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“The Place My Grandmother Made”: Cultural Genealogy and Home in Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*

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A study of Michelle Cliff’s use of her own genealogical and historical origins to chart the emergence of female resistance in Jamaica. Focusing on the Clare Savage novels, *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, this essay traces the cultural and semantic spaces of home for her thinly-veiled autobiographical protagonist.

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> "I grew up partly in the United States, I was educated in London, and I originated in Jamaica, so I can't limit myself to one place." – Michelle Cliff, Interview[1]

> "I and Jamaica is who I am. No matter how far I travel—how deep the ambivalence I feel about returning. And Jamaica is a place in which we/they/I connect and disconnect" – Michelle Cliff, *Land of Look Behind*[2]

In her novel *Abeng*, Michelle Cliff introduces readers to an autobiographical figure for herself in Clare Savage, a young Creole girl who spends her pre-independence coming of age in Jamaica completely unaware of the island's pre-colonial history. Through the narrator's genealogical storytelling about the rebel women of Clare's West Indian ancestry, the official discourse of British aristocracy with which Clare has been expected to identify as a child of British colonialism slowly unravels. It isn't until the concluding chapters of *Abeng's* sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, that an adult Clare is able to trace a complete path through her awakening to racial, gender, and economic oppression. This path, which is very similar to Cliff's, begins in Jamaica, the island of her birth, moves on to the pre-civil rights South of the United States, then takes her to Oxford University for an education at the seat of the colonial empire, and finally back to Jamaica to join a group of rebels fighting for independence. To prove her loyalty to the resistance, Clare tells the rebels that she considers herself Jamaican although she has lived in many places. One rebel leader who questions Clare's origins comments, "You stress place."[3] But it is only shortly before she dies in rebel crossfire that Clare begins to "stress place" and realize that her strongest connection to the island has always been to a piece of land belonging to her grandmother — what she calls "my allegiance to the place my grandmother made."[4] Through this declaration, she refers not only to the actual coffee cooperative she inherits from her grandmother, Miss Mattie, whose "labor of love" provided for people in need, but also to a less tangible place in a matrifocal genealogy of women ancestors who have defended Jamaica and its inhabitants against colonialism and slavery, thus, making it a home for future descendants.[5] In this claim on her inheritance, Clare voices her sense of belonging to a physical place on the island, but more importantly, to a genealogical home among the rebel women in her cultural ancestry.

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1 Meryl Schwartz, "An Interview with Michelle Cliff." *Contemporary Literature* 34 no. 4 (1993): 597.
2 Michelle Cliff, *The Land of Look Behind* (New York: Firebrand, 1985), 76.
3 Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York: Dutton, 1987), 189.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

My reading of Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and its sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven,* suggests that through Clare, a character Françoise Lionnet has referred to as "a thinly disguised alter ego of the author," Cliff engages in the autobiographical act of constructing a genealogy of colonial and pre-colonial rebel women for her protagonist as well as for herself.[6] Together, these novels enact a "performative rewriting" of the colonial influences on a mutual ancestry of women resisting enslavement, colonialism, and patriarchal domination.[7] The use of cultural genealogy as an autobiographical act of self-construction permits readers to see that the contested concepts of "self" and "home" are more than analogous; they are mutually constitutive. Cliff's genealogical tracings prove to be a powerful autobiographical method of simultaneously creating both a "home" and a "self" within a shared network of cultural kinship. It is within this network of places, to echo Clare's sentiment, "made" by their grandmothers, that they both must travel in order to actively participate in their own self-construction. Rather than insert her characters into a phenomena of existing collective homes out there in a diaspora of static historical pathways, Cliff is engaged in the creation, transmission, bequest and inheritance of homes made by figural mothers in an extended cultural genealogy she shares with Clare.

While the spatial relationship between the cultural "self" and the ancestral "home" have been and continue to be elaborated and complicated in discourses of post-colonialism as well as in studies of African and Caribbean diasporas, it is important to examine Cliff's attention to these concepts as invested in autobiographical acts of establishing genealogies as home. In doing so, one must acknowledge that however fraught with tensions between writing the self and writing the self among others, the construction of a genealogically-informed selfhood through the devices of lifewriting permits not only innovative frameworks for constructing identity but also new paradigms for autobiographical representation.

Like her protagonist, Cliff identifies as a white Creole whose fair complexion belies her Afro-Caribbean ancestry and makes her what Helen Tiffin would consider a conspicuous "double outsider."[8] Born and raised in Jamaica, where she spent considerable time on her grandmother's rural property, Cliff was schooled in England and currently resides in the United States. In an interview with Opal Palmer Adisa, Cliff

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[6] Françoise Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons: Language, History, and the Multicultural Subject of Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*," *De/Colonizing the Subject*. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 324.

[7] Ibid., 339.

[8] Helen Tiffin, "Mirror and Mask: Colonial motif in the novels of Jean Rhys." *World Literature Written in English*, 17 (1978): 328.

reveals that her life as a biracial Jamaican woman is shaped by a family obsessed with "family roots [which] go back to slaves and slave owners."[9] Descended from both the colonizer and the colonized, the fluid racial identity of the white Creole occupies an equally fluid realm of West Indian culture, if not West Indian literary history in which other white Creole women novelists, such as Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, stage "the profoundly ambivalent relationship of white Creole society to black West Indian society."[10] In the introduction to their anthology, *Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean*, critics Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson consider this fluidity to be a sign of Cliff's "compromised authenticity" as a West Indian writer due, in part, to her removal from the island of Jamaica as any primary or permanent home.[11] But as Suzanne Bost argues, "Cliff's work[,] while retaining roots in Jamaican culture, also moves fluidly from the Caribbean to Europe to the United States, crossing not only oceans but also borders of identity and history. She cannot be simply categorized as black or white, as Jamaican, American or European."[12] Cultural roots of her Creole identity are found in multiple physical locations throughout the diaspora but only insofar as they serve as sites of identification with a West Indian matrilineal genealogy. Various engagements with these physical locations, including their grandmother's land, provide the conditions for Cliff's autobiographical self-construction as well as her self-identification among others. Thus, Cliff is able to not only articulate an inclusive "we/they/I" of individual and collective cultural consciousness but also to situate that consciousness in multiple and frequently traversed pathways of physical landscapes and other tangible dwellings that have served as public or private homes in Cliff's and her protagonist's shared Arawak/African/English histories.

Although Cliff does not present Clare as an explicitly autobiographical character, her methods of genealogical storytelling in the Clare Savage novels reveal a shared cultural genealogy of women's resistance between Cliff and Clare. It is Clare's return to her grandmother's property, where she spent much of her childhood, which proves to be the conclusion of a long journey toward the pre-colonial "homeland and wholeness" she seeks among her figural mothers and grandmothers.[13] This journey

[9] Opal Palmer Adisa, "A Journey into Speech – A Writer between Two Worlds: An Interview with Michelle Cliff." *African American Review*, 28.2 (1994): 275.

[10] Belinda Edmondson. "Race, Writing, and the Politics of (Re)Writing History: An Analysis of the Novels of Michelle Cliff," *Callaloo*, 16:1 (1993): 181.

[11] Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson (eds) "Introduction," Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1990), xvii.

[12] Suzanne Bost. "Fluidity without Postmodernism: Michelle Cliff and the 'Tragic Mulatta' Tradition." *African American Review*, 32.4 (1998): 679.

[13] Michelle Cliff "Clare as a Crossroads Character." *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*. Sewlyn Cudjoe (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990), 265.

begins in *Abeng* when the narrator explicates Jamaican heritage as an ancestral struggle between subordination and resistance in Jamaica: "In the beginning there had been two sisters — Nanny and Sekesu. Nanny fled slavery. Sekesu remained a slave [...] It was believed that all island children were descended from one or the other."[14] In solidarity with Nanny, Cliff allies Clare with her rebel ancestor and places her on a path of self-exploration which extends beyond her individual life to encompass an entire colonial and pre-colonial history of women like Nanny, whom "they didn't teach" in Clare's parochial school.[15]

Cliff presents Clare's story not as a representation of her own autobiographical selfhood but as a vehicle for "the re-creation of a *collective* identity" rooted in a legacy they share as daughters in perpetual grieving for, reconciliation with, and return to the places in which their ancestral mothers have become lost to the future.[16] The pursuit of home through genealogy subverts the problematic nature of "return" inherent in such acts of homecoming to physical "places" of origin by relinquishing modes of nationalist discourse inherent in claiming any single national home. Cultural genealogy is a construct and a practice which brings such contested categories as "self" and "home" into focus as dwellings within actual and, in Benedict Anderson's terms, "imagined communities" which affirm both Cliff's and Clare's identities and repatriate, or re*matriate* them in cultural kinship.[17] It frees readers to think of home as a condition of fulfillment in the desire for community and not exclusively as a physical location of origin. In this way, cultural genealogy is not engaged in tracing patterns of departure and return from any single or central location of home but in the construction of selfhood within a network created and claimed by the agent. Within this network thrives the imagining of "communion" in spite of its members possibly never being, or having ever been, united in any geographical home. The elasticity of the "indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship" they share remind us that all communities are "imagined" and no "true" genealogy exists — a powerful challenge to the racist milieu of pedigree and miscegenation in which genealogy can be invoked for biracial women like Cliff and Clare. If, as Anderson suggests, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined," so, too, are the identities of these agents engaged in the creative figuration of themselves among ancestors.[18]

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[14] Michelle Cliff, *Abeng*. Plume: New York, 1995: 18.
[15] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 146.
[16] Lionnet, "Of Mangoes," 334.
[17] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.
[18] Ibid.

In the same way that cultural genealogy enables the invention of rather than the discovery of homes, it, too, enables the invention of, rather than the discovery of, an autonomous self and autobiographical narrative forms to describe it. Often such forms are not easily identifiable and do not necessarily adhere to the conventions of genre. Such autobiographical performances are the technologies of autobiography that Leigh Gilmore dubs "autobiographics": "those elements of self representation which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self derived from Augustine, not content with the literary history of autobiography, those elements that instead mark a location in a text where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge."[19] Although Cliff claims to be neither the protagonist nor the narrator of the novels, she points to Clare as a genealogical project in just such "autobiographics" of self-invention. In her interview with Meryl Schwartz, she describes these characters many times as friends, relatives and other people of personal significance. And while it is always problematic to claim a shared subjectivity between authors and their characters, Cliff invites such a reading across this two-part figural autobiography when she shares her goals for writing *Abeng*: "I was really trying to construct myself as a Jamaican. I was able then to claim the rest of the people that I happen to be as well."[20]

Cliff acknowledges the work of cultural genealogy as vital among women like Clare and like herself, for whom an ancestry of colonial resistance is grounded in the anonymous graves of the Antilles. She writes: "To write as a complete Caribbean woman [...] demands of us retracing the African part of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush."[21] Cliff demonstrates that the relationship between "self" and "home" is central to, if not constitutive of, the relationship between self and ancestors when she maps Clare's journey in a reverse chronology of the slave trade in which Clare makes attempts at homecoming to both her slave and slave-owning ancestors. In the larger framework of diaspora implied by Clare's journey, genealogy — and not location — is the central and defining force in finding home. While to suggest that people can be united by their claim to any home is overly simplistic, it is not an entirely incorrect assumption. It is the relationship between self and home that drives the creation of frameworks such as diaspora and their displaced populations. In suggesting that there is a diaspora genealogy at work in Cliff's novels, I am not arguing for the existence of any specific or actual diasporas present in the author's or her characters' ancestries.

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[19] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1994), 42.

[20] Meryl F. Schwartz, "An Interview with Michelle Cliff." *Contemporary Literature*. 34.4 (1993): 598.

[21] Michelle Cliff, "A Journey into Speech," *Multicultural Literacy*. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (St. Paul: Graywolf, 1988), 59.

While it would not be an entirely fruitless effort, it is one fraught with debate over what scholars consider diasporas and their communities to be. For Cliff, cultural ancestors are as significant as actual ancestors to Clare's construction of selfhood.

In contrast to Cliff's inclusive approach to ancestry, Clare's father, Boy Savage, introduces his daughter to her British lineage by taking her to the dilapidated mansion where his slave-holding great-grandfather, Judge Savage, once lived. Cliff portrays Boy, whose name invokes the discourse of slavery, as a character in constant denial of his African heritage. The great-grandson of a white Englishman, he often encourages his daughter to cherish her whiteness and deny her blackness. Like an anthropologist's report on ancient locations, Cliff describes Clare and Boy's return to the site of the Savage family mansion as an insider ethnography in which the descendants of a lost culture catalogue remnants of their shared past. As a return to places where their ancestors lived, Boy's and Clare's moments together on the plantation are replete with ethnographic methods of constructing genealogy, including "thick description" of the sites in which its subjects one dwelled. Cliff's narrator reminds the reader that the visit to the mansion traces not only family history but also revisits the economic and social realities of nineteenth-century slavery that shape her autobiographical protagonist's twentieth-century family. The building and its surrounding plantation are in ruins and can, therefore, no longer be easily claimed or identified as a physical home. Yet Boy uses these ruins to highlight Clare's British heritage and to encourage denial of her mother's Maroon ancestry. In Clare's examination of the property, she is discriminating about how she accepts this place as part of her family history. She is more interested in the slave quarters than in the house to which her father attaches a legacy of nobility. Her senses serve her with an alternate genealogy that counters Boy's colonial narrative of "home" as the seat of European birthright. The grounds surrounding the mansion disclose information about the Savage family slaves:

> The traces in the earth, which Clare could now see, indicated where slave cabins had been. Little more than huts really, twenty to twenty five feet long and twelve feet wide, made of wattle and plaster, with dirt floors and palm-thatched roofs. Inside, the ceiling was low – usually brushing the forehead – so the inhabitants, if they were any height at all, had to walk stooped forward.[22]

Lionnet reads this omniscient voice of *Abeng*'s narrator as Cliff's own autobiographical identity in the third person — a "protective device" that shields her from the "burden

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[22] Cliff, *Abeng*, 26.

of history."[23] Through Clare's engagement with the physical landscape of slavery within which her family's history is repressed, Cliff allows Clare to "negotiate the conflicting elements of her cultural and familial background" and intuit her sense of her belonging there.[24] Clare's choice to focus on the location where the slave cabins had once been, instead of on the lavish European wall coverings still inside the mansion, challenges the master narrative of Savage heritage promoted by her father. As a "performative rewriting" of colonial influences on Cliff's West Indian identity, Lionnet considers the narrative voice of *Abeng* to be Cliff's attempt to transcend the boundaries of traditional genres with a twentieth-century autoethnography of colonial West Indian cultural identity.[25] Lionnet reads the novel and its narrative interjections of folklore and cultural history as a trope on both the autobiographical methods of self-representation and on the ethnographic methods of cultural explication specific to autoethnography, a hybrid genre of cultural anthropology. Indeed, through the novel's modal mosaic of revisionist history, genealogy, and ethnographic fieldwork in ancestral sites of ancestral significance, Cliff reconstructs what Michel Foucault would consider an "effective history" for herself and her characters and she relies heavily on the voice of the narrator to tell readers things that Clare cannot possibly know about her ancestry but comes to learn as she comes into contact with different sites of her cultural past.[26]

Cliff grounds Clare's growing ancestral awareness in both the imagined spaces of ancestral presence and in the physical locations of ancestry that are present to her senses. In this way, Cliff provides readers with a clear paradigm for reading the autobiographical act of constructing self as mutual and concurrent with the act of imagining conceptual spaces in which that sense of self is reified. Although it is Clare's duty to live up to the nobility attached to being "a true Savage," the ground she walks on tells a different story; it testifies to the "savage" inheritance of cruelty and inhumanity of the family patriarch known for burning an entire slave community to the ground in order to find one escaped slave.[27] Traces of this community are still visible on the property, albeit only through marks in the ground where the cabins used to be. The cabins are there, although they are not there, as their absent presence in this physical space invokes in Clare a powerful sense of belonging — something she does not feel in the master's house. Boy's nostalgia and Clare's interest in the slave quarters are

[23] Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1989), 26.
[24] Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons," 324.
[25] Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons," 339.
[26] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 154.
[27] *Abeng*, 40.

mitigated by the presence of the mansion itself — a place that both characters can see but that cannot truly be remembered by Boy, who never lived there, nor truly known by Clare, who identifies more closely with those slaves who were shut out of its doors.

Cliff's use of genealogical tracing permits Clare to "get" her own life rather than claim one in a colonial discourse where ancestry is based on the pedigree of White males of European descent.[28] Julia Watson recognizes that genealogy can serve as a powerful autobiographical method of challenging the "imperial gesture of autobiographical self-hood" in which subjects are forced to claim a life rather than construct a life of their own. Reading Cliff's narrative as an autobiographical act of genealogy foregrounds her representation of "self understanding" which resists simple acts of claiming "self location."[29] The narrator "gets" a life for Clare by demonstrating the child's own innate power and agency in understanding herself within a web of ancestry. This genealogical web helps make sense of the "radical discontinuity" in Clare's experience of being forced to deny her African ancestors. Cliff shows Clare ignoring her father's guided tour and exploring the property based on an intuitive "symbolic kinship" with the people who lived in the slave quarters.[30] Clare's symbolic kinship permits the reader to focus on the complex Arawak and African influences with which Clare appears to be preoccupied.

At this point, Cliff chooses to focus more on Clare's sensory responses to her physical environment where her ancestors once lived rather than to extensively elaborate upon the ancestors themselves. Boy prefers to fill the mansion with reports of imported bric-a-brac and china that used to occupy the now empty space, but Clare deploys her own reading by using her senses.[31] When she licks her finger after she touches the wallpaper, she tastes the salt of the sea outside the verandah. These traces of salt are easily overlooked by Boy, whose interest in his heritage involves a claim to the wallpaper's depiction of his elite European ancestry.[32]

Salt recurs in the descriptive passages about the plantation, particularly in the narrator's account of crates that once held salted herring, a staple of the slave diet. Her unconventional interpretive devices appear to be an intuitive and deeply embodied awareness that the mansion is not a viable ancestral home for her. Instead, Clare's ability to taste the salt clinging to the imported wallpaper pattern depicting well-dressed

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[28] Julia Watson, "Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree," *Getting a Life*. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 312.

[29] Ibid., 319.

[30] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University, 1986), 7.

[31] Cliff, *Abeng*, 25.

[32] *No Telephone*, 92.

European women of leisure demonstrates her sensitivity to the slave labor used to sustain the family home. In symbolic communion with her ancestors, Clare tastes the salt, unaware that the acuity of her senses can be verified by the African folklore which is later interjected by the narrator in order to elaborate upon the significance of salt to Clare's ancestors and make plain what is only intuitively understood by Clare:

> Before the slaves came to Jamaica, the old women and men believed, before they had to eat salt during their sweated labor in the canefields, Africans could fly. They were the only people on this earth to whom God had given this power. Those who refused to become slaves and did not eat salt flew back to Africa; those who did these things, who were slaves and ate salt to replenish their sweat, had lost the power, because the salt made them heavy, weighted down.[33]

Through Boy's attention to the main house, Cliff stages the perpetuation of a white mythology expressly so that his daughter may dispel it. The denial of rape and slave labor upon which the Savage family and wealth were built discourages genealogical inquiry. It is the narrator alone who interjects brutal episodes of history in which we learn that "[t]he bones of the dead slaves made the land at Runaway Bay [as] rich and green" as the eyes Clare inherited from her slave-owning great-great-grandfather.[34] Through a form of embodied cognition, Cliff shows that slave ancestry matters to Clare on a physical level and the spaces occupied by her slave-holding ancestors do not. She feels nothing in the mansion, as it is "Both the source of her and not the source of her."[35] After having seen it, the narrator tells us, Clare "didn't need the house" as an ancestral home or otherwise.[36]

Clare's act of tasting salt initiates, by the narrator, an unraveling of colonial truths that are still not fully accessible to the "colonized child" who "lived within certain parameters."[37] The physical space, later restored as "Paradise Plantation," is not an ancestral home for her but a simulacrum in which the reenactment of cane slavery by period actors creates yet another gap into which her black ancestry threatens to disappear. As Caroline Rhody notes, Cliff limits Clare's knowledge about her slave and slaveholding ancestry so that the reader can witness Clare's moments of coming into awareness. Rhody states that Clare's education about her ancestors demonstrates Cliff's "authorial will to infuse amassed knowledge into a space of ignorance" — a

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[33] Ibid., 26.
[34] Ibid., 40.
[35] *Abeng*, 37.
[36] Ibid., 37.
[37] Ibid., 77.

desire on the part of the author to establish Clare's complex ancestry despite her being unaware of it.[38]

Cliff further complicates the Savage genealogy when she introduces a mass coffin containing the remains of a hundred plague-infected victims of a slave vessel from the Gold Coast. Discovered by the erosion of soil in a Kingston churchyard, the contents of the coffin leave Clare's parish with literal possession of its slave ancestry. Ready to spill forth its forgotten legacy of colonialism, the coffin threatens to both disrupt and construct the genealogy she and Cliff share. The coffin's contents, like myth, can only be imagined through Cliff's construction of an invisible, yet tangible framework upon which to build the repressed genealogy. Although "buried in the vacant lots of big cities," the remains of her slave ancestry are physically located on the island of Jamaica.[39] Édouard Glissant views the unearthing of such intangible ancestry as "[t]he obsession with finding the primordial source toward which one struggles through revelations that have the peculiarity (like myth in the past) of obscuring as well as disclosing."[40] The influence of slave history upon Clare's present lies just beneath the surface and, like her ancestry, when "unearthed," cannot be completely suppressed or fully revealed. When on behalf of the parish, the vicar commissions a United States warship to submerge the coffin in the sea, he conspires in the denial of the slaves' existence.[41] Cliff presents these liminal beings as suspended between worlds and patently denies any claim of return to Africa or to a final home in a Jamaican burial plot. And while the parish is surprised by their presence and unprepared to deal with the threat of acknowledging them, the dead slaves take their place in Cliff's genealogy. She passes on their complex history as Clare's ancestors in a narrative space where the relationship between Clare and the underwater slaves can be imagined as submerged and out of reach but, nonetheless, remembered and unified with what Glissant refers to as "submarine roots."[42] In *No Telephone to Heaven*, an adult Clare later concedes that, "Yes — some history is only underwater[,]" thereby proving the task of tracing a West Indian ancestry to often be a return, not to homes, but to sites of loss through deliberate acts of remembrance which refuse and undo such forgetting as committed by the vicar and his parish.[43]

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[38] Caroline Rhody, "Decolonizing Jamaica's Daughter: Learning History in the Novels of Michelle Cliff." *The Daughter's Return* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 156.

[39] Michelle Cliff, "History as Fiction." *Ploughshares*, 20.2 (1994): 198.

[40] Édouard Glissant, "The Known, the Uncertain." *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: Univeristy of Virginia, 1999), 79.

[41] Cliff, *Abeng*, 7.

[42] Glissant, "The Known, the Uncertain," 67.

[43] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 193.

According to Clare's father, the origins of Jamaica as a physical landscape are also submarine, but not entirely out of reach to her. Boy takes his daughter to Jamaica's mountaintops to show her fragments of coral and shell as proof that the Caribbean islands had once been submerged in the ocean. He theorizes that the West Indies surfaced suddenly and without explanation:

> He explained to her how the entire chain of the West Indies had once been underwater. He spoke of mountain-folding, the process by which flat rock becomes peaks and slopes. While this process usually took thousands of years, Mr. Savage preferred to believe that Jamaican mountains had been created in cataclysm, "All of a sudden."[44]

Boy suggests that the West Indies "were the remains of Atlantis" that had surfaced with a powerful earthquake, or that "maybe the islands were an undersea mountain range, and emerged when Atlantis went under the Mediterranean."[45] He prefers to believe that Jamaica was created by a "divine plan" more magical than colonial and does not acknowledge that its landscape has been inscribed with a history of its people, its mountaintops filled with remnants of tools and implements of communication such as the *abeng,* a conch shell horn used by both Maroon armies and plantation overseers.

It is Clare who comes into literal contact with the land when performing the work of an amateur archeologist studying tribolate fossil she finds embedded in the earth. The wild, rocky land is characterized by its "unsheltered" atmosphere, where there is nothing to protect Clare against the implications of unearthing the repressed histories of her cultural ancestors.[46] Boy's narrative is interrupted by the narrator's tracts detailing Clare's finds. Boy's mythical discourse thrives on the assumption that the history interjected by the narrator is inconsequential or unverifiable by his daughter. His narration is, instead, caught "somewhere between the future and the past."[47] There, he does not have to confront "the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces" that created Caribbean historical consciousness and the Jamaican landscape.[48] Despite Boy's attempt to bring her to what he deems the significant physical locations of Jamaica's history, Clare once again rejects them.

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[44] Cliff, *Abeng*, 9.
[45] Ibid., 9.
[46] Ibid., 8.
[47] Cliff, *Abeng*, 22.
[48] Glissant, "The Known, the Uncertain," 62.

Cliff extends the metaphor of Boy's claim that Jamaica mysteriously emerged from the sea by revealing repressed genealogies that simultaneously interrupt Boy's narrative and construct a counter-narrative of decolonization. In a form of narrative-folding that mirrors the mountain-folding process Boy believes to have created the island, Cliff constructs a more inclusive history of Jamaica, a global narrative of exploitation in the British Empire and beyond. The narrator interjects to highlight the forgotten slaves who worked the land:

> Consider the tea plantations of Ceylon and China. The coffee plantations of Sumatra and Colombia. The tobacco plantations of Pakistan and the Philippines. The mills of Lowell. Manchester. Leeds. Marseilles. The mines of Wales. Alsace-Lorraine. The railroads of the Union Pacific. Cape to Cairo. All worked by captive labor.[49]

Cliff maintains a dialogue between the Savage text of colonial history in which the social and economic reality of slavery is justified as natural and the narrator's heteroglossic intertext of unofficial history that undermines it:

> It was an afternoon in March — the month of most rain — the month in which the star apple ripens. Clare sat by herself in the Carib cinema — the first enclosed cinema in Jamaica, named for one of the native peoples of the West Indies.
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> ———
>
> The name of the Carib in their own language was *Galibi*. Carib was invented by Columbus, and was later changed to *Caníball* — the origin of the English word *cannibal* — because it was said that the Galibi ate human flesh.[50]

Cliff's narrator interrupts herself in order to allow the reader to see Clare's life unfold as both the subject and object of this collective cultural genealogy. At this time, knowledge of the Carib people is lost on Clare, yet it interrupts the tracts about her life in the present day, revealing repressed pasts that simultaneously disrupt and construct the unseen narrative of her ancestry that surrounds her. It is only later in her adult life that Clare, not the narrator, voices an awareness of slave history and contemplates its legacy in her life:

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[49] Cliff, *Abeng*, 28.
[50] Cliff, *Abeng*, 67.

> I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people [...] leafed through the archives downtown [...] spent time at the university library [...] one thing leads to another. I have studied the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl [...] the shards of hand-thrown pots [...] the petroglyphs hidden in the bush [...] listened to the stories about Nanny and [have] taken them to heart [...] 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.[51]

Here, the dialectic of ancestor and descendant functions through "the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" — the connective tissue which holds Cliff and Clare together.[52]

Cliff presents Clare's life as a series of "events" in history, merely sites of intervention among many in the history for which there is neither a beginning nor an end that can truly be claimed in a diaspora or elsewhere.[53] As Foucault notes, "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things."[54] In this way, Cliff demonstrates that it is dissenting "emergences" rather than claims to "origin" which constitute Clare's ancestral past.[55] In staging the influence of ancestry in Clare's daily life as emergent moments, gaps, and fragmentation, Cliff pursues not repressed history itself, but rather a reversal of discursive practices, an intervention into the linearity of British colonial history with an alternate, dialectical genealogy of Arawak and African influences within which she has the agency to create and claim precursors. The emergent genealogy rearticulates history beyond the ruptures of colonialism and renders a representation of Jamaica from the time of the indigenous Arawak people through the economic and social reality of nineteenth century slavery in order to arrive at the family of her twentieth century autobiographical protagonist and the colonial influences on her West Indian identity.

Simon Gikandi notes that Cliff's use of this technique foregrounds history as "scattered around its subjects" who "relive their past without grasping its significance."[56] Even Clare's grandmother, Miss Mattie Freeman, an influential figure

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[51] Cliff, *Telephone*, 193–194.

[52] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotype in the Novel," Translated by Caryl Emerson. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 324.

[53] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory*, Practice, Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977), 148.

[54] Ibid., 142.

[55] Ibid., 148.

[56] Simon Gikandi, "Narration at the Postcolonial Moment: History and Representation in *Abeng*." *Writing in Limbo* (Ithaca: Cornel University, 1992), 245.

in her all-female congregation, is disempowered by a limited understanding of this ancestry.[57] She and her "sistern" are last in a line of an entire dispossessed genealogy subject to the same oppression as their slave ancestors.[58] Repetition of the phrase "[t]hey did not know" frames tract after tract of the narrator's historical information, refusing to be contained by the congregation's ignorance:

> They did not know about the Kingdom of Ashanti or the Kingdom of Dahomey, where most of their ancestors had come from. They did not imagine that Black Africans had commanded thousands of warriors. Built pyramids. Created systems of law. Devised language. Wrote history. Poetry. Were traders. Artists. Diplomats. They did not know that their name for papaya — *pawpaw* — was the name of one of the languages of Dahomey. Or that the *cotta*, the circle of cloth women wound tightly to make a cushion to balance baskets on their heads, was an African device, an African word.[59]

They know nothing of Nanny, the Maroon leader who ran the white man out of Nanny Town, despite the fact that "some of them were called Nanny, because they cared for the children of other women."[60] In the scope of Clare's genealogical awareness, this mythical mother sorceress is a missing link between her and the large-scale genealogy of her African and Arawak ancestors. Nanny is the primal mother of twentieth-century Caribbean women writers' "quest for cultural legitimacy and agency" and "the incarnation of historical awareness and resistant militancy" toward which Clare will eventually develop in *No Telephone to Heaven* when she joins the Jamaican independence movement.[61]

This quest also leads the narrator to Inez, an enslaved Miskito Indian woman, who finds herself pregnant by her master, Judge Savage. In the absence of her family, she draws on the strength of an elder slave, Mma Alli, a one-breasted obeah woman who "represented a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them."[62] Mma Alli, whose Igbo name means "supreme being," is the respected center of the Savage slave community. She encourages slaves to remember the ancestry which informs their place in the world: "She taught the children the old ways — the knowledge she brought from Africa — and told them never to forget them and to carry them on."[63] Mma Alli

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[57] Cliff, *Abeng*, 19.
[58] Ibid., 14.
[59] Ibid., 20.
[60] Ibid., 21.
[61] Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Introduction. *Caribbean Autobiography* (Madison, University of Wisconsin, 2002), 12.
[62] Cliff, *Abeng*, 34.
[63] Ibid.

helps to empower Inez by relieving her of her pregnancy through a combination of brews, chants, and physical healing to counteract her master's violation. With Mma Alli's guidance, Inez "remembered her mother and her people and knew she would return home" to them.[64] Inez and Mma Alli serve as regenerative forces, as their resistance restores the kinship destroyed by colonialism and enslavement. In reaching out to her slave elder, Inez also reaches out beyond her immediate community to a greater ancestry and eventually devises an escape plan using Maroon secrets taught to her by her mother.[65] This tale of interrupting the Savage line of descent by aborting the unborn child of rape is emblematic of Cliff's genealogical project, an insurgent counter-narrative that interrupts the transmission of "the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations" of genealogical history that have shaped both Clare's and Cliff's individual lives.[66] When Master Savage finds that Inez has escaped under Mma Alli's guidance, he collapses the slave community on his estate from its matriarchal center by setting fire to the hut in which Mma Alli lived. Through the elimination of Mma Alli's influence on the slave community, Savage destroys the community's ability to draw on its elders and, like Inez, to "remember their mothers."[67]

Cliff offers the stories of Nanny, Inez and Mma Alli in Clare's genealogy of rebel women not in search of her "origins," but as a critical and imaginative attempt to situate their shared cultural and individual identities in a genealogy of African presence minimized or eliminated by colonial history. Cliff identifies her work in the Clare Savage novels as a form of revisionary history and genealogy, an act of "revising what passes as the official version of history" and "inserting those lives that have been left out."[68] These tales of resistance by her foremothers "correct received versions of history" and establish a figural place of belonging for both Cliff and her protagonist.[69] When Cliff states that Clare is not intended to be explicitly autobiographical but more of "an amalgam of [herself] and others," she suggests a synthesis between her own story of self and the stories of others.[70] This synthesis between her own self-representation and her representation of Clare's life comes into focus under the category of relational autobiography which is theorized by Paul John Eakin as a narrative of "self" in which "the space of autobiography, the space of the self, is literally occupied by the

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64 Ibid., 35.
65 *Abeng*, 34.
66 Foucault, 146.
67 Ibid.
68 Judith Raiskin, "The Art of History: An Interview with Michelle Cliff." *Kenyon Review*. 15.1 (1993): 71.
69 Opal Palmer Adisa, "A Journey into Speech – A Writer between Two Worlds," *African American Review*, 28 no. 2 (1994): 273–81.
70 Cliff, "Clare as Crossroads," 265.

autobiography and self of the other."[71] His theory of relationality assists readers in seeing the ancestral stories of escaped slave women, obeah priestesses, and Maroon woman warriors told by the narrator as informing Clare's and Cliff's Creole womanhood and the legacies of racial, gender, and economic oppression that they share. While not strictly autobiographical in form, these stories offer a relationally autobiographical narrative in which Cliff's identity can be displayed through "an involved relationship" with Clare's, Inez's, and Mma Alli's stories.[72]

The narrator uses Clare's own mother, Kitty Savage, to further complicate the Savage legacy by suggesting that "[p]erhaps her marriage to Boy was an attempt to contain colonialism in her own home."[73] Kitty embraces her African heritage and rural black upbringing. She and her daughter explore the uncultivated bush in Jamaica, where they pick wild fruits and sing in Creole. There, Kitty is able to temporarily immerse herself and her daughter in the landscape and briefly de-colonize themselves among other undomesticated creatures. As the wild mangoes grow by their own timetable, Kitty and her daughter are also "out of season" and outside of Boy's reach.[74]

The maternal relationship between Kitty and her daughter is problematic in part because Kitty surrenders her influence. She breaks their bond when she agrees that Clare should be raised by the white Mrs. Phillips, who can teach the child things about being a proper lady that Kitty cannot.[75] Kitty's weakness is that she, too, is isolated from her rebel ancestors and cannot draw on their strength to help her raise her daughter:

> Kitty should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Alli, 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 that protecting what she felt was its fragility. The fragility of her people, on this island, intent on erasing the past.[76]

In Mrs. Phillip's care, Clare ceases to be a daughter to any immediate biological mother as well to any Arawak or African ancestry.

Years later, it is Kitty's death that propels Clare's flight to England in search of a mother figure in the colonial motherland. Not for another ten years does Clare complete her search and return to the bush where she fights for Jamaican independence. Cliff

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[71] Paul John Eakin, "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story," *True Relations*. Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg (Westport: Greenwood, 1998), 71.

[72] Eakin, "Relational Selves," 71–72.

[73] Cliff, *Abeng*, 128.

[74] Ibid., 53.

[75] Cliff, *Abeng*, 162.

[76] Cliff, *Abeng*, 128.

describes Clare's choice to return as the emergence of familiar "skills" brought on by the loss of her mother and "urges" to be in her natural dwelling:

> Time passes. The longing for tribe surfaces — unmistakable. To create if not to find. She cannot shake it off. She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness. The skills are deep within her. Buried so long, she fears they may have atrophied. Distant treks with her dark-pelted mother. With a solid urgency they may emerge but she must also give herself to the struggle. She belongs in these hills. And she knows this choice is irrevocable and she will never be the same again.[77]

Clare returns to Jamaica to bury her mother with an intertwined "longing for tribe" and the "irrevocable" influence of landscape. Kitty's last words to her daughter are that she should "[n]ever forget who [her] people are[,]" reminding her daughter: "Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself. There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it."[78] Kitty's call to fill that space underscores Cliff's own attempt to do just that through genealogy located in what Belinda Edmondson calls "geopolitical spaces of memory" and its new spaces of resistance.[79]

Edmondson highlights Cliff's genealogy in terms of an effort to bury the unburied "grand/mother" and, therefore, reconcile with the more significant "history of the people" contained in the land.[80] Despite the fact that these figures remain unburied, or perhaps because of it, they persist as resisting figures. Cliff does not allow Clare to comply with her mother's last request. Kitty is buried in a strange cemetery that holds no family history and where "[t]he ties had been broken."[81] Clare is also unable to anoint the body of her mother, a metaphor for a failure to reconcile with ancestries that are repressed, distorted or otherwise lost to her. Mma Alli also has no such burial when her master sets fire to her hut. Rhody finds such characters to be caught in a cycle of "incomplete mourning" among mothers and their children.[82]

Clare's pre-colonial genealogy continues to flesh out as Clare studies at Oxford. Her encounter in England with a bronze statue of Pocahontas is a catalyst in her awareness of colonial influences in her personal life. When Clare reflects upon Pocahontas as a pre-colonial mother figure to whom she feels a parallel connection, the narrator comments that England and the United States are places where island people go "to get ahead,"

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[77] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 91.
[78] Ibid., 103.
[79] Belinda Edmondson, "Race, Writing, and the Politics of (Re)Writing History," *Callaloo* 16 no. 1 (1993): 185.
[80] Ibid., 189–190.
[81] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 103.
[82] Rhody, "Decolonizing," 168.

not find a home.[83] In this decisive moment of self-construction for Clare, readers are offered a powerful truth about the journey of post-colonial immigration in which Cliff shares a "deep, horizontal comradeship" with her characters and with others of West Indian descent.[84] Clare realizes "[s]omething was wrong" with being memorialized as a willing collaborator of the colonists.[85] "Baptized" a native of the New World, Pocahontas evokes Clare's identification as a displaced woman claimed for England.[86] When England proves a false mother, the displaced Pocahontas is reclaimed as a pre-colonial mother figure. Clare asks, "[w]here was she now?" and comes to understand the implications of her own displacement — her own motherless-ness in the colonial motherland. Unlike Pocahontas, Clare would not be claimed by England.[87] Instead, she returns to Jamaica and claims her grandmother's land left to her after Kitty's death.

As a home for Clare, Jamaica evolves from the obscure pre-colonial Arawak "Land of Springs" whose people no longer exist, into the colonial "Mother Sugar" who exports her mangoes to England, and eventually into the island to which Clare says she owes her rebel allegiance as "the place [her] grandmother made."[88] Upon her return, Clare finds that Miss Mattie's land has turned to ruinate: "lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into [...] 'bush'."[89] The unclaimed ruinate, overrun with brush and wild creatures, is depicted as a land recovering from colonization. Clare, too, is recovering from the effects of colonialism. Her return to the island completes what Cliff calls Clare's "fragmented, damaged, incomplete" colonial selfhood, whose development as a character is "a movement back, ragged, interrupted, uncertain, to [sic] homeland."[90] The challenge facing Clare parallels the impossible task that Cliff expresses when she asks, "[w]hen our landscape is so tampered with, how do we locate ourselves?"[91] This movement constitutes for Cliff a return to her people, specifically to a female ancestry infused in the landscape that *ruins nation* in favor of a place Cliff describes as "redolent of my grandmother and mother."[92] Similar to the metaphor for decolonization represented in Miss Mattie's chipped enamel washbasin, in which "the black shapes threatened to change the whiteness into patches of water and themselves into land mass," a "new map" of de-colonized territory is created in

[83] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 36.
[84] Anderson, 7.
[85] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 137.
[86] Ibid., 136.
[87] Ibid., 172.
[88] Cliff, *Abeng* 5, 78; *No Telephone*, 189.
[89] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 2.
[90] Cliff, "Clare as Crossroads," 265.
[91] Thomas Cartelli, "After 'The Tempest,'" *Contemporary Literature* 36 no.1 (1995): 37.
[92] Cliff, "Clare as Crossroads," 266.

the ruinate and the resisting narrative.[93] The ruinate represents the island's search for its own de-colonization, a return to its own ecology, in which it can "possess itself."[94]

As Derek Walcott declares, ancestry remains in the landscape: "It is there in the Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory."[95] The land remembers a pre-colonial history its inhabitants cannot. In place of the carefully ordered garden of Clare's grandmother, there now grow wild and haphazard vines and blossoms with the power to remember, forget, conceal, reveal, and perhaps, undo that history:

> The emergence of Ethiopian apples and wild bamboo in place of the citrus trees signifies a return to "other" roots that were previously unable to push through the soil and thrive because they had to compete with cultivation. Although the land had returned to "what it was," this was not its original state. The land had returned to a gap in history where the vegetation ceased to be "unhumaned" as it was prior to the intervention of cultivation.[96]

When Clare joins the movement for Jamaican independence, she turns the ruinate over to the rebels, who farm it for ganja to be traded for ammunition. As the rebels clear the land, they call forth the memory of their parents' and grandparents' clearing of this same land before it was owned by Miss Mattie.[97]

The image of Clare and other rebels dressed in stolen United States military fatigues calls Clare into question as a passing figure attempting to remain unseen in her efforts to subvert neocolonialism. Nada Elia points out that although a sign of subversive agency, this form of passing "is never free from the dominant discourse."[98] The fatigues remain a sign of United States aggression and the rebels who wear them eventually die violent deaths that are also unseen as their uniforms merge with the Jamaican landscape in a perfect but problematic camouflage of its ancestry.[99] Paula Morgan suggests that Clare's reclaiming of the ruinate, and thus, her black identity,

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93 *Abeng*, 55.
94 Cliff, *No Telephone*, 105.
95 Derek Walcott, "The Antilles," *What the Twilight Says* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1998), 81.
96 Cliff, *No Telephone*, 9.
97 Ibid., 11.
98 Nada Elia, "'The Memories of Old Women'," *Dances, Trances and Vociferations* (New York: Garland, 2001), 67.
99 Cliff, *No Telephone*, 7.

is "in propitiation for copping out during the American Civil rights struggle."[100] Clare has, in fact, as Morgan puts it, "grappled with the trauma of the American Civil Rights Movement wearing her white mask" because it was her father's wish to escape the black blood of Kitty's family, which makes the family a target in the United States.[101] There, the family lives in a basement apartment nearly invisible and where they can pass for white, according to Boy's order that they were simply "American now."[102] The narrator describes the United States as a way-station in Clare's search for home — a temporary, but significant location where there is no room for her in the strictly black/white racial dichotomy. As Raiskin points out, "[i]t is not until Clare goes to the United States, where she falls out of the racial system that has defined her, that she is able to scrutinize the mythologies of the system itself."[103]

Displaced from the island and their position as descendants of white Jamaicans, the Savages arrive in the United States unprepared to face the open racial persecution characteristic of the fiercest period of the pre-civil rights history era. They are forced to pass for white in order to find employment and accommodation amidst signs declaring that they are in "Klan Country."[104] Boy has difficulty with the fact that in the United States, he and Kitty are equalized, both "shipmates, as surely as the slaves who crossed the Middle Passage together."[105] Clare witnesses Boy, who is well versed in the eugenicist science of genealogy, fail to place himself in the scheme of Aristotelian racial stratifications suggested by the narrator: "mulatto, offspring of African and white; sambo, offspring of African and mulatto; quadroon, offspring of mulatto and white; mestee, offspring of quadroon and white; mestefeena, offspring of mestee and white."[106] Neither does he recognize the narrator's insight that in the South, everyone who is not white is black: "It's a question of degree."[107] Boy declares himself a descendant of Jamaican slaveholders, while Kitty feels unable to express her rage over their passing. Instead, she releases her anger subversively in the laundry where she works as "Mrs. White." While her job is to write notes with practical laundering advice to be left in customer packages, she lashes out by writing notes about hatred and bigotry such as, "White people can be black hearted" and signing her notes, "Mrs. Black."[108] Angeletta Gourdine stresses that Cliff deliberately inserts the tensions of the pre-civil rights

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[100] Paula Morgan, "Homecomings Without Home," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 3 no. 3 (2003): 164.
[101] Ibid., 162.
[102] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 102.
[103] Judith Raiskin "With the Logic of a Creole," *Snow on the Cane Fields* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 188.
[104] Cliff, *No Telephone*, 55.
[105] Ibid., 60.
[106] Ibid., 56.
[107] Ibid., 153.
[108] Ibid., 81.

movement in the United States into Clare's growing "diaspora consciousness" of the places, cultures, languages, and histories of Clare's journey.[109] When in Klan Country, any identifiable binaries between black/white or colonized/colonizer disappear and Clare's identity rests in a "site of undecidability and indeterminacy."[110]

Later in her adult life, after she returns to Jamaica, Clare and her fellow rebels are also cloaked in indeterminacy. Their US military fatigues clearly signify their attempts to at once appropriate the uniforms as masks and also regain themselves from "the imposed nation" as the camouflage allows them to hide in "the naturalness of ruin."[111] Cliff stresses that "[a]s individuals in this landscape, we, the colonized, are also subject to ruination, to the self reverting to the wildness of the forest."[112] Both the wild and over-grown ruinate and Clare's infertile womb are expected to reproduce life, but both the property and its inheritor have resisted. After a miscarriage and sterilizing infection, Clare becomes a defunct link in the propagation of her own genealogy. Raiskin observes that Clare is only capable of resisting neocolonial power once her sexuality has been "cut loose from the reproductive drama of racial progress or degeneration."[113]

While it is an accidental death that claims Clare's life, it may be seen as her final act of resistance — the surrender to an inevitable reversion to ruinate in which her body is joined to the island's struggle to renew itself. Cliff writes that in Clare's death she has "complete identification with her homeland" to the extent that, like her ancestors, she would soon "be indistinguishable from the ground."[114] In the end, Clare has both turned her grandmother's property over to the rebels and herself with it. Her body is one with the landscape that claims her. When she dies on the property, her body is left to be claimed by the landscape. The cultural genealogy of women's resistance facilitates her physical return to "the place [her] grandmother made" in Jamaica and, despite her infertility, allows her to take her place in the line of descent — albeit at the "end" of the actual line. Cliff's conclusion unites "home" and genealogy in a primordial source of self. No longer a child of colonialism or a granddaughter who inherited a piece of Jamaica, Clare surrenders the search for an immutable "home" to the realization that, as Glissant contends, "[t]he death of everything is in the knowledge of origins."[115]

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[109] Angeletta Gourdine, "'Dis here is fe me territory'," *The Difference Place Makes* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002), 39.

[110] Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, 6.

[111] Michelle Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 12 no. 2 (1991): 40.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Raiskin, "With the Logic of a Creole," 192.

[114] Cliff, "Clare as Crossroads," 265.

[115] Glissant, "The Known, the Uncertain," 82.

Jocelyn Fenton Stitt suggests that the search for a rebel woman genealogy is complicated in this conclusion of Clare's life. She notes that Cliff tends toward a gendered romanticism in *Abeng* when, in tracing Jamaica's rebel foremothers, she "reinscribes an essentialized view of national identity as coming through biological motherhood" when she returns Clare to her grandmother's land in the sequel, where she dies in her final home.[116] Stitt's concern is with modes of nationalist discourse inherent in claiming an essential link between motherhood and the landscape and this link's potential to exclude women from post-colonial nationalist agency:

> *Abeng*'s attempts to come to grips with a cultural identity for Clare, as well as a national culture for Jamaica, reproduces nationalist discourse that figures the mother as curator of national culture without agency in her own right. This strategy clearly maps a method to establish cultural authenticity both for Clare, and for *Abeng* itself within the existing narratives of Caribbean nationalism. This may be true for Cliff as well.[117]

Yet the conclusion of *Abeng*'s sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, remedies the lack of agency Stitt finds in the position of the "mother curator" in West-Indian cultural history. By relinquishing Clare's life to the complex and irreconcilable questions of Clare's national and cultural identity to the various women in her genealogy and to the sites where she encounters an identification with them, Cliff is invoking forms of borrowed cultural memory in which Clare has physically experiential relationships with her past. While not memory proper, Clare's engagement with various sites of memory evoke what Alison Landsberg considers a "prosthetic" memory which informs her subjectivity as a West Indian woman. Landsberg suggests that prosthetic memories are those which "emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience" as when one visits a museum exhibit or a memorial site.[118] In these sites, she argues, one experiences "privately felt public memories" of events that are not part of one's lived experience but to which they are powerfully drawn and feel imaginatively engaged through their own "archive of experience."[119] By allowing Clare to borrow and then share in sites of experience with her ancestor, Cliff disrupts the empirical nature of experience by crossing the border between lived memory and cultural memory and

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[116] Stitt, Jocelyn Fenton. "Gendered Legacies of Romantic Nationalism in the Works of Michelle Cliff." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. 24 (2007): 72.

[117] Ibid., 61.

[118] Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. (New York: Columbia, 2004), 19.

[119] Ibid., 19.

gives her character — and herself — agency to remember their shared West-Indian history in ways that are recuperative of their forgotten foremothers. While she cannot restore agency proper to these women of her past, each serves as an agent of counter-memory that disrupts dominant discourses of nationalism and womanhood. Just as the counter-narratives from which this act of counter-memory is drawn do not have the power to replace the historical events in which her ancestors are stripped of agency, these novels can re-place the women in their cultural genealogy through a collective project of transmitting the cultural memory of their resistance to the author and the protagonist.

Cliff also appears to restore agency to the mother curator by subverting homecoming to Jamaica as a resolution for the continued disenfranchisement of future generations of women. Although Clare dies and literally falls upon Jamaican soil, the telling of her story as a representational strategy for reclaiming her ancestry is a progressive step in the direction of reconsidering the selective cultural amnesia she inherits as a child of colonialism. Even if Clare attempts a homecoming in Jamaica, or elsewhere, she fails to achieve lived memory of origins. While Cliff allows her to engage in acts of borrowed memory, she cannot return to any past, just as she cannot return to any one home. The multiple and overlapping pathways home resonate beyond the capacity to return or the existence of any specific selves or homes that can be claimed by the author or her characters. Instead of homecoming, Cliff's genealogy rearticulates personal and collective history beyond the ruptures of colonialism and renders a representation of Jamaica from the time of the indigenous Arawak people through the economic and social reality of nineteenth-century slavery in order to arrive at the family of her twentieth-century autobiographical protagonist. In this way, the reader can see the processes and experiences that have made homecoming impossible.

Clare's journey from Jamaica to the United States, then England, and back to Jamaica retraces a Middle Passage triangle in search of precursors. The stories of the author and her protagonist resonate beyond the history of Jamaica, beyond fiction, and beyond the autobiographical focus on an individual life into a genealogical tracing that simultaneously represents both Cliff and Clare as post-colonial subjects in search of a shared genealogy. This twenty-five-year journey places Clare in a transnational context of historical inquiry in which she must see herself against the landscapes of the "way station" of the United States, "the false mother" of England and the "ruinate" of Jamaica before she discovers the radical instability of locating physical homes in a Caribbean diaspora or elsewhere.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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