black man's child. Mrs. Stevens tells Clare that her pregnancy and unsanctioned relationship with a black man is what has “crossed her up” (162) and that Clare should take care not to let them—white people—do the same thing to her. Winifred Stevens also admits that she “knew better. I know that God meant that coons and buckra people were not meant to mix their blood. It's not right. Only sadness comes from mixture” (164). She claims that she stopped washing because “all the water in the world cannot wash away what I did” (164), but she also says that she named her

child and that she thinks about her everyday. She even seems to see something of her child in Clare when she tries to touch her.

Here again we see the idea that blackness and contact with blackness is what causes madness, but it seems from what Winifred says and how the others, like her sister, treat her, that this, rather, is a case in which high valuation of whiteness and aspiring to white racist values that strictly mandate separation between the races is actually what drives Winifred insane. Rather than the blackness of her lover or of her child, what really works against her sanity are the social constraints that say she was wrong to love or even to get close to a black person. Thus, “her refusal to wash” may illustrate her sense of shame, but it may “also indica[te] that she rejects the Victorian ‘mania for cleanliness.’ In refusing to wash [that is], she identifies with blackness; in essence[,] she becomes the black woman she needed to be in order to love the man of her choice” (Renk 108). Winifred, then, becomes the direct counterpoint to the “lady” that Clare is supposed to become by learning how to be “white” from Beatrice. Because of Winifred’s position as metaphorically black, Clare is able to admit to Winifred that she herself is mixed, even though she has not been able to do that with Beatrice. To her she confesses her mother is red, rather than relying on her father’s whiteness for her racial identity as she has done with Beatrice.

More importantly, as a consequence of shared disclosures, Winifred tells Clare that her life did not turn out as it should have because she misunderstood her history. She then tells Clare how things really came about in Jamaica: “They brought people here in chains and then expected to prosper. They killed off all the Indians and all the snakes and believed they were doing good They are all gone now—the ones who did these

things—gone to their reward. But the afterbirth is lodged in the woman's body and will not be expelled. All the waste of birth. Foul-smelling and past its use" (165). In her reading of this moment in the text, M. M. Adjarian says,

Colonialism gave rise to the multicolored children of Jamaica and more specifically to the circumstances that brought about Mrs. Steven's doomed affair. Rather than being expelled along with the infants, however, the British imperial placenta that nourished these children from within their mother's bodies remains implanted within the maternal womb. If an air of decay, corruption, and death seems to exist in Jamaica, then, it is because the historical memories of the colonizers and the colonizers' crimes against the colonized, though buried deep, are strong across centuries. And it is the women who bear the burden of those memories, figured here as afterbirth, within, or in Mrs. Steven's case, outside their bodies. (20)

Significantly, it is Winifred (who has stepped outside of her racial, class, and gender system) who knows the history of slavery and oppression that brought the Jamaica they know into existence and who teaches Clare. Winifred therefore acts as Clare's "true benefactor" since she "represents the black and white races, the outcast and the English gentlewoman. Clare is supposed to become a genteel Englishwoman under the guidance of Mrs. Philips, but she receives her real education from the mad woman and thus is transformed from girl to womanist" (Renk 107). As mentioned earlier, those perceived as marginal to society are often the ones who have the insight to effect social change.

Interestingly, the metaphor of the aftermath of colonization being the rotting afterbirth lodged in the woman's body connects the land to the female body but such that the womb is infected and unable to produce or fulfill its purpose. Significantly, Clare starts her period that night of re-education right after she has a very important dream about Zoe. Clare's menstruation coincides with her growing political consciousness, which signals that there is hope in her generation—in children who know they are mixed

and embrace that truth rather than trying to reject it. However, this metaphor of afterbirth also seems to be tied to Clare's miscarriage in *No Telephone to Heaven* and the subsequent infection and sterility that it causes. Clare comments that her womb is of no use and that her looks (which Winifred says are beautiful but only if she acts beautifully) have been for nothing—she cannot produce an even lighter child with a white man, which had always been Boy's aspiration for her.⁸¹

That night Clare has her dream, which is intertextually related to Antoinette's encounter with Tia in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette says, "I will live with Tia and I will be like her When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple as she began to cry" (Rhys 45). In her dream, Clare sees herself throwing a rock at Zoe and then saying she is sorry and making a compress for the bloody wound. This bears a strong similarity to what happens in the scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea* above with two very important exceptions. First, the white child (Clare) throws the rock at the black child (Zoe) rather than vice versa. Second, Clare apologizes and tries to make amends. As Edmondson notes, "If we consider this scene within the context of its literary history, Cliff is rewriting an *historical* relation of black and white West Indian women not only to link their cultural identities but to acknowledge the white woman's relation to power" (183). Clare's dream act is symbolic displacement of what Winifred has told her about her white ancestors that day—they also metaphorically threw rocks at the black people on the island. She wakes up from tending

⁸¹ Wendy Walters notes that "this condition of being a motherless child and the analogous one of being a childless woman are important metaphors structuring Cliff's complex and provocative narrative [*No Telephone to Heaven*]. Throughout the novel, the island of Jamaica stands for both her mother and motherlessness, ultimately resisting a stable symbolic role as womb or home" (218).

to Zoe's wound to find that she has started her period, and the narrator describes it "as the blood lining of her womb . . . breaking away" (166), which act also relates to Winifred's comment about the afterbirth in the body: something is being expelled here, and it happens for the first time after she tries to reconcile with Zoe in her dream. Clare's body thereby becomes a metaphor for her own political awakening as she subconsciously and then physically tries to rectify something that is wrong and then expel it through her menstrual flow. Additionally, as M. M. Adjarian points out, "when Clare begins her first menstrual cycle, she cleanses her body in a nearby stream, mingling her blood with island waters. In this quasi-ritual act of mingling fluids, woman and land become one" (50). This idea that Clare's body is now connected to Jamaica and to its reconciliation is further clarified in the next passage of the novel:

when she got muscle cramps from exercise, Kitty told her it was a 'sweet pain' and nothing to worry about. Something which would pass. Something which only meant that her body was working as it should—the tissues moving in reaction to exertion. Clare pictured the flesh of her insides expanding and contracting, then settling. This was not the same kind of pain, but it had its own sweetness, and promise that it would pass. All had happened as Zoe said it would Something had happened to her—was happening to her. (166)

This image of her insides expanding and contracting and then settling echoes the opening lines of the book: "The island rose and sank. Twice. During periods in which history was recorded by indentions on rock and shell" (3). At this point Clare is becoming more aware of her history and her place in her country, and this knowledge is connected to her own body and the body of the land whose fate is now intimately connected to hers.

The last lines of the book refer to this all-important dream about Zoe: "She was not ready to understand her dream. She had no idea that everyone we dream about we are" (166). Though Clare cannot yet fully understand her dream or her history and her

connection to Jamaica's fate, as Kathleen Renk argues, "the seed of matrilineage and woman's story has been planted in her womb" (Renk 109), thereby serving as the beginning of her political awakening which gets fully realized in *No Telephone to Heaven*. It will be a long time before Clare can accept her place and her role in Jamaica, but she has now begun the journey. Significantly, Clare's beginning of coming to consciousness conflicts with everything that her father has taught her about who she is and what she should be as well as with what Beatrice has been trying to teach her.⁸² Since what Clare realizes contradicts Beatrice's ideas, Clare does not tell her about her dream or about the change in her body. Instead, she writes about both in her journal. Though the reader is not privy to her thoughts in the same way that we are to the others in this chapter, it is nevertheless significant that she got a journal because she had been reading about the Holocaust and Anne Frank and Kitty Hart, and she begins writing about herself and what happens to her when she has moments of self-awareness and political consciousness. Writing seems to be the way for her to work through her own awakening as well. However, this is a difficult and slow awakening, and the conflict it causes to her sense of identity is reflected well in the narrative fragmentation of *No Telephone to Heaven*.

This sequel novel opens with Clare at thirty-six riding in the back of a truck with her other comrades who have joined in the cause of resistance against an American film portraying a westernized conception of Nanny. Opening the novel this way and backtracking to illustrate how Clare came to this moment in her life emphasizes how her

⁸² Beatrice has almost been successful in teaching Clare to abet racism because Clare no longer winces when Beatrice beats one of her servants.

personal experience and understanding of her own history has led her to this point of resistance as well as to a sense of community and solidarity she feels with other Jamaicans who might have rejected her under different circumstances. Clare, along with the other people in the truck, looks past the colonial history that has divided them along class and racial lines by embracing her hybridity. The description Cliff gives of Clare emphasizes this point when the narrator describes Clare as “a light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, émigrés, Carib, Ashanti, English, [who] has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her” (5). The majority of the rest of the novel focuses on what Clare has gone through to get to this place and moment.

Like *Abeng*, this book is concerned with re-telling history. However, this time the narrative focuses more on Clare’s personal history of political awakening than on the buried unknown/untold history of Jamaica. Clare’s history and her sense of identity is now, of course, intimately connected with Jamaican history and her ultimate willingness to embrace and later to fight to preserve that same history. The differences between the people on the back of the truck are the differences of history which are inscribed visibly on their bodies. However, they all participate in the same cause under the same name—Nanny. That Clare now recognizes and fights under Nanny’s name suggests an awareness of history that simply did not exist in *Abeng*. Not only do their bodies proclaim their history, so does their clothing: they all wear the khaki pants and shirts that they have always worn as children of empire, but now they are using this colonial uniform in the cause of resistance rather than compliance. Also, they wear American army jackets to that same end, so that they are rebelling against neocolonial forces as

well. Thus they illustrate Bhabha's notion of ambivalence in their use of items for protest which were previously used in the service of the empire.

Clare's quest for identity takes a long time precisely because she has never been allowed to experience Jamaica for what it is and what it can be to her—her home. All of her education from Boy in *Abeng* centers on those people in her history who were not from Jamaica, and all of her teaching relates to how to distance herself from Jamaica's people (the ones Kitty sympathizes with but sees only as victims). When Clare is fourteen, Boy once again alienates her from her home and land by taking the family to America.

When the Savages move to America in 1960, this further solidifies the differences between Kitty and Boy and serves to polarize their racial identifications since Boy chooses to pass for white while Kitty sees the racism in America as more blatant than that in Jamaica. Interestingly, the family's knowledge of America as well as their perception of it is formed "mainly from the movies shown in Kingston" and Boy telling them that America is "the greatest country in the world" (54), which establishes the importance of media, particularly film, as an instrument of colonialism which presents a particular image of America. The importance of film is also relevant to the end of the novel when American filmmakers seek to pervert Jamaica's history, thereby also constructing another false image of Jamaica for American audiences. Indeed, much of this novel is constructed like a movie—a scene from one point of view (like Paul finding his murdered family) and then from another perspective (like Christopher's memory of the same event) as well as the flashbacks and snippets of memory that help to construct Clare's story as she stands on the truck. Not only is there the structure of a movie, but movies play an important role

in how Clare learns throughout her life. For example, the rules of racial relations are different in the movies in America—here things are make-believe so that Shirley Temple dancing with a black butler is not frowned upon by her father in the same way that Clare was when she played with Alexander the garden boy (94). Clare's American teacher in elementary school taking her class to see *Gone With the Wind* as a history lesson, seeing the film as a documentary on the civil war, is evidence of another American misrepresentation of history. The film-like construction of the novel as well as the protest at the end of the book make Clare's story as well as Cliff's writing a kind of mimicry in Bhabha's sense of the word, since this mimicry is inherently resistant to colonial authority in the portrayal of Jamaica's people and its history.

Though they have an idyllic impression of America in their minds, the brutalities and inequalities the Savages face during their stay prove that the movie images of America do not represent the realities of life there for minorities. Just as Boy aligned himself with his white ancestors in Jamaica and excused the brutalities of the Holocaust as something the Jewish people in some way brought on themselves, he immediately becomes complicit in American racism as well when he tells Clare that "lynched" is a "form of punishment for wickedness" (55). Moreover, on their first night in America, Boy identifies himself to the hotel owner, who is a member of the KKK, as "a white man" whose "ancestors owned sugar plantations," thereby "streamlining himself for America. A new man" (57). Although she disapproves of Boy's explanation of lynching and of his behavior, Kitty "offer[s] her daughter nothing more" (55). Kitty sympathizes with the poverty in America in a way similar to how she did in Jamaica, and she recognizes the lights in "the unpainted shacks in the center of small fields . . . as a

reminder of *home*” (59). Despite Boy’s insistence that the racial and class stratifications in America are not so different from those in Jamaica, Kitty insists that “*Home* was different—she would hold to that as long as she lasted. She who was cut from home” (60). Thus, Kitty’s identification and sense of self, which is determined by her connection to Jamaica, works in direct contrast to Boy’s desire to remake himself as a white man in America. However, by not offering her perspective to her daughter, she once again becomes complicit in how Boy educates Clare.

The split in the way that Boy and Kitty identify themselves affects every aspect of the way they live in America as well as how they respond to the racism they encounter there. While Boy seeks to reinvent himself by painting the family crest on white china plates, and then by “painting images of the great houses and the past” on “slabs of wallboard” (63), Kitty seeks out the “shops from *home*” which carry “mangoes, yams, cho-cho, salt-fish, plantains, callaloo, goat meat, and Jamaican curry to rub it with” (65). Though she originally brings these things home to share with her family, a comment from her neighbor regarding the smell makes her stop. And, though she still visits the stores on her own, she does not take her daughters with her, nor does she bring anything home any more. Thus, Kitty is once again complicit in Boy’s racism in America the way she had been in Jamaica.⁸³

⁸³ It seems noteworthy that the reason Kitty agrees to come to America is that Miss Mattie dies and that her death is announced by dogs barking, which Dorothy reminds her they were taught about in their childhood (67). Even though Kitty acknowledges this folk wisdom rather than dismissing it as Boy does, saying that Dorothy is mad, when she wonders if the dogs bring news of Mattie’s death, “She [speaks] to her [Dorothy] exclusively, as if this would be her own loss entirely, not giving room at all to the fact that Dorothy had been one of Miss Mattie’s adoptions, and that Kitty and Dorothy had wet the same bed when they were small” (70). So, even in her adherence to a culture which her colonial school teacher dismissed as “bunga nonsense” (69) in her childhood, she still holds to her class privilege in her adulthood.

Despite Boy's eagerness to fit into America, the Savages do not find it to be the land of opportunity they believed it would be since "the jobs at the laundry [are] the only jobs available to the Savages. An education in colonial schools, Jesuit or otherwise, did not seem to go very far here" (74). Kitty's job includes putting notes from Mrs. White, "the imaginary wife of an imaginary man conceived by Mr. B" (73), into the laundry. Mr. B also creates a personality and philosophy for Mrs. White using the rhetoric of colonization and patriarchy since it stresses a "duty to make her husband's shirts, their crispness and their stiffness, a matter of her primary concern" (73). Moreover, the word "*sanitary*" operates as "a keystone . . . to Mr. B." while the image of Mrs. White—"An older woman with gentle gray curls, pink skin, two places on either cheek where the pink deepened slightly, soft rounded bosom, small mouth" (74)—exemplifies a neo-colonial version of Victoria, who is described in *Abeng* as "a rather plain little white woman The whitest woman in the world" whose "portrait . . . hung in banks, department stores, grocery stores, schools, government buildings, and homes" (5). Just as Victoria symbolically watches over the colonies and upholds "the Victorian mania for cleanliness" (*Abeng* 18), so, too, does the imaginary Mrs. White keep watch over the laundry and ensures that "sanitary" conditions are maintained. It is not surprising, then, that Kitty has such a visceral reaction to this image and eventually takes action to speak out against racism.

The racism of white people, like the manager at the bank who dismisses her because of her accent as well as the lack of solidarity she feels with the African American

women she works with who will talk with each other but not with her (77),⁸⁴ instigates Kitty's protest through Mrs. White. In her first protest, Kitty changes one of the notes from Mrs. White to read "EVER TRY CLEANSING YOUR MIND OF HATRED? THINK OF IT" (78).⁸⁵ Significantly, immediately after Kitty's first politically motivated and socially conscious action (her thoughts prior to this have been those of sympathy but not *action* to stop the conditions which cause her sadness), she begins her period on the subway going to the shops which remind her of home. This seems very reminiscent of Clare's beginning her period the morning after she has the talk with Winifred and the dream about Zoe. It seems that for Cliff, resistance is something that is intimately connected with the female body in the same way that colonization was, both literally and metaphorically figured. However, unlike Clare, who seeks a kind of female solidarity in a dream about Zoe but ultimately has to tend to her menstruating body on her own, Kitty finds a connection through the ministrations of a fellow island woman who removes the stain from Kitty's skirt and who tells her about La Morenita, "the little dark one. They say she was cut from the life. From ebony" (80).⁸⁶ With this kind of camaraderie, Kitty becomes bolder in her resisting behavior, writing notes like "WE CAN CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES BUT NOT YOUR HEART WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACK-HEARTED MARCUS GARVEY WAS RIGHT" (81). Kitty's intrepid criticism of

⁸⁴ This treatment echoes what Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* experiences when she is ostracized because of the stereotypes about Haitians having body odor and AIDS.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, after Kitty does this, she wonders if she is going crazy like "one of the women at home who talked to lizards and duppies" (78), which is a reference to Mad Hannah whom Clare talks to in *Abeng*. This seems to be a suggestion that those who are often considered by society to be crazy are the ones with revolutionary potential like Christopher and Josephus discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁶ This image of a powerful female deity who gives strength for resistance (it is after her dream about La Morenita that Kitty leaves Boy to go back to America) seems reminiscent of Erzulie's powers for Sophie and Martine in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

American racism in these notes suggests that understanding and solidarity can lead to greater action, which becomes an important factor in Clare's own resisting behavior when she returns to Jamaica at the end of the novel. Kitty's connection with another island woman along with her commitment to act against racism provides her the strength to leave Boy and return to her home in Jamaica.

When Kitty tells Boy that she wants to leave, she says, "Busha is maybe time we cut the cotta . . . [,] addressing him as overseer, with reference to divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors" (82), thereby indicting him for the first time for his willingness to pass and for his complicity in the violence enacted on their ancestors during slavery. She follows this encounter with her most blatant act of resistance to the white authority embodied in Mrs. White when she writes her final note saying, "HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER" (83). Soon after, Kitty goes back to Jamaica and takes Jenny with her, leaving Clare behind with her father.

Though no clear date is given in the text for when Kitty leaves, it seems to be around 1962, the year of Jamaica's independence from Britain, which furthers the metaphor of Boy and Kitty's marriage as a parallel to the relationship between England and Jamaica. Kitty has broken free from Boy by returning to Jamaica without him, but since the "cotta remains intact" (100), their severed relationship also mirrors what the narrator of *Abeng* calls "Independence-in-practically-name-only" (5). Moreover, since Kitty leaves Clare behind because she "favor buckra, and fe you Daddy" (105), she maintains the color hierarchy in her family that continued in Jamaica after independence as well.

Kitty's absence and her later death force Clare to try to "settle into life with her father" (96). As in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, when Frieda's mother has to "die" for her to come to terms with her father, Clare's mother must be absent for her to understand Boy fully, and to see him for who and what he really is. She is able to do this because, like Mr. Shenton, Boy tries to acclimate Clare to her more privileged "white" life by enrolling her in a prestigious school. Also like Mr. Shenton, Boy is seduced by the promise that light skin can bring upward mobility, and he pursues it by drawing on the heritage of his white ancestors. However, like Frieda, Clare soon realizes that these promises are empty since they will only allow her to go as far as those in power are willing to allow her, for the principal tells them that "it [is] a matter of course in New York City schools to have foreign students begin a year behind so they wouldn't get 'lost'" (97). She dismisses any claim to an exception Clare might have by virtue of her superior education because she is "white chocolate" (99) and therefore does not belong.

Boy's reluctance to address or to take a stand against the school's racism along with the burgeoning civil rights struggle in America cause Clare to question once again her position when the 1963 church bombs kill two African American girls who, like Anne Frank, are close to her age. Once again, historical realities inspire Clare to doubt what her father has taught her about "invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (100) and to sympathize with Kitty's position on racial issues which Boy condemns, telling her that she is "too much like [her] mother for [her] own good" (102). This interruption of history and her educational experiences cause Clare, like Frieda, to feel disconnected from her family and to go to England in search of a sense of belonging.

Indeed, like Frieda, Clare also tries to negotiate her alienated position from Jamaica and from her people through sex, when on a visit from university to Jamaica, she has sex with Paul even though she has no sense of connection to him. The next day, when she hears the news that Paul and his family have been murdered, she feels “shock but not real sorrow” (89). Clare does understand the reactions of other light-skinned, privileged Jamaicans as ignorant since they call “the murders of the night before the *latest incident*” (89). Their reaction reminds her of her mother’s family who, though they dislike Boy and blame him for Kitty’s death, still prize her “white” looking features and try to claim them for their side of the family by saying that “Clare’s face [is] the dead-stamp of Kitty, lightening her . . . in death” (118). Thus, they refuse to acknowledge the possibility of their position being compromised, in the same way that Mr. Shenton dismisses Henry’s revolutionary activities in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*. Despite her understanding of their ignorance and the revolutionary impetus implicit in these violent acts, Clare, like Frieda, chooses to ignore them and returns “to the motherland and graduate school, and [tries] to forget the details” (90). However, just as there is a revolution in South Africa which Frieda chooses to ignore, there is also a kind of revolution going on in Jamaica since there are people who are willing to question the race and class divisions inherent in their society.

Christopher, who murders the family who takes him in as a servant after he has been left alone for two years subsequent to his grandmother’s death, is the most radical example of a person who takes violent action. Christopher is plagued by the idea that his grandmother’s spirit is unable to rest because “De government men tek her body away fe bury dem say” (40). Like Hannah in *Abeng*, Christopher as a poor child of eight does not

have the means to give her a proper burial. After being assured many years later by a police man in a bar that he could reclaim his grandmother's remains and give her a proper burial, Christopher goes to the family "to ask fe a lickle parcel fe him grandmother He convinced himself that he would not be refused. And yet he had nothing to base his conviction on—except it seemed fair to him—who had never experienced a piece of fairness in him life" (45). Assured by the idea that he has made a reasonable request, Christopher feels justified in the violence he enacts on the family after their refusal. Kathleen Renk asserts that "it is suggested that the silent voice of the powerless grandmother instigates the violence. No longer able to bear the injustices suffered by him and his grandmother, Christopher acts on her behalf and on behalf of other silenced, forgotten, marginalized women, enacting a swift vengeance against those who oppressed them" (59). Additionally, the narrator's injunction following the accounts of Christopher's murders that "They must turn the damn thing upside down. Fight fire with fire. Burn. Yes, burn it down" (50) aligns Christopher with Fanon's assertion in *Wretched of the Earth* that "The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists" (37).

Along with his grandmother's "instigation" of violence is the idea that Christopher has been equipped to question the position of authority Mas Charles adopts with him because he had been taught by Brother Josephus as a child to question colonial representations of Jesus. Josephus asserts that Jesus is black and that he looks like Christopher (36). Thus, Brother Josephus, in a similar fashion to Tambu's mother in *Nervous Conditions*, understands that valorizing white ideals corrupts and causes dis-ease

when he says, “de ones who mixed, de ones who talk ‘my white grandmother’ or ‘my English father’—dese ones carry Satan in dem blood. Jus’ so . . . jus’ like dem would carry typhoid . . . cancer . . . for it eat at dem. Dem cyan help demselves, but dem is tainted” (38).⁸⁷

Additionally, Christopher’s actions serve as a precursor to Clare’s own resistance, for she finally makes her choice to return to Jamaica after Harry/Harriet sends her a letter detailing a “day of national mourning” when “We are supposed to be remembering, through our hypocrisy, the 167 old women who burned up in a fire started by some bastard One side wish to bring shame ‘pon the other so them set fire to some old women Is how long we must endure?” (160). At this time, though, Clare ignores the happenings in Jamaica and even her mother’s injunction in her last letter to “someday help [her] people” which the narrator explains as “A reminder . . . never to 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). Instead, she returns to England to immerse herself in books and European history.

However, several things happen during her time in England that make her not only question her privileged position as someone who could pass as white but to reject it and choose to identify instead with her blackness and her repressed history. The first happens when she sees a brooch which “had the Cross of Lorraine on the front of it, along with the word *Résistez*” (112). Clare feels drawn to the brooch because of “The sense of cause—clear-cut, heroic—one she could not join” (112). Though Clare does not

⁸⁷ Interestingly, aspiring to a privileged position through “Englishness” is once again compared to cancer. See chapter two for a fuller discussion of this idea.

buy the brooch, she recognizes in this failure something to be added to “her list of regrets” which includes not “[bucking] her father and [joining] a demonstration decrying the murder of Dr. King . . . [;] [not being] as dark as her sister, mother . . . [and] that she allowed the one to become confused with the other, and so lessen her” (113). With these thoughts, Clare becomes more like her mother in her desire to speak out against injustices and her lack of conviction to move to action. Significantly, in a flash-forward to the present time, the narrator says “*Résistez*. What else was there? Now, on this truck . . . she might think of Lorraine” (113), suggesting that her final act will serve as the action she should have taken so many times before but failed to do.

The second incident which pushes Clare closer to her resistance in that truck occurs when she reads *Jane Eyre* and realizes that “she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English. No, . . . try Bertha . . . Yes, Bertha was closer to the mark. Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimaron. All Bertha. All Clare” (116).⁸⁸ Significantly, Clare has this realization after she believes that someone has come to visit her despite the fact that she has made no friends or connections since living in England. The person who mistakenly stops at her boarding house happens to be an African, suggesting that Clare is developing a kind of unconscious connection with black people. This connection will eventually turn into a collective memory when she finally commits to the cause of resistance and claims, “When I study Tom Cringle’s silk cotton tree, I wonder about the fact that I have never been able to bear a necklace around my throat . . . not even a scarf” (194). This sense of connection Clare feels causes her to

⁸⁸ This passage also contains references to Bertha being “wild-maned,” and Clare remembers that her father was “Forever after her to train her hair. His visions of orderly pageboy . . . She refused . . . [holding] to her curls . . . Beloved racial characteristic” (116), which is strikingly similar to Mr. Shenton’s desire for Frieda’s hair not to betray racial markers and Frieda’s later decision to embrace and wear an afro.

spend the “next three days watching for a black taxicab and listening for them when it became dark. No one came” (116). This sense of abandonment causes her to suppress once again her desire to be connected to her black heritage since she applies “to an institute to study the artifacts of a small group of people who lived several hundred years before” (117).

The third occurrence in Clare’s developing political consciousness happens when she goes with her friend, Liz, to a reunion between her and her old school friends. What seems to persuade Clare to go with Liz is her description of the school which brings back quick, vivid “memories of *School Friends*, the comic book which arrived each month in Jamaica” which contained “images of a *real* girls’ school” (134). Once again, Clare seeks identification in what she has been taught to valorize and understand as “real” culture, but, like the history that would not be kept down in *Abeng*, she is once more confronted by another historical figure who suffered under the dual oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy. The information Clare finds about the statue of Pocahontas when she leaves the group for a walk indicates that Pocahontas was twenty when she was “Found . . . [and] tamed, renamed Rebecca” (136). Like Anne Frank and the girls in the church bombing, Pocahontas was about Clare’s age, thus inspiring a kind of identification for Clare who seems to be developing an increasingly acute Diaspora consciousness that recognizes a kind of fealty with all oppressed people and particularly women.⁸⁹ As Belinda Edmondson notes, Cliff “rewrites white creole history of privilege and collaboration to integrate it with the unwritten black and Amerindian histories of

⁸⁹ Interestingly, what Clare learns about Pocahontas is similar to what Rhys envisions happening to Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when she is also “tamed” for a while by a British man who renames her and takes her to England where she dies, thereby furthering her connection to Clare through Bertha in *Jane Eyre*.

suffering and resistance” (185). Cliff, in writing thus about Clare, acknowledges that “When Clare Savage recognizes Pocahontas in that graveyard in Gravesend she makes a choice, begins a series of choices, which will take her from the mother country back to the country of her grandmother, her own” (268).

Though Clare does not make the choice to leave right away, a demonstration by the National Front a few months later prompts her to admit to a schoolmate, presumably for the first time since telling Winifred, that she is part black. Significantly, Clare feels as though she *has* to say something, not only to the schoolmate whom she barely knows but also to Liz, who suggests that Clare is “hardly the sort they were ranting on about” (139). Clare understands this comment as well as Liz’s response to Clare’s claim that she is “by blood . . . the sort they . . . were ranting on about” that her “blood has thinned, or thickened” (139) to indicate that she and others believe that Clare is somehow different or better by virtue of her white blood—an idea her father has always espoused and which she now categorically rejects.

Immediately after this incident, Clare receives a letter from Harry/Harriet encouraging her to come home because “Jamaica needs her children”; however, instead of responding to this request, Clare begins a relationship with Bobby, a wounded African American soldier, thereby deferring her action from Jamaica but also assuaging her guilt about inaction by trying to “heal” a wounded black man who does not share her history since she is “drawn to him as a friend; later, lover. But also as protector and healer. She felt her petty, private misery recede, faced with the concreteness of his broken skin” (145). Clare tells Bobby about her life-long struggle with having to negotiate between her two identities as well as her anger with her father for not listening to Kitty and

returning to Jamaica, which choice provided the impetus for Clare's wandering and her desire to connect with something that always seems elusive to her since "home . . . [is] something in [her] head" (153).

When Clare becomes pregnant, she learns, like Frieda, that her pregnancy speaks to the impossibility of their relationship, for Bobby, and therefore their child, is corrupted by the chemicals he was exposed to in Vietnam. The narrator implies that he had to deal with the chemicals more closely than others because of his race. As M. M. Adjarian contends, "both [Clare and Bobby] have been damaged by British and/or American (neo)colonial projects—the Caribbean conquest, the Vietnam War—and the racial domination and brutalization to which those projects gave rise. Any child of theirs would therefore be malformed in body and spirit and represent the imperial malady that infects them both" (41). Bobby understands this reality and eventually goes insane and leaves after telling Clare about his experiences in war. However, his abandonment is not what draws Clare back to Jamaica; it is yet another letter from Harry/Harriet that brings her home.

Indeed, Clare's friendship with Harry/Harriet is the most deciding factor in her commitment to resistance. In Harry/Harriet, Clare finds the kind of solidarity that Nyasha and Tambu lose when Tambu goes to Sacred Heart and that Frieda might have had with Moira if she had allowed herself to follow her example. At this point, Clare becomes the most actively resistant character examined in this project, suggesting that commitment and political consciousness must be coupled with solidarity in order to effect any kind of active resistance.

Harry/Harriet makes Clare feel comfortable and allows her to connect with her Jamaican culture: “Her twang was coming back, rapidly, in Harry/Harriet’s presence, voice breaking the taboo of speaking bad. Discouraged among her people” (121). Myriam Chancy contends that Clare’s revised speech aligns Harry/Harriet with Zoe, with whom Clare also spoke patois in her childhood (161). Harry/Harriet also teaches Clare to question the version of colonial education he received when he tells her that “my twelve-year-old self couldn’t comprehend why it so gold if dem keep slave . . . if dem women lock up so. Why Jamaica den nuh golden, eh?” (123). Even though Harry/Harriet is mixed, he was not granted the privileged position that Clare had as a child since his “mumma was a maid, and [his] father, her employer” (124), which puts him in a position to question that Clare never had and affords him the opportunity to identify with his mother, also something Clare was denied. As a result, he possesses insight into Clare’s struggles with identity, knowing, for instance, that her sympathy for the orphaned children she sees at Christmas stems from her discomfort at their being light-skinned when “such children are born to be prized, loved” (126). Harry/Harriet understands and warns Clare about the inherent danger in light-skinned people adopting the ways of the past under colonization when he says, “we have taken the master’s place as our own. That is the danger” (127). In this way, he becomes the representative of Cliff’s own feelings about the color hierarchy in Jamaica discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

Not only does Harry/Harriet have the ability to question his position because of the unequal power relationships between his parents, he also experienced colonial patriarchal violence at the hands of the man who raped him when he was “ten years old and guilty that a big man in khaki uniform, braided and bemedaled, in the garrison of Her

Majesty, did to me what he did” (128). His insight into this experience allows him to identify with female oppression when he tells Clare, “I have been tempted in my life to think *symbol*—that what he did to me is but a symbol for what they do to all of us, always bearing in mind that some of us, many of us, also do it to each other. But that’s not right. I only suffered what my mother suffered—no more, no less” (129).⁹⁰ He goes on to say that this experience did not make him who he is since he “was born this way . . . Not just sun, but sun and moon” (128), thereby claiming his own identity and refusing to allow his attacker any power in determining who he is. Clare identifies with Harry/Harriet because he, too, is a hybrid, liminal person who is “neither one thing nor the other” (131). While Clare finds comfort in this connection, Harry/Harriet understands that in order to effect social change, they must “make a choice. Cast [their] lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world” (131), which Clare understands as the need to choose her dark heritage of poverty and oppression since she “could feel the tint of her skin deepening, melanin rising to the occasion” (131). She understands that she must identify with this position in order to speak out against the injustices enacted on this group of people.

Significantly, Harry/Harriet solidifies his commitment to revolution by learning about the history of Jamaica through C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins* because it is “the history they didn’t teach us” (146). Thus, as Myriam Chancy contends, “Harry/Harriet accepts his fragmented identity and lives with contradiction in order to reclaim his past as well as Jamaica’s” (162). Moreover, Harry/Harriet not only learns his own history through written records, he also studies “the healing practices. At the university and with

⁹⁰ If, as I posit earlier, Boy did rape Kitty, then this aligns him with Clare’s mother as well.

the old women in the country, women who knew the properties of roots and leaves and how to apply spells effectively” (171). These women also open the way for Harry/Harriet to find the power in his liminal position as “Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors” (171). And, his choice to become female despite the fact that a “male organ swung gently under her bleached and starched skirt” (171) is like Clare’s eventual choice to identify with her blackness since, in Chancy’s words, he “claims an identity he was taught to despise, his femaleness as well as his colonized self” (161).⁹¹ These, then, are political choices which align them with the most oppressed in Jamaica—the poor, black women, whose suffering also serves as Clare’s impetus to come home. Though Clare and Harriet hide their bodies under the camouflage of clothes (skirts and military jackets, respectively), they have not escaped those bodies nor denied these aspects of their identities. Rather, they have seen that “they cyan live split” and have chosen a political identity with revolutionary potential. Interestingly, Boy’s lessons about “camouflage” and fitting in are subverted here for Clare’s act of resistance.

When Clare does return to Jamaica, she learns that she has “a raging infection in her womb” which will likely leave her sterile (169). As it was at the end of *Abeng*, “Clare’s infected womb is mirrored by the womb of Jamaica, the motherland, which is also polluted, infected by the chemical wastes of capitalist enterprise” (Walters 228). However, when she learns of her sterility, she recognizes that all of her father’s desires for her were “for naught. Lightening up. Eyes for naught. Skin for naught. Fine nose for

⁹¹ While this quote is taken from Chancy’s book, it is worth noting that “Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise” is the title of one of Cliff’s non-fiction works.

naught” (169). Thus, Clare’s body is also permanently connected to her political cause since it can no longer contribute to upholding the racial and patriarchal authority of the light-skinned elite. This realization, along with Harriet’s counsel, opens up the space for her to return to Miss Mattie’s farm and reclaim her mother along with her motherland.

Like Frieda, Clare experiences a kind of resurrection of her mother when she returns to this landscape and remembers it as the place “where she [Kitty] was alive” (173) and realizes that her conception of this land is intimately connected to finding her mother since “Here is her” (175). In writing about this moment in the novel, Cliff says, “For me the land is redolent of my grandmother and mother, it is a deeply personal connection. The same could be said of Clare Savage, who seeks out the landscape of her grandmother’s farm as she would seek out her grandmother and mother” (266). However, as Schwartz notes, “though her grandmother’s land is the site of maternal filial ties, Clare consciously *chooses* it as her home, and so it is fitting that this family property supports the resistance group’s attempt to create an imagined community based on an ethic of chosen political affiliation” (292-293). Additionally, Clare, also like Frieda, realizes that claims on nature are always unfounded when she remembers Miss Naomi, the butcher’s wife, telling her “only Massa God could posses river” (173). Like Mrs. Shenton’s explanation to Frieda that no one can own the protea bush in South Africa, so Clare’s memory along with the farm itself, which has become “ruinate,” serve as reminders that the land can become the space where barriers and divisions are potentially broken down. Technically, Clare has the power to give this land to her comrades since it belonged to her grandmother, but the description Cliff’s narrator provides of the land makes it clear that any pretense of ownership that Miss Mattie had is now gone and that nature has once

again claimed her farm. Even Miss Mattie's grave has become part of the natural landscape in the same way that Clare's body will be returned to the land at the end of the novel.

This renewed connection with the land allows Clare to take on her mother's name as her own, accepting greetings which hail her as Kitty and identifying herself to locals through her maternal line (185). More importantly, she also fulfills Kitty's dream of being a teacher and teaching her students "the history of their . . . homeland" (193) which she also claims as her own. Significantly, Clare learns this history by "[speaking] with the old people . . . [,] [studying] the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl . . . [,] [listening] to the stories about Nanny . . . [,] [swimming] underwater off the cays" (193) as well as through conventional methods. By seeking out and validating all these versions and sources of history, Clare reclaims her revolutionary past and is ready to commit herself to what Wendy Walters calls "a coalition" that protests an American film about Nanny. As Schwartz asserts, "in joining the resistance movement, Clare has both recognized her implication in the history that produced Jamaica's social division and accepted the burden of agency that accompanies her dual heritage" (293). By protesting a film, Clare and her comrades seek to preserve Nanny's legacy rather than allowing her story to be co-opted and mass produced in the service of a neo-colonialist vision of a Jamaican hero which, as my reading of *Myal* in the first chapter shows, can function as another way to alienate people from themselves and their culture.

Unfortunately, Clare's group fails since "the eventual betrayal of the resistance group by a quashee—an informant—is figured in *No Telephone to Heaven* as historically inevitable, an unavoidable parallel to the historic betrayal of Nanny" (Schwartz 301).

Cliff nevertheless envisions this ending as positive since “it completes the circle, or rather the triangle, of the character’s life. In her death, she has complete identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestor’s bones” (265). However, despite her complete identification with the land, one has to question a resolution that can only be envisioned through death in the text. As Myriam Chancy poignantly contends, “the return home becomes complicated by the gap between the dream of repatriation to our islands and/or cultures and the actualization of that dream” (165). Though Clare represents the most overt form of resistance practiced by any character examined in this project, her reclamation of an alienated identity and homeland are still somehow figured as illusive and imaginary spaces where bodily connection can come only through death and transformation of the body into something other than itself.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Evelyn O'Callaghan notes that in several texts by Caribbean women authors "the combination of racist, 'classist' and patriarchal prejudices is demonstrably detrimental to a female sense of self, and divides instead of uniting women In some cases, psychological damage is so severe as to drive female protagonists to insanity and self-destruction" (3). I have argued that this is true in the Southern African texts examined here as well. Most of the work done on postcolonial literature focusing on female narratives by women writers, even literatures of resistance, tends to focus only on the psychological impact of the dual oppressions of colonization and patriarchy. This project has sought to broaden that focus to explore how these psychological impacts also work through the body in terms of race and gender constraints, and to show how these raced and gendered bodies influence identity construction and resistance.

I have been arguing throughout, using the work of Anne McClintock and others, that British colonialism was grounded in a rhetoric of the female body, using it as a metaphor for the virgin land being penetrated by the male thrust of colonial power, which, in turn, inscribed notions of patriarchal as well as racial authority. McClintock argues, "As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries Explorers called unknown lands 'virgin' territory. Philosophers veiled 'truth' as female, then fantasized about drawing back the veil. In myriad ways women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge" (24). Moreover, the female body served in the imagination of native

patriarchy as the site where the nation would be preserved and upheld after colonization. Resisting these figurations, the female characters discussed in this project each work in some way against these literal and metaphorical constructions of the female body in the service of colonialism and patriarchy to reclaim the body for themselves and to empower it as a site of resistance. As Ketu H. Katrak asserts, “Despite tragic and negative conclusions—madness, death, suicide, other forms of social exclusion and unbelonging—in women’s texts, it is important to recognize the strategic use of those same female bodies, often the only available avenue for resistance” (5). The syncretism inherent in colonization implies that all of the characters considered here do this work of reclamation and resistance from within a culturally and/or racially hybrid space, and, as I have shown, with varying degrees of success. Therefore, even the characters who are not of mixed-race identity, like Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, and Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, still occupy an “in-between” or third space of hybridity, which Bhabha contends is important because “it bears traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (qtd. in Rutherford 211). As people who have been alienated from their native culture through colonial education, as is the case with Tambu, Nyasha, and Sophie, or, as is the case with Mrs. Curren, as a person who does not belong to the Nationalist Party because she is an

English speaking, intellectual opponent of apartheid, these characters also inhabit what Bhabha terms a “new identification.”

As people profoundly influenced by colonial ideology, specifically through education, these characters are also exposed to colonial and Victorian notions of sexuality, which subject them to gender constraints as well as to racist notions about female, and especially black female, sexuality. As Katrak notes, “the ideological baggage that British colonizers imposed, for instance, a gendered English education that conflicted with indigenous cultural norms, [results] in forms of cultural alienation for female subjects. Further, colonial education policies collude effectively with indigenous patriarchal norms to control female sexuality” (15). Thus, it becomes even more important for these characters to reclaim their bodies, not only from racist, colonial ideas about their racial and cultural identities but from patriarchal ideas about their gendered identities as well. So, for Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* and Ella in *Myal*, their diseased and life-stealing pregnancies refigure the way that the maternal body is commodified as a site to reproduce children for the nation, testifying, instead, to the corruption and sickness inherent in the colonial system which, in turn, breeds isolation and illness. Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* and Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* empower, albeit self-destructively, the sexualized black female body by asserting their own control over what enters and leaves those bodies, which regimen defies the patriarchal and colonial controls over their sexual bodies. Finally, Frieda in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and Clare in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* have the chance to reclaim their racialized, and therefore also sexually coded, bodies for the cause of resistance against these dual oppressions by choosing to identify with and perform the role of black femininity,

thereby actively working against the systems of racial hierarchy in their respective countries.

Additionally, the authors discussed in chapters three and four all write from a semi-autobiographical standpoint, which, as O'Callaghan makes clear, “‘allow[s] a sort of re-vision, a radical reshaping of a life, seen and recounted from the inside.’ It is also the case that such ‘confessional’ or intimate narratives prove to be as much exploration of national and political as of personal concerns” (7). Thus, this approach affords each author the chance to reclaim and retell her story as well as the “herstory” of her respective country through the body of the text, even as the protagonists seek to reclaim their bodies through the course of the narratives. In this way, these authors also equate the female bodies of their protagonists with the land; however, by making them the narrators of their own stories (this is true for all but Clare in Cliff's novels) and agents of their own resistance, they write a new kind of empowered and resisting history onto these bodies rather than representing their characters and the land to which their stories are connected as passive receptors of the thrust of colonial and patriarchal authority.

Since these regions share a history of British colonization⁹² as well as comparable backgrounds in the way that race and power, especially gendered power, relations developed under that colonization, there are many similarities in the ways that these authors envision the female body as a site of resistance. Further, understanding how these “systems of domination”⁹³ operated in similar ways and created similar responses in these regions and from these particular authors makes this an important and relevant

⁹² See the introduction for a justification of including a novel from Haiti even though the British did not colonize it.

⁹³ I borrow this term from bell hooks in a lecture delivered at the University of Tennessee on April 5, 2006.

project since it foregrounds the systematic racism *and* sexism inherent in colonization while also illuminating empowered responses to that domination through the female body. Exploring the ways that other African writers like Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi as well other Caribbean authors such as Jamaica Kincaid, Merle Hodges, and Paule Marshall treat the female body in their works would be an interesting way to expand this project for future research. Additionally, examining the ways that authors from other areas colonized by the British, such as India and Australia, envision the female body in their texts would also be an exciting future project.

While I highlight the similarities of response and resistance in texts from the Caribbean and Southern Africa throughout this project, as I make clear in the introduction, these regions cannot be made monolithic, nor can one hegemonic response to British colonization be posited. Indeed, in the Caribbean, identity formation, as Stuart Hall and others point out, is even more vexed than for people in Africa since people from the Caribbean have been doubly displaced from their origins in Africa and by British (or in the case of Haiti, French) colonial rule. Patrick Colm Hogan argues that the “conviction that one has no identity, no real cultural home . . . appears to be particularly common in Caribbean literature, unsurprisingly, given the high degree of severance experienced by all colonized people in the region” (17), and Evelyn O’Callaghan makes a similar point with regard to female-authored Caribbean texts. This dual displacement intrinsic to Caribbean identity often manifests itself in fragmented notions of self, which are then reflected in fragmented narratives. This certainly holds true for Erna Brodber’s

Myal and for Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, discussed in chapters one and three, respectively.

While Hogan and O'Callaghan both also note that this fragmented sense of self often leads to madness for many characters in Caribbean texts, it is relevant to the texts discussed here that a negotiation with the three aspects of Caribbean identity, which Stuart Hall calls "*Présence Africaine, Présence Européenne, and Présence Américaine*" (116-119), seems to make the characters under consideration here more amenable to a kind of productive hybridity that leads to at least moderate success in terms of their resistance as well. Ella in *Myal* learns to teach against the colonial text through a collaborative effort between the people of Grovestown inhabited by ancient spirits and the minister's white, British wife, Maydene. Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* comes to terms with her sexual abuse and alienation from her mother through counseling in the United States and with the help of a support group made up of women from various places in the previously British colonized world as well as with help from her grandmother and her aunt in Haiti. Sophie also resolves to enact a kind of productive resistance to the colonial and patriarchal legacy that sanctioned her abuse by vowing to teach her daughter about her connection to Haiti; in essence, she resolves to reinforce a sense of a *mother* country without continuing the abuse of her biological mother. Finally, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare learns the lessons of history presented throughout the text of *Abeng* and, like Ella, uses them to teach Jamaican children about their own history, rather than the colonial version of history they learn at school. Moreover, Clare joins a group of rebels made up of people from all races and colors, thereby representing a truly hybrid resistance to the American film about Nanny and the representation of her

ancestry it seeks to portray. Thus, all the texts by Caribbean authors discussed here endow their characters with the agency to *act* while at the same time they envision a positive collaboration between different groups of people to enact a resistance born of hybridity.

On the other hand, the texts from Southern Africa are not quite as successful in the way these hybrid collaborations are figured in the conclusions their authors imagine for their characters. Rather than developing fully the characters' *actions* against the dual oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy, most of the characters' development stops at the level of raised consciousness and political awareness. Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* learns about the harsh realities of apartheid for those classified as other than white, and she confronts her own complicity in that system as well. However, while her "education" comes from an alliance with several black men, she never overcomes her ingrained racist thinking so that she can actively join the cause of resistance to the apartheid system. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha does resist through her bulimic behavior; however, unlike Sophie, she does not project a positive future for herself from her confrontation with the colonial past that serves as the impetus for her breakdown. Additionally, by the end of the novel, Tambu has gained an awareness that causes her to question her colonial education, but she does not teach against it the way that several characters in texts from the Caribbean do. Finally, Frieda in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* ends her narrative without definitively returning to South Africa to oppose apartheid actively. Like Clare in Cliff's novels, she realizes the political necessity of choosing a black identity and returning to the country of her birth. However, unlike Clare, she never acts on this awareness within the text.

These disparities in the ways that authors from the Caribbean and Southern Africa portray their characters' resistance invite some speculation as to why, given all the similarities foregrounded throughout this study, authors from the Caribbean take their characters farther toward positive resolution than do authors from Southern Africa. While any conclusions I can offer are only conjectural, it seems likely that the dates of independence in these two regions have some bearing on the level of resistance imagined by these authors. Jamaica achieved independence from the British Empire in 1962, much earlier than Zimbabwe, while Haiti also gained independence very early in 1804 from the French. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, was one of the last countries in Africa to gain independence, which did not happen until 1980, while apartheid in South Africa was not officially abolished until 1991, and it was not until 1994 that South Africa held its first free democratic elections.

While the authors from the Caribbean experienced more years of independence than those from Southern Africa, none of the texts under consideration here portrays a fully realized, positive resistance to colonial and patriarchal authority. Mrs. Curren dies at the end of *Age of Iron*, as do Bheki and John; however, the apartheid system that causes Mrs. Curren's illness and which Bheki and John resist does not die with them. Ella learns in *Myal* to teach an empowered reading of the story of the farm animals to the children of Grovetown, but Selwyn has commodified and immortalized her memories, and, therefore, part of her identity, in his film based on his racist play, *Caribbean Nights and Days*. Nyasha's health and future hang in the balance at the end of *Nervous Conditions*, and Tambu's educational future also remains uncertain. Moreover,

Dangarembga's sequel to the novel remains unpublished (and possibly unwritten?).⁹⁴

Sophie resolves in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* to teach Brigitte that she is a daughter of Haiti, but she has not overcome her own bulimia, nor has she reconciled her relationship with Joseph. Frieda tells her mother in the final chapter of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* that she will likely return to South Africa, but other indications in the text suggest that this may be an idle promise. Clare does return to Jamaica and becomes the most actively resistant character of any in these novels; however, she and her rebel group are betrayed by a *quashee* and are killed. Thus, it seems that all of these authors' "unfinished" narratives indicate an intrinsic inability to attain what Stuart Hall calls a "return to the beginning," which then can be read as something like "the imaginary in Lacan—it can neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery—in short, the reservoir of our . . . narratives" (Hall 120). While this idea of a return as something that can never be completely attained does make sense in the texts considered here, I would also argue that these authors' inability to imagine a fully realized, positive resistance speaks to the continuing legacy of colonial policies and education that instilled notions of racial, class, and gender hierarchies that still persist.

In fact, when I lived in Bophuthatswana, then a homeland state for the Setswana tribe, in apartheid South Africa, I attended a racially segregated school wherein I was required to learn Afrikaans while Setswana was never mentioned despite the fact that the country was governed by a Setswana president, Lucas Mangope. Moreover, I was

⁹⁴ Dangarembga stated in an interview with Seal Press, included in the 2001 printing of the novel, that she was working on a sequel to *Nervous Conditions* (205).

required to learn the South African national anthem “Die Stem” in English as well as Afrikaans and was regularly asked to pledge allegiance to the Nationalist Party during school assemblies. However, I learned Bophuthatswana’s national anthem only when our school choir was invited to perform at the South African embassy in Bophuthatswana. Had it not been for my conversational knowledge of Setswana, which came as a result of attending an all Setswana church where my father preached every week in Setswana, I would have mangled the words along with all of my other choirmates the way that our choir teacher taught them to us.

Aside from the incredible disrespect for the language and culture of the country where we lived demonstrated in these aspects of my elementary school education, even more reprehensible is that fact that the only history I was taught centered on the Dutch East India Company and Jan van Riebeeck, Peit Retief and the Great Trek, and the 1820 settlers and Lord Charles Somerset. None of my classes covered any history pertaining to the indigenous peoples of South Africa except to convince us that we could not go outside during recess on the anniversary of one of the particularly bloody battles between the British and the Zulus since they might retaliate against us as we were students in an all-white school. Despite the fact that there were very few Zulu people in Bophuthatswana as it was a Setswana homeland, and regardless of the brutalities enacted by the British on the Zulu people, we were taught to fear an unreasonable and unrealistic threat from vicious and vengeful black bodies without ever once being asked to consider the circumstances which might have prompted such an attack, thereby reinforcing the notion of black people as savages who always already sought to harm innocent white children. Since the free elections in 1994, race relations have improved. However, I

would add that on a recent trip to South Africa in December of 2004, while I was pleasantly surprised by the many changes that have occurred during the era of a “New South Africa” in the eleven years since I had been there, the tensions attendant to the corporeal reminders of privilege and power were palpable in almost every situation. In other words, the reality of raced bodies still continues to breed strife, and though apartheid is now a part of history, the painful wounds this system inflicted cannot soon heal.

It is a sad testament to the corrupt nature of colonial education that I did not know or learn about much of the history of the country I consider to be my home until I began graduate work in America; and while I do not claim the same positionality as the authors discussed here, I find it worth noting that my experience of encountering “my” history in a country not my home is not unlike the way that several characters in these novels, such as Ella in *Myal*, Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, and Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, learn about, or at least are made more conscious of, their own histories as well. The alienation of colonial education continues throughout the postcolonial world.

While my own experiences with colonial education as well as the estrangement a similar kind of colonial education causes for the characters in these novels is reprehensible, the consequences of the legacy of mistrust felt for this corrupt system and still experienced in the lived realities of women throughout the “Third World” make the subject of this dissertation even more politically relevant and urgent. One particularly disturbing example of these consequences is the way that the black female bodies of children in South Africa are treated as a result of myths surrounding AIDS and its cure. With the AIDS epidemic claiming thousands of lives and in light of a deep-seated

skepticism about Western education and medicine, particularly with regards to sexuality, black female bodies are subject to abuse and exploitation because of myths that AIDS can be cured by having sex with a virgin. The easy acceptance by some of this myth and the brutalities to female children it allows indicate that an empowered sense of female bodies as valuable and viable in their own right has not yet occurred. This project, along with the very important work of author Ketu H. Katrak, whose book *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World* was recently published by Rutgers University Press, highlights the need to make the female body central in postcolonial scholarship and political activism so that we can someday inhabit a world in which the notion of a self-determined female identity that does not result from some prior harm to the body might find voice in the world of fiction and in reality.

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