Toward a literary theory of outlyerism: an outlyerist reading of Michelle Cliff's Abeng and No Telephone To Heaven

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TOWARD A LITERARY THEORY OF OUTLYERISM: AN OUTLYERIST READING OF MICHELLE CLIFF'S ABENG AND NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN

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ABSTRACT
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TOWARD A LITERARY THEORY OF OUTLYERISM: AN OUTLYERIST
READING OF MICHELLE CLIFF'S ABENG AND NO TELEPHONE TO
HEAVEN

Advisor: Dr. Daniel P. Black

Thesis dated May, 1996

This study explores the relationship of the Outlyer/Maroon tradition and
historical reality to the form and content of Michelle Cliff's novels Abeng and No
Telephone to Heaven in order to demonstrate how a literary theory of Outlyerism
derives from distinct aspects and phenomena of Outlyer/Maroon culture and
tradition. The social, political, and military strategies used by Outlyers can be
roughly grouped into eight categories: 1. Conjuring 2. Camouflage 3. Creolization
4. Rapid movements from one area to another 5. Military Ambush 6. Primacy of
Elders 7. Primacy of Rituals 8. Use of communicative instruments in a network
of military signification.

While the Outlyers used these strategies as forms of resistance in an historical
space to combat European hegemony and cultural imperialism, Cliff employs and
manipulates them, figuratively, in the literary space towards the same end, such
that these strategies become literary and historical tropes in her contouring of the form and content of her novels and give heightened import to the notion of creative resistance.

The creation of a literary theory of Outlyerism was designed so that critics might reconfigure the ways in which black resistance and nation building are theorized and discussed. Situating Cliff’s texts within the Outlyerist vein takes care, then, not to use theories of marginalization to center the very hegemonic systems which work to oppress minority groups.
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Introduction

According to Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, if Fredric Jameson is correct in the assertion that narrative is one of the basic categorical forms through which we apprehend realities in time, and under which synchronic and analytic thinking is itself subsumed and put in perspective, then critics should no longer be defensive about the role of culture and the importance of its study and analysis (xi). The prolific creation of literatures by both blacks and whites, concerning the socio-cultural and political realities of slavery and plantation existence, makes it clear that slavery and colonialism have provided an inexhaustible springboard for the study of African American culture. That this historical reality informs and engenders the production of African American art, specifically literature, is not, however, an argument for the establishment or existence of an essentialized black aesthetic. Rather, it points to the existence of a consciousness that understands the incorporation and articulation of history as indelibly related to social positioning and the struggle for freedom from European hegemony. It is with this understanding that memory is a site of resistance, as well as political self-recovery,¹ that many African American writers have traditionally undertaken literary productions, and continue to create. And, it is on the basis of this concept that critics of African American literatures interpret, contextualize and theorize about African American literatures. As a result, the growing number of novels, critical and theoretical studies by and about the African Diaspora

¹This phrase is borrowed from black, feminist, social critic bell hooks [sic], who quotes Michel Foucault in her article "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" (ed. Grossberg et. al, *Cultural Studies*, NY: Routledge, 1992). Also, see hooks' essay "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance" in her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* ( Boston: South End Press, 1992).
experience are beginning to form veritable canons of African American literatures which evoke themes of decolonization, double-consciousness, marginalization, self-actualization, and issues of sexuality in post-colonial, yet fundamentally hegemonic societies. While these themes, as examined by novelists and literary critics, have stimulated prolific dialogue and incisive socio-historical critique, they have also served, paradoxically, to typecast Afro-American literatures as tropologically static: mired in "reactionary pleading" and protest.

From Zora Neale Hurston to James Baldwin, to Toni Morrison, African American writers themselves, have understood the limitations of being cornered into the protest trope. As early as 1938, in the essay "Art and Such," Hurston explained:

The one subject for the Negro is the Race and its sufferings, and so the song of the morning gets choked back. [the writer says to herself] ...'Ought I not to be singing our sorrows?... I will write of a lynching instead'. So the same old theme, the same old phrases get done again to the detriment of art...

This in spite of the obvious fact Negroes love and hate and fight and strive and travel... like other humans (Gates 24).

While recent African American literatures and critical literary scholars have enlarged their scope to investigate the intricacies of gender construction and sexuality alongside issues of racial identity formation and cultural creolization, it seems that the central method employed by both black and white critics is to critique in dichotomous fashion, invoking comparative analyses of black characters' marginalized relations with the majority culture. That fruitful analysis arises from comparative strategy is not disputed; for indeed, the social and political realities of what it means to
be African American, female and/or homosexual in hegemonic societies are germane issues which will continue to be significant as long as social inequality persists. The existing body of critical scholarship that examines the dynamics of marginalization has proved to be insightful in the conceptualization and articulation of how issues of race, sex, gender, and class impact those of minority cultures. African American critics could do well, however, by following Hurston's lead in "Art and Such," for the use of critical methods which over-extend marginalization theoretics often center the very European paradigm they seek to subvert and wish to dismantle, by concentrating too intensely on the oppressive social dynamics of European culture. What results then, is that theories of marginalization can become detrimental to the minority critic, since they can very easily be co-opted to afford the hegemonic center continued dominance, while marginalization theoretics implicitly assert the absolute powerlessness of minority cultures. Also, the notion of marginalization is problematized by stereotypical conceptions that the margin is automatically an homogenous space:

... the tendency to see the margin as a unified position, as the "opposite" pole in an immutable binary paradigm prevents us from seeing the margin as a wide expanse of physical, intellectual, and psychological space with its own dynamics, contradictions and tensions. In actuality, the so-called margin is an immense heterogeneous space, punctuated by boundaries and edges which define the limits of numerous different pockets of reality (Nnaemaka 141).

If black scholars, black literary critics and black authors are to be successful in their attempts to de-center the European gaze and European hegemony, we must re-configure the ways in which racial and sexual
marginalizations are discussed and theorized. Otherwise, as novelists and critics, we remain mortgaged to the very hegemonic ideologies we contest and subsequently seek to subvert. The cogency and aesthetic value of African American literatures must not be ignored or reduced to mere reactionary manifestos which expose European hegemony; while African American literatures have much to teach the world in this regard, black authors' manipulation of artistic form is as equally valuable as content.

Accordingly, the use of theoretical frameworks which foreground African American culture as the major apparatus with which to critique African American literature and culture seem most appropriate. While location in the Western World makes it virtually infeasible for the critic to establish theoretical modes void of any vestiges of Westernized European thought, the work of Gates\(^2\) and Baker\(^3\) attest that insightful literary theories can be forged from distinct aspects and phenomena in African American culture without employing or centralizing European modes of thought and analysis. Because an ideal way to confound a Eurocentric bias is to create a theory of reading that has been generated from within the black tradition itself, autonomously, I posit the use of Maroon/Outlyer existence as a theoretical model for interpretation of African American literatures (Gates xx).\(^4\)

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\(^3\)See *Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature*, which like Gates' work, uses Afro-centric culture as the theoretical base for textual interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

\(^4\)This phrase is paraphrased from Gates' Introduction to *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, wherein he asserts that the ideal way to confound Eurocentric theoretical bias is to create Afro-centric theories which come directly from the black tradition.
This theory of *Outlyerism* explores the relationship of the Outlyer/Maroon tradition and historical reality to the African American literary tradition. The philosophies and ideologies which arose and continue to arise in Maroon societies—physical and psychological struggle for freedom from European hegemony and colonization, positive definitions of self and identity formation, and cultural creolization—are recurrent subjects in African American literatures. Of late, in critical literary studies the tendency has been to examine these issues as individual acts of resistance, self-actualization, marginalization, or at best, arbitrary protest and rebellion. I propose, however, that examining these issues within the context of Outlyer's history and ideological thought adds theoretical soundness to the interpretation of struggle against colonization, race, sex, class, gender domination, and the search for identity and freedom. This theoretical exercise will call, then, for a reading and re-reading of African American texts to assess their value in a collective Outlyer continuum, which lends greater potency to distinct aspects of history when African American authors signify upon social and historical realities and acts of resistance.

This attempt to situate selected African American narratives within an Outlyerist vein investigates the social and historical dynamics of African American texts such that critics might re-configure the ways in which marginalization, black revolution, and nation building are discussed and interpreted. I seek to build upon and enrich the existing body of African American literary criticism by providing a new way for critics to theorize.

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5 This is a term taken from Vincent Harding in his book *There is a River* (NY: HBJ, 1981).

6 The term *signify* is used here as Gates uses it in *Signifying Monkey: a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. For the sake of clarity, it may be interpreted here as allusion to history.
marginalization and examine literary forms. Outlyerism differs from marginalization because it assumes, at once, a pro-active stance, as opposed to a reactionary one. Whereas in marginalization theoretics the implicit idea is that the minority culture is acted upon and largely dominated by the majority culture, this theory of Outlyerism concentrates on the empowered gaze of the Outlyers, which allows them to create their own communities independent of the majority culture. Hence, Outlyers assume a more assertive posturing than the marginalized. To be sure, Outlyerism does contain the isolationist strain characteristic of marginalized groups; yet, the ideological stance of the Outlying allows for an internal gaze, an inward looking upon self, fixed on the dynamics of specific black communities who choose to defect from Europeanized thought, ideology, and practice, to create their own Afro-centric ways of seeing, enact their own cultural practices, and subsequently heal their communities. The fundamental difference between Outlyerism and marginalization is critically linked to the notion of choice--the assertive choice of the Outlyer to be apart from the majority culture.

At first glance, the subtleties of both terms might be obsfucated by isolationist notions characteristic of both concepts, yet their differences cut across issues of power and self will. Heretofore, the subtleties in the language of marginalization, with the exception of certain strains of black nationalism, have not allowed for the conception of a group who wished not to be a part of majority culture. In fact, the language of marginalization is structured so that it almost always invokes the yearning for entry into the mainstream--integration--and displeasure at being banished to the periphery of majority culture. Outlyers, however, entertained no such wish; the direct inverse obtained in Outlyerist ideology. I have used the term
inverse to indicate, specifically, the Outlyers' subversion and reversal of the colonial gaze so prominent in hegemonic atmospheres.

Certainly, this theory of Outlyerism does not attempt to account for interpretation or reading of all African American literatures. It is possible, however, to chart configurations of the Outlyer across a variety of genres, such as slave narratives, folktales, Negro ballads, and novels. Recognizing that a precise cataloging of the number of works which evoke configurations of the Outlyer is a larger undertaking than the scope of this project, I have limited my consideration to two novels of Jamaican woman writer Michelle Cliff, understanding that a detailed theoretical account across genres should occupy a book of its own. I have chosen Cliff’s texts, Abeng and its sequel No Telephone to Heaven, for primarily two reasons: first, because she is a relatively new, unexplored artist whose work underscores important historical and theoretical dialogue between African Caribbean and African North American artists; and secondly, because her novels seem to suggest a theory of Outlying in both form and content. What follows then, is a brief historical introduction to the Outlyers/Maroons, their cultural and philosophical ideas, and an outline of the social and historical phenomena in Outlyer history and ideology which seem to form an undergirding base for Michelle Cliff’s content in her novels, as well as her manipulation of form and structure. These sections will be followed by two chapters in which each novel, Abeng, and No Telephone to Heaven, will be read closely, to render an illustration of the literary theory of Outlyerism.

II

Within the context of colonial societies, those who were defined as Outlyers were the "ba-ad runaway niggers--" desperadoes elevated to an organized level primarily concerned with militating against the nets of white
order, especially when that system mandated their degradation\(^7\) (Harding 39; 73). During the Colonial Era, Outlyers were known for their fierce military skills and willful defection from slave societies. Popularly known as "Maroons," Outlyers can still be found in countries throughout the Caribbean such as Jamaica, Surinam, Brazil, Guiana and many other countries. As historian John Blassingame points out, "the maroon was a resourceful black man [or woman] who having obtained his [her] freedom challenged any white man to take it away from [her and] if his hideout was discovered he was willing to die defending it" (210). "The societies they created ranged in size from small bands of 10 or 20 people to powerful kingdoms with thousands of members . . ." (Bilby & Baird N'Diaye 54).

Throughout the Caribbean and the United States (Florida, South Carolina), Outlyers consolidated to form "small guerrilla bands, maintaining constant opposition" to surrounding white societies which sought their enslavement; they attacked white plantations with calculated, organized, and justly legitimized vengeance, and ". . . often engaged in guerrilla like activities, plundering and burning plantations, stealing stock, and attacking, robbing and murdering whites" (Harding 31; Blassingame 209). "When

\(^7\)The word "Outlyer" is a term that historian Vincent Harding uses to describe Maroons (There is a River: The Black Struggle For Freedom. NY: HBJ, 1981). It is unclear whether or not Maroons ever defined, or rather named themselves as Outlyers. However, for the purposes of this study it is most useful to use the term Outlyerism, rather than "Maroonage," for implicit in the name Outlyerism is a definitive expression of the self-will--agency--that characterized "Maroon" struggle. The term "Maroonage," on the other hand, has the implicit connotation of marginalization--disillusionment--which certainly does not reflect the self-determination the Outlyers have historically expressed. Though subtle, the difference between the two concepts serves this study's purpose of revising the language of "marginalization theoretics" which delimits our conceptualization of black resistance. To be sure, and historically precise, however, I must concede that those whom Harding and I call Outlyers refer to themselves today as Maroons. My distinction in the subtleties of the terms is not meant to re-name the group, but rather to circumvent the conceptualization of Outlyerism--the constraints of language--in the Western academic context as an atheoretical/confused state of being, as the term "Maroonage" might be prone to mistakenly connote.
slaves lived near swamps, impenetrable forests or near frontier areas, they often banded together in . . . mass effort," to ambush plantations (Blassingame 206). They utilized complex systems of military intelligence to communicate across the rugged terrain of swamps, mountains, and caves which they used for hideouts. In many cases, Outlyers used instruments such as talking drums, and the *abeng*\(^8\) to send distinct messages to each other about the threat of advancing plantation troops or patrollers. In other instances, Outlyers used trained spies who served as lookouts for the Maroon camps, and were skilled at luring plantation troops into terrain where they could be easily ambushed. These acts of organized resistance, and shrewd military intelligence often kept whites in constant fear and paranoia, yet undoubtedly, reminded and convinced whites of the Africans' determination for freedom, as well as their sense of political organization. Everywhere that slavery existed, even in geographical regions which proved to be extremely challenging for the runaway, Outlyer communities were formidable powers which struck fear in the hearts of colonizers. They were an embarrassing reminder to colonizers that the will of a people could not be broken, even in the midst of the most cruel physical and psychological abuse, and "represented one of the gravest threats to the planters . . . [as they] undermined the master's authority and emboldened other slaves to join them (209).

Significantly, the Outlyers chose not to leave the plantation region but to "lie out" in neighboring swamps, providing a base and support system for slaves seeking to escape North, or the sovereignty of the Outlyer

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\(^8\)Notice that *abeng* is also the name of one of Cliff's novels. This title will soon prove quite significant.
community. This military and philosophical strategy distinguishes the Outlyer from the rebel; for, Outlyers seemed to understand that by remaining within the plantation vicinity, but independent of it, they were asserting forceful social and political commentary on the institutions of forced labor and European hegemony. And, though economic factors may have motivated many Outlyer communities to remain in social commerce with those enslaved on plantations, this factor alone is not enough to argue cogently for why Maroon communities sprung up in such close vicinity to slave plantations. That Outlyers who lived during the Plantation Era remained within the plantation regions, waging protracted ideological and armed struggle against white hegemony, as opposed to fleeing the site of danger, to obliterate the memory of physical bondage, indicates that they possessed some ideological commitment to change, revolution even. And, though we might surmise that defection was contingent upon the degree to which the enslaved had viable alternatives, as Price indicates, an extraordinary number of Outlyer communities throughout the Western Hemisphere were led by Creoles, and skilled slaves who could have very easily run away to cities where they could pass as freedmen, "melting unobserved into the urban populations" (25).

As a point of clarification, it must be noted that the concept of the Outlyer should not be over simplified or reduced to characterize Outlyers as those who merely sought freedom by rebelling, physically, against the brutal inhumanity of slavery. The Outlyers were and are indeed more politically sophisticated. To be sure, their philosophy of subversion is inclusive of the rebel--the "ba-ad nigger" type; yet, ideologically, Outlyers' principles extend far beyond the mere attainment of physical freedom, toward the forging of identity and nation building. A feature that must be appropriated here is the
significance of "blacks' political consciousness in the general evolution of their conceptual understanding of their wants, needs, and means" (Beckles 389). To do this, it is necessary to say something meaningful about the Outlyer's mind, hence ideology (Beckles 369). According to historian Hillary Beckles in *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy*, evidence illustrates fully that slaves made definite political analyses of the power structures they encountered (370). Therefore, any over simplification of the Outlyers' struggles as mere rebellion de-politicizes their efforts, implying that theirs was purely an atheoretical struggle which militated against physical bondage, as would the average "beast" when cornered.

... slave resistance has long been conceived of as a lower species of political behavior, lacking in ideological cohesion, intellectual qualities and philosophical direction. Generally considered as marginally more advanced than basic primitive responses to a crude... oppressive material and social world, [slave resistance] was not seen as possessing anything theoretical in significance (364).

A proper evaluation of the Outlyer, however, will concede that Outlyers seemed to be concerned with more complex issues than freedom from bondage. Indeed, "they wanted freedom by all means necessary and engaged in activities which ranged from self-purchase to violent armed struggle for territory and political sovereignty... but it can no longer be assumed that slaves existed in a world devoid of any political concepts and an alternative socio-political vision" (Beckles 354 & 371). Outlyers seemed to have a strong vision of community in mind that was not generally characteristic of rebels, who tended to maintain individualist aspirations. Whereas rebels tended to band together in the fight for freedom, then
disperse once freedom was attained, Outlyers seemed to conceptualize revolution as a means, not an end in itself. This distinction is subtle, but significant, once one considers that there were hundreds--thousands even--of rebellions throughout the Western Hemisphere, most of which were put down; yet, Outlyer communities are still in existence all throughout the Western Hemisphere today. Their existence and preservation of culture over hundreds of years beyond emancipation is evidence to suggest that the Outlyers were not merely in search of physical freedom, but the more profound realization of a communal space free from white hegemony and oppression, a space where identities could be forged independent of the racist views of slave masters. One particularly important aspect of culture building was creolization. The Outlyers were comprised of a diverse background of Africans, Indians, and even poor whites. According to the historian Richard Price, "Not only were African tribal affiliations quite diverse, but a wide range of slave adaptations were represented [in Maroon communities] as well" (23).

As Outlyers escaped the plantation order to form their own groups and communities in the swamps, caves, and forests, outside the domination of white hegemony, "Their existence [became] a radical act of disobedience," which served to incite visions of freedom and discontent among those who were enslaved (Harding 39-40). The Planter Classes usually sought to make peace with the Outlyers in exchange for the return of runaway slaves. But, even then, Outlyers proved to be shrewd in their negotiations, for they made treaties on the strength of their own terms. "[I]n a remarkable number of cases throughout the Americas, whites were forced to bring themselves to sue their former slaves for peace" (Price 3). A report in the "Norfolk Herald" in 1823 described the Maroons as those against "whose . . .
designs neither the power of the law, nor vigilance, or personal strength and intrepidity can avail" (Aptheker 276). A description of one Outlyer leader, Abraham, by a white officer during the Second Seminole War further reveals that whites recognized the Outlyers' strapping power as a force with which they were compelled to reckon: "They were a most cruel and malignant enemy. For them, surrender would be servitude to the whites, but to retain an open warfare secured them plunder, liberty, and importance" (Blassingame 213). Another observation by a military officer offered that "... Ten resolute Negroes, with a knowledge of the country, are sufficient to desolate the frontier from one extent to the other" (214).

In addition to militant acts of resistance, Outlyers also used conjuring to wage war against whites. Several reports confirm that Outlyers were known to use conjuring powders to protect them from the bullets of captors, and to erase the human scent from the trail of bloodhounds. In the Caribbean, Nanny, the Maroon Chieftaness, was believed to "catch bullets between her buttocks" through the use of obeah, which granted her physical invincibility (Price 10). In the United States, Fredrick Douglass is known to have used "root dust from Africa," which rendered his servility impossible (Harding 104). Of the Caribbean maroon leader Tacky and his followers, it is said:

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9Wherever possible, Maroons formed coalitions with Indians to fight against whites. During the first and the second Seminole Wars, several blacks banded together with Indians to fight against whites. In fact, blacks intermarried and lived with Indians in a milder version of slavery that made it virtually impossible to distinguish that some of the blacks were in fact servants of the Indians. These arrangements of servitude did not prevail everywhere blacks and Indians intermingled, but it was a characterizing feature in some communities which chose to unite against the whites. See Price's, Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas. (NY: Anchor Press, 1973).

10 These stories of Nanny and Douglass' physical invincibility are of course legend. There is no definitive way of proving their actual credulity; however, these two legends have become widespread in historical accounts. For example, in Price's Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas, in Patterson's "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Socio-historical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665-1740," and Douglass' own autobiography,
"To their natural bravery was added the encouragement of the obeahmen who distributed powder . . . which it was believed, would protect them from injury in battle" (Black 64). Too, there is evidence that Outlyer community leaders in the Caribbean as well as the United States entered into a type of "conjuring communion" before battle. This ritual (noted in the United States as the characterizing feature in Turner's rebellion) included the mixing of dirt, gunpowder and blood from each participant's wrists, as a sign of dedication, affirmation and commitment.

The studies of numerous historians reveal that, transnationally, Outlyer communities maintained similar socio-political organizational structures in their societies. Maroon communities were almost always guided by a leader and his/her chosen officers who effectively designed rules for living and stratagems to deal with deviants and traitors. Most often, punishments were harsh, resulting in the death of those who endangered the community through betrayal or unnecessary risk taking. Wherever geographical terrain permitted, Outlyers cultivated gardens to maintain physical sustenance as well as economic independence (Price 10). Whenever they lived in the remote swamps and areas not particularly conducive to farming, the Outlyers relied on sustenance from the raiding of nearby plantations. In many cases, collusion between lower class whites and Indians aided these

My Bondage My Freedom.

11 This activity seems to have been most common among those who had strong ties to Africa or had not been in the West for a long time.

efforts; "... underprivileged whites carried on their own struggle against ruling groups ... , [hence] the getting away from the myth of a placid, contented classless united land ... (79). Additionally, the production of items farmed or crafted by Outlyers, as well as those pilfered from neighboring plantations, were taken to "market" and sold by lower class whites who received a percentage of the earnings of the Outlyers' productions, but rendered unto the Outlyers the profits made.

III

In exploring the relationship of Outlyerism to the literary work of Michelle Cliff, it is necessary to look at distinct social, political, and historical phenomena in Outlyer history which seem to correlate directly with Cliff's manipulation of literary content and form such that these strategies become literary and historical tropes. The social, political, and military strategies used by Outlyers can be roughly grouped into eight categories: 1. Conjuring 2. Camouflage 3. Creolization 4. Rapid Movements from one area to another 5. Military ambush 6. Primacy of Rituals 7. Primacy of Elders 8. Use of communicative instruments such as the Abeng, and Talking Drums as forms of Military Intelligence. While the Outlyers were able to use these strategies as forms of resistance in an historical space, Cliff employs them figuratively, in the literary space, towards the same end, such that, now, these strategies operate as tropes which illustrate her contouring of literary form and content, giving heightened import to the notion of "creative resistance."

As a point of departure, it becomes necessary to discuss briefly how the eight aforementioned strategies can be interpreted literally, as tropes. Within Outlyer communities, most of these strategies were enacted simultaneously for efficacy. Thus, it should be understood that as tropes...
they overlap generously, complementing and supplementing each other. Cliff, like the Outlyers, does not employ any one strategy in isolation, but rather, for a holistic effect, blends richly these eight characteristics, rendering her work a wholesome literary concoction, replete with tropological signification. For the purpose of this study, it is useful to consider *Conjuring* as the primal, antecedent literary trope --the one from which all other strategies--Outlyer tropes--emanate, and the one with which all other strategies work.

1. *Conjuring*: using a definition of the conjurer as one who seeks to manipulate elements such that they function outside of their ordinary realm, and do things that they would not ordinarily do, we may consider Cliff a Literary Conjurer who manipulates historical elements, language, form and geography. She blends fact with fiction in a manner which blurs their distinction equivocally.

2. *Camouflage*: disguise used in the presence of the adversary. For effectiveness, every conjurer must be highly skilled in the art of camouflage--disguise. The art of conjuring hinges in great part on camouflaging and manipulating forms. Cliff uses techniques of camouflaging in form by blending fiction with history so that a fictional text can serve as discourse upon historical texts. In terms of content, Cliff manipulates camouflage by subverting and inverting gender and racial categories. She disrupts binary paradigms so that familiar touchstones, familiar notions of gender and race are reconfigured.

3. *Creolization*: the blending of various cultures and races, and/or artistic forms or language. Again, part of the Conjurer's success lies in the ability to mix a wide variety of elements to create an effective potion. In form, Cliff blends poetry with prose, historical writing, and epistolary form. In content,
she dispels the notion of one homogenous, "margin" of minority culture by creating spaces where there are cultural potpourris of Africans, Jews, Indians, Caribs, and even Europeans who come together to build cultural matrices independent of the larger oppressing culture. Gender dichotomization also takes on the form of creolization in No Telephone To Heaven as Cliff constructs a character who is both male and female.

4. **Rapid Shifts:** quick movements from one area to another--quick changes in strategies of defense or offense. In form, Cliff's texts are propelled by rapid movements in time, place, voice, gender and form. These textual shifts are part of what may be considered 5. **Literary Ambush:** the notion of surprise marked by unexpected, forceful thrust of text that seems misplaced--anachronistic.

6. **Primacy of Rituals:** Ritual is without doubt the communion of the conjurer. Cliff employs cultural symbols, motifs and rituals in the content of her work in ways that surpass the efficacy of language itself. Also, it seems that the re-writing of the history of African resistance becomes a ritual for Cliff in both Abeng and No Telephone to Heaven.

7. **Primacy of Elders:** Most Conjurers have a sense of reverence for the ancestors, who have opened the way for them and intercede on their behalf. For Cliff, there is a constant evocation of elders, particularly grandmothers. This "grandmother trope" parallels the evocation of the muse popular in the epic form, and signifies on the importance of elders to history, and the reclamation of ancestry.

8. **Abeng:** The abeng is an instrument that was used by Outlyers in the West Indies. "It was the instrument used by the Maroons to pass their messages and reach one another" (Abeng 1). Cliff's texts are so dense with significations upon history that they can only be really understood if one
knows the history she is attempting to re-write, or is at least familiar with the historical figures, the nuances surrounding the lives she recreates. Because the abeng sent direct messages to the ears of those who were listening, and who had been trained to hear their names, specifically, in its tunes, we must consider Cliff's writing as a clarion call to those who are waiting to hear the official versions of history, as told by the Outlyer. Just as the Outlyers used instruments such as the abeng as part of a network of military intelligence, so too does Cliff use her work as a sign in the matrix of historical signification.
Chapter One: Conjuring the (un)Official: Outlyerism in Abeng

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion this revolution with the people . . . In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought . . . There is no part outside the fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not [her]self concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and the suffering of humanity—Sekou Toure (Fanon 206).

By evoking the struggle of the Outlyers in the novels Abeng and No Telephone to Heaven, Michelle Cliff asserts her dedication to the revolutionary spirit of those who wish to continue the "great battle" against the subjugation of African and African American peoples by forging their own communities. In her own right, Michelle Cliff establishes herself among the "magnanimous female warriors" she praises in No Telephone to Heaven—the great mother/grandmother "conjurers" who possess the secrets of old, those fragments of lost, forgotten, abandoned, suppressed history, which need to be unearthed and used in the struggle against hegemony, and the quest for spiritual survival in spaces committed to the complete extermination and erasure of blackness. It is useful to consider Cliff a Literary Conjurer—one who uses memory and the (re)writing of history as the primary tools for creative resistance and political self-recovery,¹ appropriating elements of Afro-Caribbean myth and legend with history, in a fictional discourse, to create narratives that challenge "official" versions of history. As an artist, Cliff, by way of her work, situates herself inside the "fight" against the suffering of humanity.

¹This notion of political self-recovery is taken from bell hooks [sic] in the work Black Looks, (Boston: South End Press, 1992).
humanity; her novels are, indeed, a living "part of Africa and her thought." To consider her a Literary Conjurer is to understand how in both the form and content of both novels, Abeng and its sequel No Telephone To Heaven, she manipulates the suppressed fragments of Outlyer history to reconfigure our gaze . . . to create a vision of resistance that challenges reality as we have come to know it, by the "official" historical versions, and to transform these versions into (un) official versions. Says Cliff: "I've always been struck by the misrepresentation of history and have tried to correct received versions . . . One of the things I am trying to do is to adjust the lens, to re-vision\textsuperscript{2} history" (Adisa 280). What the reader comes to see, as a result of Cliff's literary conjuring, is the inversion of the official and the (un)official--"It's no mystery/We make history . . ." (No Telephone 5).

In interviews with Opal Adisa Palmer and Judith Raiskin Cliff explains further that ". . . part of the whole process [of writing is], to correct what's been said, put those pieces of history together . . . especially the history of resistance. It seems to me that if one does not know that one's people have resisted, then it makes resistance difficult" (Raskin 66 & Adisa 280). This reconfiguration of history which possesses the power to transform our historical gaze and self-identification finds its creative and historical analogue not only in the notion of Cliff's Outlyerist literary conjuring, but too, in the legendary grandmother Nanny's ability to deflect the ammunition of the redcoats--the colonizers.\textsuperscript{3} In the true spirit of the Outlyer, Cliff catches the history of the

\textsuperscript{2} This idea of "re-visioning" is directly related to conjuring and the ability to manipulate what others see.

\textsuperscript{3}Nanny was a famous warrior 'Chieftainess' of the Maroons in Jamaica, who was known throughout the land for her skills as a military leader of the Outlyers. Her Outlyer camps are rumored to have had hundreds of members who followed her commands diligently. Legend has it that she had the power, by way of conjuring, to catch the bullets of the British soldiers and
colonizer--their historical ammunition, which would reduce black nationalist struggle to atheoretical chaos--and returns the historical assault on multi-ethnic oppressed peoples with potent textual ammunition of her own. Cliff's literary conjuring works not only to liberate the oppressed, to transform their self-gaze, but also, to subvert the hegemonic colonial gaze which works to oppress minority peoples. To use Henry Louis Gates' term, Cliff signifies with a signal difference in viewpoint. However, while Cliff's literary and historical conjuring subverts the colonial gaze, she is not interested in supplanting one hegemony for another; her aim is chiefly to signify with a difference, not assert any hierarchy of ethnic supremacy. To emphasize further Cliff's use of literary conjuring by using fictional texts to transform historical discourse, it is useful to consider Franz Fanon's comments about subverting colonial history. Fanon writes:

The immobility to which the native [colonial subject] is condemned can only be called into question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization--the history of pillage--and bring into existence the history of the nation--the history of decolonization. . . . In the period of decolonization, the [writer] mocks . . . the supremacy of the white man's values . . . insults them, and vomits them up (51 &43).

With the writing of Abeng and No Telephone to Heaven, Cliff calls into question the (un) official versions of black resistance, hence Fanon's insightful comment that: "In decolonization, there is . . . a complete calling into question of the colonial situation" (37). Significantly, Fanon's notion of vomiting up "the white man's values" coincides with Nanny's bullet catching legend. By re-troping

return them with an even more powerful blow.
historical accounts, Cliff uses fiction to purge from the history of African resistance the tinctures of inaccuracy and mendacity produced in colonial accounts.

For Cliff, "To bear the burden of memory one must willingly journey to places long uninhabited, searching the debts of history for traces of the unforgettable . . .," and this must be done by restoring the connections with the elders, specifically, the great mother/grandmothers--the magnanimous warriors like Nanny of the Maroons (hooks 342). "Can you remember how to love her?" Cliff asks of the magnanimous female warrior, "Now that we need her more than ever" (No Telephone 164). In Abeng and No Telephone, historical and spiritual reclamation are figured through the great mother/grandmother trope and the notion of movement--journey--in the process of historical and spiritual reclamation. Cliff uses land--elaborate description of landscape--to buttress this notion of movement over and beyond terrain that promises to nurture as much as it promises to betray, if one is not well acquainted with the land's specific contours--the womb of the great grandmothers. These contours, however, are the spaces which make camouflage and ambush, two of the most important survival strategies for the Outlyer, possible. These spaces are spaces where "entry ways are covered in some places with vines . . . with cascades of water:" spaces where one can, if she connects with the vital spirit of Nanny, learn to be "surefooted and to guard those [critical] points of access," so essential to camouflaging and ambushing (Abeng 19).

In Abeng and No Telephone to Heaven, these "points of access" figure, metaphorically, as places of connections and disconnections with the spiritual and revolutionary legacy of the Great African and African American grandmothers. The historical significance of the grandmother's presence--their contributions to African American peoples--is accentuated by Cliff's assertion of
the impact of lineage and ancestry charted, primarily, by connections with elders—one's mother and grandmother—but also, understood through celebrating all aspects of the self—all fragments of ancestry—whatever the race, nationality, or sexuality. Cliff writes that "At her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practices, and food. She assists in the rites of passage, protects, and teaches. She may be informed with the *ashe*, the power to make things happen, the responsibility to mete justice" (Cliff "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character" 267).

The protagonist in both *Abeng* and *No Telephone*, Clare Savage, finds herself through the act of journeying and by establishing important spiritual and philosophical connections with her mother, grandmother, and the Outlyers. Yet, Clare cannot do so independent of reclaiming the land—this literal space . . . "country," so beloved by her grandmother, and by extension Nanny, our great Outlyer warrior; she cannot do so without retrieving the umbilical cord of connections buried beneath this land, so she turns to collecting the relics of riunate\textsuperscript{4} from both her mother and grandmother's past. Snatches of her grandmother, Miss Mattie, and her mother Kitty's past, buried under the riunate which has over taken the land, provide spiritual sustenance and empowerment for Clare, enabling her to link herself definitively with the heritage of these women and the heritage of the Outlyers:

Clare slithered beneath her grandmother's house, drawing her head through widow's webs, pulling herself through the hard black leavings of rats, hands scraping against fragments of shells embedded in the *ground*, which signaled the explosive birth of the

\textsuperscript{4}Cliff defines this term according to B. Floyd's definition as a word used "to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into the...bush" (*No Telephone To Heaven* 1).
island. . . . Her mother's schoolbooks--history, literature, geography--opened their wormed pages to a former world . . . Clare . . . gathered her mother's girlhood into a crocus sack. . . . tucked the ends of the crocus sack into the loosened earth, placing the piece of shell on top (No Telephone 199-200).

But these connections between land, grandmother, spirituality, and self empowerment are over thirty years in the making; the Clare that one finds at the end of No Telephone has traveled a long road, literally and spiritually. Significantly, Clare's return to this actual land of her grandmother, in the rural parish of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, is possible only because of her connection with the Jamaican Outlyers, who are waging war against the oppressive political leaders of Jamaica. As Clare crouches beneath this old, abandoned, dilapidated house of her grandmother, trying to collect vestiges of the past, one is reminded of the Outlyers, foraging through the wild, country wilderness, trying to master its flora and fauna, so that it can nurture and protect them. These snatches of "eggshells" mixed with "history" are the crucial links--pieces to the puzzle of identity, and self-empowerment, which Clare so desperately seeks and needs. Clare literally assumes the Outlyer posturing, the crouching pose. Like Nanny, "She moves her elbows and knees across the rock ledges. Through corridors created by stone . . ." in order to unearth the elements that will sustain her in the physical, spiritual, and philosophical battle against the hegemonic enemy (Abeng 19).

When Cliff begins Abeng, it is clear/Clare that she is standing guard over the spiritual, philosophical, and historical "points of access" that will maintain the vitality of African peoples. Her prologue reads: "The island rose and sank. Twice. During periods in which history was recorded by indentations on rock and shell. This is a book about the time that followed that time. As the island
became a place where people lived." (Abeng 3). While Cliff conjures up historical memories of the struggle for resistance against colonialism and European imperialism, her writing chips away at the new rock hard sediments, firmly established, historical indentations--colonial history and religion--which misguide African peoples, even as these indentations promise to "deliver" Africans from their suffering. This prologue is Cliff's way of explaining that her fiction will be chiseled over the rock hard indentations set in place by colonial texts. Abeng opens in 1958 on a "Sunday morning at the height of . . . the mango season," with the "Savages--father, mother and two daughters . . . getting ready for church, the first service of the day" (3). Cliff's juxtaposition of history against the fictional life of the Savages suggests, at once, that historical connections with the ancestors are crucial to spiritual survival. Cliff divides her first chapter into seven sections, with rapid textual shifts that interpolate between the history of Jamaica, and the Savages' Sunday activities. She manipulates her text in such a way that the stories of African Caribbeans, past and present, provide insight into the world of the Savages. Implicit in this conjuring of form--the blending of history with fiction--is Cliff's use of literary camouflage: the use of fictional discourse to assert socio-historical and political critique on European imperialism, which has forged disconnections between Jamaicans and their original spiritual base--the traditions of their ancestors.

In Chapters One and Two, Cliff establishes a host of contradictions to illustrate the discrepancy between the pious promises of the colonial church and the reality of the lives of those it serves and has claimed to serve. One of the first contradictions is represented in a symbol, the church harpsichord, "which had been shipped to Jamaica in a box . . . The instrument never adjusted to the climate" (Abeng 6). The middle class people of John Knox Memorial are told to sing softly, to observe the nuances of "harmony and quiet"
so as not to drown out the tones of this displaced instrument that cannot accommodate their voices: "Although they were not able to say so, the people of the congregation had always felt the harpsichord had been a mistake--not meant . . . to accompany a hundred voices" (6). As this feeble, but apparently authoritative voice of the harpsichord dictates its intonations,\(^5\) the range and scale of the song at hand, Cliff uses the harpsichord as a symbol of colonialism forcing its will upon the native people through the suppression of their voices--the voices of resistance. The protocol that the harpsichord requires--harmony and quiet--becomes a metaphor for the advocacy of revolutionary self-restraint and universal subjectivity, even in the face of the marked cultural and historical differences between the natives and their colonial leaders. For the people of John Knox to observe nuances of harmony and quiet, they must ignore the differences in culture and styles of worship that would prove the harpsichord inappropriate and unnecessary. They must ignore the great economic divide between themselves and their fellow citizens who suffer from political abuse (live in poverty) and manipulation by the colonial policies of administration. They must submit to the harpsichord's power and let it lead the song of worship, while they provide the background accompaniment. As Fanon offers, "In order to assimilate and to experience the oppressor's culture, the native has to leave certain of [her] intellectual [and cultural] possessions in pawn. These pledges include the adoption of the forms of thought of the colonialist

\(^5\)Interestingly, this whole idea of the English harpsichord asserting its notes over the voice of the native people is a metaphor for the struggle between ideas presented in oral versions of history, a form beloved by African peoples, and those historical versions presented in written--\textit{noted} history, a form beloved by the colonists who feverishly sought in diaries and travel journals to document and insert interpretations of history as a way of proving their established culture. African peoples seemed to be content with the understanding that there \textit{is} a culture that would be preserved by posterity--the oral text--rather than the written text.
bourgeoisie" (49). The middle class bourgeoisie of John Knox must appropriate the elements and posturing of the mother country by suppressing their voices, eradicating all traces of traditional--native--culture which threatens to invoke the notion of difference so crucial in the process of self-realization. It is as if their realization of differences in culture, economic mobility, and political opportunity available to them and to those who occupy the lower strata of class will magnify colonial domination that threatens, even them--the chosen people--and thrust them into disillusionment. Thus, the middle class natives of John Knox are as afraid of comparison as the whites.

To consider the harpsichord a symbol of colonialism and European imperialism is to understand the church's deep investment in deflecting attention from colonialism's supremacy, courted under the shallow pretext of harmony and sameness. For the colonial champions of the harpsichord, all ways of looking that highlight difference--those rich black voices that threaten to rise in emotion--subvert the liberal conviction that is the assertion of universal subjectivity, by threatening the mythic illusion of sanguine homogeneity purported by notions of religious harmony. To observe harmony and quiet, the people of John Knox must ignore racism and cultural imperialism. What they fearfully fail to acknowledge is that this illusion of homogeneity is strategically employed. Racial hegemony and cultural imperialism are given to them as part of a mantle of "divine selection," which obsfuscates the colonizer's true intentions (that of ravaging the colonies and its peoples) by supporting a manichean dichotomy that polarizes the natives

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through color-chromatism, intra-racism, and romantic notions of class--false categories.

But, for all its promises, the harpsichord cannot completely cover the voices of the light-skinned, middle class people. Struggling to avert their gaze from the social and political contradictions around them, the middle class bourgeoisie of John Knox must ever be reminded by the school master to "tone down their singing" (Abeng 6). Their voices, which periodically rise in unison, overpowering the harpsichord, imply a reflexive response reminiscent of the culture they have forsaken, their darker brothers and sisters whom they have forgotten, and most importantly, the middle class's own recognition that they are not exempt from the hegemony of the European colonists, merely awarded a milder degree (however slight) of domination. This periodical rise in voices is, then, a metaphor for the ambivalence of this native middle class's desire to "cry out," as their peripheral vision takes in a glance of their own suffering, which they complicitly help to reinforce. Cliff further emphasizes this metaphor of middle class ambivalence by indicating that the school master's admonitions to "tone down their singing. . . . didn't work" (Abeng 6).

Cliff continues her evocation of contradictions inherent in the colonial Church in Chapter One by forcefully inserting an historical section about the three prestigious churches in Jamaica, one of which had a direct hand in the inhumanity against African peoples. Cliff sounds her historical and critical abeng, drowning out the pretentious notes of the colonial harpsichords which have kept a history of subjugation quiet, purported "harmony" under a covering of religiously sanctioned hate. She reveals the promise of the Anglican Christian Church to be deadly, life taking:

The Parish Church was High Anglican--it was the church of attendance of the white governor, and members of the royal
family stopped there when the queen's yacht . . . docked in Kingston Harbor. In 1958, while digging near the church-yard during some renovations to the building, workers uncovered a coffin . . . a coffin of huge proportions . . . shaped like a monstrous packing case, made of lead, welded shut (7).

This section of Chapter One seems almost misplaced, anachronistic, as it chronicles the lives of the "hundred plague victims, part of a shipload of slaves from the Gold Coast, who . . . contracted the plague from the rats on the vessel which brought them to Jamaica," alongside the lives of those who seek security in the teachings of the Anglican church, and consider themselves faithful worshippers (7). With this insertion that pivots on the tangential relationship of the subject, the church, Cliff seizes the opportunity to highlight the inherent contradictions between the religious thought and actions of the rich colonists. It is only after cataloguing the prestige associated with the Holy Cross Cathedral and the Kingston Anglican church, that Cliff quickly shifts her text to signify on the church's complicity in a history of enslavement and inhumanity. Her irony hinges on understanding that the bodies of slaves are the foundation for this edifice of "holiness," beloved by everyone, including the "queen, and the white governor." By indicating that it is the country's "wealthy" who worship at The Parish Church, Cliff asserts the idea that their edification, both spiritual and economic, is predicated upon subjugation, the murder of slaves:

Others, many others, would have died onboard and their bodies dropped in the sea along the Middle Passage--the route across the Atlantic from Africa. The vicar commissioned an American navy warship in port to take the coffin twenty miles out to sea and
sink it . . . The people in the coffin had died in a baracoon in
Kingston-a holding pen-a stockade (8).7

Through this remotely related but seemingly misplaced fragment of history situated in between a discussion about the Savages and their own church, Cliff employs a strategy of literary ambush. In typical Outlyer fashion, she launches a surprise literary and historical attack on European hypocrisy and imperialism enacted through the colonial church. The efficacy of Cliff’s ambush obtains because the reader does not expect historical critique at this moment. Cliff has written this section as if she meant only to catalogue the “rich” history of the prestigious Jamaican church.8 There is no preparation for negation, for Cliff links the church with the most esteemed of the island’s colonists and rulers, the “queen” and the “white governor.”9 Thus, the element of surprise unveiled at the end of this section is three-fold: at once for the reader and for both those who are renovating the church, and those who are basking in the protection of its self-righteous graces, when the horror of the church’s complicity in a murder and brutal sacrilege against humanity is unearthed. This surprise is dramatic and forceful, as Cliff presents compelling evidence—the bodies of the dead—without lingering elaboration or sentimental comment, and quickly brings

7 Elsewhere in the text, Cliff advances this idea in more directly when she offers that “The bones of the slaves made the land of Runaway Bay rich and green” (40). Runaway Bay, like the church, is a metaphor for the sites the oppressors colonize—the empires built on the blood, sweat, and tears of enslaved Africans.

8 Indeed she does plan to unveil the history of the rich, but by the end of the passage, the reader understands that this has been a subversive set up.

9 It is interesting that in this passage which focuses, meticulously, on cataloguing the names of different churches, religious groups, places, momentous years, and even the queen’s boat, the H. M. S. Britannia, Cliff chooses to omit the proper names of the queen and the governor, thereby allowing her to refer to them without capitalization. With this subtlety, the lack of specific naming allows for the graphic dethroning of the “queen” and the “governor.”
abrupt closure to this section: "The coffin should be opened on no account the plaque said, as the plague might still be viable. The vicar commissioned American navy warship in port to take the coffin twenty miles out and sink it in the sea" (8). The subversion provided by literary ambush becomes pronounced when Cliff rapidly shifts her text back to the Savages Sunday "seabath" at Tumbleover beach, leaving the reader to draw her own conclusions, to ponder the weight of the mantle of contradictions just presented. It is Cliff's gaping silence that refuses to stretch into direct moral and ethical judgment--critique--that is more effective than language at this juncture. Part of the cogency of this passage is achieved through silence; the absence of discourse--comment--outside of the cold "facts" is haunting and effective precisely because of Cliff's abruptness--ambush--which makes the rawness of her portraiture of this horror visceral. Moreover, by placing the revelation of the slaves' bodies at the end of the passage, Cliff establishes a potent structural metaphor that serves as a graphic analogue to map out her point: the discussion about the church which precedes Cliff's discussion of the slaves literally stands on top of Cliff's final revelation of the slaves' buried bodies.

In Chapters Two and Three, the reader is made aware of class differences between the islanders as Cliff takes us to the "Tabernacle of the Almighty, on Mountainview Road, Mrs. Savage's place of worship," where people come to church on foot, to this cement-block building adjoined to a Chinese grocery store (Abeng 11). Cliff subtly prepares the reader for another detour into the corridors of history by indicating that "At the back of the church the dark outlines of the foothills of Blue Mountains were shadowed" (11). This hovering presence of the Blue Mountains, that were once habitat of the Maroons, figures symbolically as the backdrop to this new religion, Christianity, through which the poor, native peoples express "the necessity of deliverance . . . their
eventual redemption" (12). The mountains serve as a literal foreshadowing of the Maroonist spirit of Nanny, which Cliff will later invoke in her continued discussion of spirituality and the Christian church. By exploring the differences in the types of hymns, literally the nature of the philosophy each church offers its peoples, Cliff establishes a contrast between John Knox Memorial and the Almighty Tabernacle. Whereas

The hymns at John Knox seemed to suggest a historical and almost equal relationship with the idea of God—that this God would support the travel of the Word to faraway "climes" and distant "heathen" by almost any means necessary—"marching as to war... The hymns sung by the people in the Tabernacle suggested something else. The necessity of deliverance. A belief in their eventual redemption. The balm of Gilead (12).

The difference in these hymns, implicit in the subtle elements of class Cliff evokes, typifies the difference in the perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized—the oppressors and the "sufferahs."10 While the hymns at John Knox indicate a parity with God that sanctions hegemony, the hymns at The Almighty Tabernacle express the desperation of the oppressed. Once again, Cliff employs camouflage, asserting a veiled socio-historical and political critique of cultural imperialism perpetrated under the guise of religiosity, by citing the titles of the hymns sung in each church. At John Knox, the predominantly middle class congregation offers up battle cries like "Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War," "God Save the Queen," and "Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still in Spite of the Dungeon, Fire and Sword" (7). Theirs are songs of victory, triumph, rallying soldiers for combat, with the "banner of

10 A Jamaican vernacular term used to describe suffering people who have been subjugated by colonial systems of oppression, racism and imperialism.
righteousness" held high by the "red-faced English man," their minister, who "had been a major in the King's [of England] Household Cavalry during the . . . war" (6). On the other hand, the lower class people who worship at the Tabernacle sing hymns of supplication, like "Rock of Ages, cleft for me/Let me hide my self in Thee/Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side . . . cure, cleanse me from . . . guilt . . ." (12). Theirs are cries and bellows for mercy, for both spiritual and economic help, as indicated by Cliff's vivid descriptions of their every day lives:

The men who were in the Tabernacle were being sorely tempted. . . . The space the temptation entered . . . could not be filled by hymn-singing or sermons, no matter how terrifying. The space had been carved so long ago, carried so long within, it was a historic fact. . . . when they worked [they] were servants to light-skinned or white families;¹¹ waiters . . . porters. . . . They balanced trays of Red Stripe beer . . . on their up-turned palms. . . . They lived from week to week . . . women . . . had their spaces of need also--but for most of them, the space had been reduced over time, so that . . . Their anguish in this life became . . . identifiable in the faces of people they were a part of (16-17).

Here Cliff reveals dichotomy as an indelible cornerstone in the establishment of class in the colonial context. "The [white] colonialist bourgeoisie, when it realizes that it is impossible for it to maintain its domination over the colonial countries, decides to carry out a rearguard action with regard to culture, values, techniques . . ." (Fanon 49). The classist manicheism Cliff divulges in the depiction of both Churches is articulated as the

¹¹My emphasis added to highlight the hierarchy of class.
outgrowth--the veritable extension--of European cultural imperialism and colonial domination. In this colonial context, the church becomes one of the social institutions wherein hegemony is practiced, reinforced, and encouraged by classist and intra-racial divisions. As Fanon offers, the colonial context is characterized by the dichotomy it imposes on the whole people" (45). The "light-skinned blacks," about whom Cliff speaks, are not able to identify the anguish "in the faces of the people they were a part of," the people whom they slight daily, since they conceive themselves to be different, better than the darker natives, white. Tracing their heritage back to the wealthy white English sugar plantation owners, the light-skinned bourgeoisie, of which the Savages are a part, believe "the only thing worse than [being dark is] to be dead" (Abeng 77). Boy Savage takes painstaking measures to explain this to his daughter in a conversation about the forbidden inter-marrying of Jews and whites depicted in Walter Scott's Ivanho: "... You are my daughter. You're white" (73). Ironically, these light-skinned natives have such a deep investment in the notion that color confers their self-worth because they know that in this colonial context, predicated on exploitation, they are but a few strides from the economic and political suffering of the darker Jamaican natives.

For Boy Savage and the light-skinned middle class to identify with the anguish in the faces of the darker lower class natives, they would have to betray their own suffering. They would have to face the reality of their social, economic, and political situation in the colonies, realizing that while they bask in notions of inherent supremacy over darker natives, the reality of their economic situations, their social and political relationship to the white colonists, does not support an authentically supremacist position. They would have to admit that "... economic reality, inequality, and the immense difference of ways of life never come to mask human realities" (Fanon 40). As Cliff reveals it,
class, for a great number of light-skinned Jamaicans, is founded on a fickle smoke screen, a mirage, that threatens to vaporize rather quickly if these light-skinned natives attempt to address any real issues of social, political, and economic power, as these issues relate to the rich white colonists. The pretentiousness of paper-thin categories of class supremacy, predicated on color and religion is emphasized further when Cliff offers:

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. Their arrogance became. . . pathetic-like a man pan-handling in an evening suit (Abeng 29).

Boy Savage has so desperately invested in the myth of his supremacy that his reasoning circumvents all logic, even the perfectly sensible reasoning of his twelve year old daughter who understands that she is "colored" because her mother is black.

Clare--"But mother is colored. Isn't she?"

Boy--"Yes."

Clare--"If she is colored and you are white, doesn't that make me colored?"

Boy--"No . . ." (73).

Continuing with her rhythmic syncopation between history and the present in Chapter Two, Cliff reveals the importance of the black natives establishing spiritual connections with the elders--the great grandmothers--that will enable them to become self-empowered. In discussing the worshipping patterns of the people at the Tabernacle, Cliff off-handedly comments that the Blue Mountains lie in back of the church as an overshadowing presence. This subtle detail
proves significant to Cliff's structuring of Chapters Two and Three where she talks about the poor people's quest for deliverance through Christianity, even as she sections off her text with rapid shifts to discuss Nanny, the Outlyer 'Chieftainess' and Conjurer. While the natives at the Tabernacle entreat the "white Jesus, with his chestnut hair, brown eyes and soft mustache," Nanny's spirit hovers in their midst ignored and forgotten (Abeng 16). While they beg to be "washed in the blood of the Lamb," cleansed from their guilt and sin, Nanny stands by waiting to be invoked. Structurally, Cliff conveys this notion through a gradual building, a literary crescendo, that pivots on the subject of spirituality. First she discusses Brother Emmanuel's sermon--"It was the brother's standard preface to a sermon in which all in the room were condemned . . ."--then, she closes this section with a lined divider and rapidly shifts to discuss Clare's grandmother, Miss Mattie's, preparation for Sunday prayer meeting communion in her home; then again, suddenly, without any warning, save a lined divider, Cliff rapidly shifts her text to tell the reader that "In 1733, Nanny, the sorceress, the obeah woman, was killed by a quashee--a faithful slave to the planters--at the height of the [Maroon War] . . ." (11 & 14). Cliff continues:

Nanny who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless, was from the empire of the Ashanti, and carried secrets of her magic into slavery. She prepared amulets and oaths for her armies. Her Nanny Town, hidden in the crevices of the Blue Mountains, was the headquarters of the Winward Maroons. Nanny was the magician of this revolution--she used her skill to unite her people and to consecrate their battles. There is absolutely no doubt that she actually existed. And the ruins of Nanny Town remain difficult to reach (14).
While the relationship between the text that precedes and comes after this anachronistic insert may not be readily apparent, insightful connections can be made if the reader considers the chapter's entire discussion about spiritually and religious ritual, the connectives around which the chapter's rapid shifts pivot. Nanny's power—*ashe*—achieved through obeah, was the power she used as a physical and *spiritual* liberating force for her people. Interestingly, the language Cliff uses in this passage signifies, through contrast, on Miss Mattie's communion preparation in the previous section—"Miss Mattie opened her ceremonial bottle of red South African wine . . . this is my blood, which is shed for you . . ."—when Cliff indicates that Nanny by way of her magic, "used her skill to unite her people and *consecrate* their battles" (14). With the use of the word *consecrate*, Cliff asserts Nanny's magic/ *conjuring* as a *ritual* equally as powerful as the teachings and practice of the communion, with more realizable effects in the natives' quest for both physical and spiritual liberation, than that of abstract communion. Freedom, the tangible result of Nanny's *conjuring*, is achieved through physical battle. Thus, in Cliff's brilliant stroke of structural antithesis, Nanny literally becomes a contrasting analogue to this "white Jesus" upon whom the natives wait—"We mus' bide our time, We mus' be patient. We will wait on the Lord. This is the way children" (15). Though subtle, Cliff's comparisons between Nanny and Jesus are compelling: Nanny, like Jesus, invests her time in the uplift of the poor *sufferahs*, using *conjuring*, for which miracle working is a metaphor, to fight the battles against the oppressor, the enemy. By structurally juxtaposing this insert about Nanny in between a discussion about the chestnut haired Jesus, Cliff asserts Nanny's presence as a rivaling power, one that offers as much, if not more, liberation than the Christian gospel. In fact, Cliff's strategy of *rapidly shifting*, of juxtaposing Outlyer history next to the reality of African subjugation in the fictional context,
is her own literary way of espousing revolution in the midst of a revelation of African subjugation. She literally reconfigures the way in which subjugation is conceptualized through the structuring of her work. True, it is necessary to reveal the exploitation of blacks by European hegemony and cultural imperialism, but Cliff expands her text to provide an answer to this exploitation; her answer is definitively historical. She fights back with her text by disrupting and interrupting the narration of African subjugation with historical information about the Outlyers who successfully resisted enslavement. Her disruptions, her spastic shifts, become part of an artillery of art-literary combat. For Cliff, structural resistance becomes a trope when she signifies on the history of African subjugation with a differences in both perspective and presentation. She re-tropes the whole idea of narratives of black marginalization and exploitation to suggest an alternative--black revolution, proving that "There is no part outside of the fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not [herself] concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and the suffering of humanity" (Toure in Fanon 206). Her narrative style takes on the configuration of organized creative resistance, wherein the text becomes the revolutionary battle-site. Like Nanny, Cliff uses the Outlyer strategies to ensure the ashe, to mete historical justice.

While the congregation at the Tabernacle is unable to invoke Nanny's spirit and claim their freedom, by the time the reader enters Chapter Three, Cliff stylistically manipulates her text with a shift in tense, from past to present, such that she literally conjures up the spirit of Nanny to reflect her as a living being, right in the natives' (and by symbolic extension the reader's) midst. Cliff bridges the connection between Chapters Two and Three by explaining at the end of Chapter Two that "In the beginning there had been two sisters--Nanny and Sekesu. Nanny fled slavery. Sekesu remained a slave. It was believed that all
the island children were descended from one or another [of the sisters]. All island people were first cousins" (Abeng 18). She then implies the spiritual and historical disconnections colonialism has forged for the natives who "could trace their bloodlines back to a past of slavery. But this was not something they... knew much about...", for "in school they were told that their ancestors were pagan" (18). Then, with all the ferocity of ambush, Cliff surprises the reader with a rapid sectional shift wherein she invokes Nanny in the present tense.

Now her head is tied. Now braided. Strung with beads and cowrie shells. Now she stalks the Red Coats as they march toward her cave, where she spins Akan chants into spells which stun her enemies. Calls on the goddesses of the Ashanti forests. ... The precipices of the mountains often hold caves she can use for headquarters or to conceal the weapons of her army. She mixes dyes from roots and teaches others to cast images on the walls. ... She teaches them to become bullet proof. To catch a bullet in their left hand and fire it back at their attackers (19).

In this passage, Cliff's shift in tense is significant to the notion of spirituality and ancestral connections because it places Nanny directly among the people (and the reader). She is here, she is "Now," artfully conjured by Cliff herself. Though the natives do not know of Nanny's legendary prowess or her great feats against the enemy, she is ever with them, ever with us: "Some were called Nanny because they cared for the children of other women, but they did not know who Nanny had been" (21). These natives had not known of Nanny, had not known about "the kingdom of the Ashanti or the Kingdom of the Dahomey, where most of their ancestors had come from," had not imagined "that Black Africans had commanded thousands of warriors. Built universities.
Created systems of law. Devised language. Wrote history" (20). Otherwise, they would not partake daily in rituals of self-negation, which reinforce the oppressor's ideology by making them feel that their skins doom their very existence. Had the natives at the Tabernacle known Nanny's rituals they would be self-empowered, pro-active, not yearning for some far away deliverance, fooled by a pacifist ideology which supported their subjugation. They would be able to defend themselves by reversing the colonialists' deadly doctrines--bullets--with their hands (metaphorically revolution), as Nanny once taught her troops to do. The problem the natives of the Tabernacle face, as they recite the lyrics of self-negation given to them by the colonial church, is that no matter how much they beg to be "washed pure," they will remain black; their features will remain fixed. They surround themselves with self-negating imagery and hope for this said imagery to transform their reality into something positive, but this never happens. Moreover, in the colonial context, it is precisely because they are black, or darker than the mulattos, who seem to think themselves white, that the natives at the Tabernacle are exploited by a religious, social, economic, and political colonialist regime that fosters their suffering and necessitates a rhetoric of deliverance. When one examines at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world begins with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race (Fanon 40). The cause of suffering becomes the consequence for the natives being who they are, and where they are cast(e) in colonialist society; one is poor because one is black; one is black because one is poor (Fanon 40).

While the poor people of the Tabernacle seem to think that if they parody the structure and ideology of the white colonial church they will obtain some eventual deliverance, they fail to realize that Christian colonialist doctrines, as they exercise them, dooms their redemption, excludes their liberty. One need
only to recall Brother Emmanuel’s weekly introduction to his Sunday sermon to observe the Tabernacle’s methodical ritual of self-abnegation: “It was the brother’s standard preface to a sermon in which all in the room were condemned--‘unto you, your children and your children’s children’--for the sin and wretched hopelessness of your lives” (Abeng 11). As Fanon incisively offers: “the church in the colonies does not call the native to the God’s ways, but to the ways of the white man, the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, many are called but few are chosen” (42). Unfortunately, the darker Jamaicans who worship at the Tabernacle are always “beyond the pale,” never quite up to mark of sublime salvation reserved for the white middle class elect, “... those whose names were recorded before time”(Abeng 44). Boy Savage’s convictions, given to him by the white Presbyterian church, confirms this analysis ideally. For Boy Savage, and the light-skinned middle class natives like him who think themselves white, “It was the concept of the Elect,” which held their attention,

Those who no matter what they did or what they did not do were the only saved souls on earth. The ones who had been chosen. This he came to believe, and this kept him going. His name was on some otherworldly roll and would never be erased, while other poor bastards whose names were not writ large would try and try to achieve the status he had been born to. Let the country people talk about the life everlasting. Let Brother Emmanuel promise his congregation deliverance. Let Miss Mattie and her circle speak of redemption. None of these would know the sweetness of

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12 My emphasis added.
eternity—they were not chosen (44-45).\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, the Tabernacle's ritualistic parody of the white middle class church's doctrines affords Boy Savage objective and psychological, even if reprehensible, deliverance from the subjugation endured by the darker Jamaicans.

In Chapter Five of \textit{Abeng}, Cliff's text becomes forthright in espousing the resistance of African slaves, particularly women who were raped by plantation masters. Through the discussion of Inez, the Maroon girl who betrays her master to lead her people to freedom, Cliff emphasizes \textsl{ritual} and \textsl{conjuring} as essential parts of the struggle for African resistance. When Inez devises a plan to escape—"She survived by planning escape, waiting for emancipation, devising a way to avenge herself. . . . She had been taught the ways of her mother's people, the Maroons, and she made spells . . ."—her plan is dependent on \textsl{rituals} of \textsl{conjuring} to abort the baby she carries as a result of being raped by the judge.\textsuperscript{14} "A baby, Inez's people believed, was sacred, but a baby conceived in \textsl{bukra}\textsuperscript{15} rape would have no soul. . . ." (34 & 35). This being the case, Inez enlists the help of one of the great mother conjurers, Mma Alli, "a strange woman. . . . [who] brewed a tea of roots and leaves, said a Pawpaw chant over it" to pull forth the liquid that had been the "mixed-up baby" (34-35). Versed in the art of conjuring, Mma Alli teaches the slave women how "To keep

\textsuperscript{13} My emphasis added to support the foregoing assessments.

\textsuperscript{14} This judge was Clare's great-great grandfather on her father's side.

\textsuperscript{15} The term \textsl{bukra} is a Jamaican term for whites, or those who are white identified. Probably from the term \textsl{mbrakara}, he who surrounds or governs. Some Jamaicans believe the word derives from back-raw, the condition of a slave's back after a whipping (Cliff \textit{No Telephone} 209)
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).16

Interestingly, Mma Alli and Inez's relationship works to illumine and subvert gender and sexuality construction in colonial society. Cliff explains that "Mma Alli had never lain with a man" (35).

The other slaves said she loved only women in that way; but she was a true sister to the men--the Black men: her brothers. They said that by being with her in bed, women learned all manner of magic of passion. How to become wet again and again all through the night. How to touch a woman deep-inside and make her womb move within her. She taught many of the women on the plantation about this passion and how to take strength from it (35).

This respect Mma Alli commands, inspite of her choice to exercise her sexuality differently is Cliff's way of signifying, paradoxically, by antithesis, creating a communal space where difference is appreciated or at least tolerated, alongside the Westernized paradigm's assertions that things become negatively defined by difference, depend on the notion of manicheism for survival. That Mma Alli is a lesbian provides us a literal example of Cliff's subversion of manicheism, the idea that opposites attract. Interestingly, Cliff's subversion is two fold: on a literal level Mma Alli is a woman who identifies sexually with women; and, on philosophical level, the slave community does not disown her, or consider her lesbianism as a cause for dis-esteem, but respect. Very cleverly then, Cliff seizes upon this idea of contrast only to use it against itself by showing Mma Alli's cherished position in the slave community--

16Jamaican vernacular term which means that one is a faithful servant to white planters.
Afro-centered—context, as different from the relationships other homosexual characters establish with their Westernized colonial communities. In two separate instances, Cliff illustrates how the homosexual characters, Clinton and Robert,\(^{17}\) become outcasts in their communities because of their sexuality. Clinton dies a death by drowning, "taunted by the other men and boys . . . [who] left him floundering in the water . . . while their shouts of 'battyman,\(^{18}\) battyman' echoed off the rocks . . ." (Abeng 62). Robert, Clare's uncle, who brings his "dearest [male] friend" to meet his family, is dismissed as an "off battyman," for whom there is no room in Jamaica. The difference between the reactions these men get to their sexuality and the reaction Mma Alli gets is critically linked to social context. Whereas Clinton and Robert live in a social context that abhors difference and turns it into negation, Mma Alli is within grounds where deviation from a heterosexualized paradigm holds no threat of negation: "Where in some places Mma Alli might have been shunned or cast out or made fun of, the slaves on the Savage Plantation respected her greatly. The women came to her with their troubles and the men with their pain" (34). It seems then, that in Mma Alli's plantation context, the enslaved citizens recognize the need to be supportive of each other despite cultural or sexual difference. Clinton and Robert's modern communities, however, seem to have conflated biological gender with the expression of sexuality, such that sexuality becomes a result of gender, not a free flowing and natural extension of the individual.\(^{19}\) Thus, Cliff's decision to make both characters experience death by

\(^{17}\) As a point of clarification it should be noted that these men are not lovers.

\(^{18}\) Derogatory name used in the Caribbean to refer to homosexual men.

\(^{19}\) Please note that the there are also time differences that separate these two examples: Mamma Alli is a character from the Plantation Era, while Clinton and Robert are characters in
drowning serves as an implicit critique on Western society's construction of sexuality as definitively heterosexual. "... Robert finally did what Clare understood many funny queer off people did: He swam too far out into Kingston Harbor and could not swim back. He drowned just as Clinton--about whom there had been similar whispers--had drowned" (126). Interestingly, both men's drowning becomes a metaphor for the heterosexualization of desire because, in the Western context, Clinton and Robert represent the phallic symbol which must be paired with the vagina, for which the sea is a symbol. Cliff's irony is that this rigid heterosexual paradigm requires Clinton's and Robert's death, their resolute descent into the sea. As Cliff presents it, the West's binary construct of heterosexuality literally asphyxiates them.

By the time the reader finishes Abeng, she has become used to Cliff's rhythmic syncopations and quick detours into the corridors of history, to unearth and challenge the official versions we have come to know and accept as fact. But, as the novel ends, Cliff's subjective interpretation of Clare Savage, the protagonist, becomes intensified. Cliff shifts the historical foci of the novel to appropriate Clare's journey to a space where Clare will take up arms in the fight against the suffering and inhumanity against African peoples--situate herself in the midst of the Outlyers. The young, inquisitive girl we find in at the end of Abeng, who questions the ethics of color hierarchies and gender categories, will become a revolutionary fighter against these said categories in No Telephone to Heaven. Cliff thus designs a character who will take us into

modern society, after emancipation.

Cliff's own emphasis added here to critique the use of pejorative names for homosexuals.
forthright, active *Outlyerism*, taking up the fight in action, as Cliff herself continues the fight in both form and content.
Chapter Two: Conjuring Creolization: Outlyerism in No Telephone To Heaven

In his groundbreaking study *Maroon Societies*, the distinguished historian Richard Price offers that some of the most valuable Outlyers during the seventeenth and eighteenth century were Creole members of the Afro-American slave population. Price's study of a wide cross-section of Maroon communities throughout the Western Hemisphere indicates that while "A striking number of the leaders during this period were Creoles, quite out of proportion to the number of American[s] . . . in the general slave population, . . . the nature of the maroon (colonial) society made the person who was skilled at understanding whites, as well as his fellow maroons especially valuable as leader" (20). And, while the colonial context might have fostered a social atmosphere wherein Creoles who were taught special skills and treated well disdained the company of African born field hands, there were some Creoles who astutely managed to achieve high status in the eyes of both planters and common slaves¹ (20). Because of the diversity of African groups which often comprised Maroon communities, it was crucial that successful tribal chiefs possess a wide range of skills at handling all whites and knowledge of "African" traditions (21). Moreover, the successful Maroon communities that exist today, the Saramakas for example, privilege a leader who is diplomatic and knowledgeable enough to understand the adversary yet serve Maroon constituents in their objectives for effective, organized, and harmonious societies. Therefore, "... neither a man [or woman] who is too Westernized in experience and attitudes, nor one who is exclusively committed to the traditional, 'African'-type values is

¹Price notes that Hati's Toussaint l'Ouverture along with many leaders in the British Guiana were examples of Creoles who were trusted by the natives.
considered appropriate for . . . office within the system" (21). " . . . wherever maroon communities survived for long periods, important aspects of their social and political organization were altered as new institutions developed . . . ." (21). What thus becomes clear from Price's study is that an appreciation and respect for diversity strengthened the Outlyer communities, enabling them to draw on various aspects of each culture and nationality represented among the constituents for survival.

In the face of the planter class' ever-looming threats of decimation, and the subsequent need to shift geographical and social contexts rapidly, Outlyer communities seemed to conceptualize diversity as one of their strongest defense mechanisms. Having derived from a variety of African cultures, African tribal affiliations in Maroon communities were quite diverse, in addition to the wide range of Afro-American slave adaptations represented in the colonial society (23). While the tendency to consider Maroon communities as monoliths united in the struggle for freedom serves a generalized portraiture of Maroon communities, it is of crucial import to note that "[Outlyerism] was not a unitary phenomenon from the point of view of the slaves, and it cannot be given a single locus along the continuum of 'forms of resistance' " (23). To be sure, the social, political, and military contexts which prevailed in many colonial societies necessitated similar strategies of Maroon resistance, but in many cases, the meaning of [Outlyerism] differed for slaves in different social positions, varying with their total perception of themselves and their situation, and this in turn was influenced by . . . . the prospective Maroon's country of birth, period of
time they had been in the New World," and a host of other factors\(^2\) (23).

Creoles in particular, must have had "... strong ideological commitments against the slave system ... since most of the skilled slaves who joined the maroons could have chosen the easier course of melting, unobserved into the urban population" (25). The resources available to them were far greater than those available to the darker slaves, making assimilation no easy feat, although certainly not an impossibility. Consequently, it not sufficient, nor is it historically correct to posit a romantic theory of homogenous "Africaness" when discussing Outlyer communities; the differences endemic to their constituents, even groups which were totally comprised of Africans, is what made Maroon societies dynamic, and hence, a powerful force with whom whites had to reckon. "What the majority of these people did share was a recently forged Afro-American culture and a strong ideological (or at least rhetorical) commitment to things "African" (26). From their diversity, they evolved distinctly Afro-American ways of dealing with life that proved crucial to their survival (Price 27). Furthermore, as Price indicates, even though

\[ \text{[t]hose scholars who have examined maroon life most closely seem to agree that such societies are often uncannily } \]

"African" in feeling, even if devoid of any directly transplanted systems, ... \[ [h]owever "African" in character, no maroon

\(^2\) Price notes that the prospective maroon's country of birth, the period of time they had been in the New World, their task assignments as slaves, and the particular treatment they were currently receiving from overseers and masters, as well as the proportion of blacks to whites in the region, the proportion of freedmen in the population, the opportunities for manumission all factored into the decision to form Maroon communities in the slave colonies throughout the hemisphere.
social, political, religious or aesthetic system can be reliably traced to a specific tribal provenience (29).

Instead, a close examination of Maroon communities discloses the syncretistic composition of Maroon culture, "... forged in the early meetings of peoples bearing diverse African, European, and Amerindian cultures in the dynamic setting of the New World" (29).

It is this dynamism contained in creolization that is of significant use in interpreting Cliff's No Telephone To Heaven. In No Telephone To Heaven Cliff fashions/employs creolization within her trope of Outlyerism, to contextualize various configurations of race, gender, class, and sexuality. As she closes Abeng and moves to its sequel No Telephone To Heaven, Cliff develops her protagonist Clare in direct proportion to an espousal of forthright Outlyerism. By structuring No Telephone around Clare's physical journey with the modern day Outlyers, who are fighting for social, economic, and political freedom in Jamaica, Cliff literally brings Outlyerism alive, making it the significant part of Clare's life that proves crucial to her self-realization. Whereas in Abeng Cliff employs Outlyerism as a stylistic device which finds expression primarily in narrative structure, in No Telephone to Heaven, Outlyerism is illustrated through the relationships characters establish with the larger society and the different aspects of themselves. The cultural and historical disconnections that obtained between the practical lives of the people and revolutionary Outlyerism in Abeng become transformed into life-giving connections in No Telephone to Heaven so that healing can commence. As the entirety of the narrative develops, the social and historical foundation of colonialism and cultural imperialism that Cliff exposes as oppressive in Abeng, becomes acted upon, revolutionized, in No Telephone. In fact, from Abeng to No
Telephone, there is a distinct narrative gradation progressing from thought and ideology, to action and commitment to revolutionary change, with Outlyerism functioning as an integrated part of the lives of the central characters, specifically Clare Savage and Clare's friend Harry/Harriet. In No Telephone, readers get a complete picture of the revolutionary aspect of change, the need to deconstruct what has been before, and build something new--fashion something instrumental which will transform suffering into freedom. As the social, economic, and political conditions worsen in Jamaica, the Outlyers seek active ways to change the quality of their lives. They do not wish to be marginalized, nor do they submit to this reactive theory of existence; instead, they defect from colonialist society to decenter the hegemonic gaze by creating their own space wherein they can be self-sufficient and self-expressive without hegemonic censure.

When Abeng ends, Clare is at an emotional and spiritual "crossroads," caught between a tug of war with the cultural values of her black mother and the natives on one side, and the racist views of her "white" father on the other. Not only is she confused about her racial identity, she also has questions how sexual identity gets constructed in the patriarchal colonial context as well. She is the "Maroon Girl "on a "lonely forest track," desperately trying to untangle the historical and spiritual riunates that prohibits her from making historical and spiritual connections with her ancestors, the life-giving connections that will render her self-empowered (Abeng 90). Her colonialist society presents her with the decision of

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3Cliff defines this term according to B. Floyd's definition as a word used "to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into the...bush" (No Telephone To Heaven 1).
claiming one racial identity; she, however, is a creolized child, not quite tamed, and far too "wild" for submission, hence the ironic surname *Savage*:

Her father told her she was white. But she knew that her mother was not. Who would she choose were she given the choice... To whom would she turn if she needed assistance? From whom 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 (36-37).

The complexity of *Outlyerism* becomes emphasized through the development of individual consciousness, as the now grown Clare Savage affirms all aspects of herself. In end, she journeys to a spiritual space where when asked "To whom do you owe your allegiance?" she is able to answer in a way that affirms the heterogeneity of her heritage, "I have African, English, and Carib in me" (*No Telephone* 189). Understanding that it is the richness of all aspects of her ancestry which makes her invaluable in the fight for humanity, she rejects the manichean racial choice expected of her by colonialist society, and now, the modern day Outlyers. Clare fashions a new path for herself, one that leads to a space where choice is not dictated to her from a small palette of exclusion that limits one's expression of race, sexuality, gender, and most importantly, humanity. Cliff uses journey as a metaphor for decolonization and self-empowerment, signifying very directly on Harriet Tubman's historical role as a journey guide, by employing the symbolic character Harry/Harriet as the central catalyst in Clare's journey.4

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4Interestingly this signification becomes even more profound with the development of Harry/Harriet's character, for as we shall soon see, Harry/Harriet, like Tubman, is also well versed in the art of camouflage, that is, *gender camouflage*. 
And, while Harry/Harriet prompts Clare to make a choice, his is an invitation to choose to re-configure and deconstruct restricting sexual, racial, and classist paradigms, to recognize the suffering of her brothers and sisters and act on their behalf (131).

If Cliff uses journey as a metaphor for Clare's search for identity, then Clare's movement has come full circle when No Telephone To Heaven opens. It thus becomes useful to consider Robert Farris Thompson's discussion of the Kongo Cosmogram in Flash of the Spirit, for it seems that Cliff's work is experimenting with various notions and aspects of Kongo Cosmology that find their expressions in everything from her narrative structuring of both novels, to characterization, to the subtle and seemingly incidental nuances of history and culture that she conjures up. According to Thompson who quotes Wyatt MacGaffey, the essential form and meaning of the Cosmogram is as follows:

The simplest ritual space is a Greek cross (+) marked on the ground, as for oath taking. One line represents the boundary; the other is ambivalently both the path leading across the boundary, as to the cemetery; and the vertical path of power linking 'the above' with 'the below.' This relationship, in turn, is polyvalent, since it refers to God and man, God and the dead. The person taking the oath stands upon the cross, situating himself between life and death, and invokes the judgment of God and the dead upon himself (108).

Thompson continues by explaining that the Cosmogram moves in a circular counter-clockwise fashion marking the four movements of the sun, with the upper sphere representing the world of the living and the male domain of power, and the lower sphere representing the world of the dead and the
female/spiritual domain of power. He clarifies that although the Cosmogram contains the graphic representation of the cross, it is not to be confused as a signification of Jesus' crucifixion; instead, the Cosmogram "signifies the equally compelling vision of the circular motion of human souls about the circumference of its intersecting lines. The Kongo cross refers therefore to the everlasting continuity of all righteous men and women" (Thompson 108). Those who invoke the Kongo Cosmogram interpret the circumference of the cross as signifying the certainty of reincarnation. "... [T]he righteous," it is believed, "will never be destroyed but will come back in the name or body or progeny, or in the form of an everlasting pool, waterfall, stone or mountain" (109). This contextual framework would certainly explain why Cliff evokes the Blue Mountains as a back drop to the Almighty Tabernacle in Abeng just before she rapidly shifts to invoke Nanny in the present tense, making her a living spirit among the forlorn natives who are trying desperately to forge a connection with heaven. In fact, we might now rightfully consider Clare as one of Nanny's progeny; for, as Cliff explains in No Telephone, Clare has taken her place on "a rickety truck with a dripping group of pale and dark people making their ascent through the Cockpit Country in Jamaica" (No Telephone 5). These people are the modern day Outlyers fighting in the struggle for freedom on the island of Jamaica, "evoking the name of Nanny, in whose memory they [are] engaged . . ." (5).

The Kongo Cosmogram is significant to an interpretation of Clare's character because Cliff conceptualizes Clare as a crossroads character and

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5My emphasis added to foreshadow the Mountain as a foreshadowing presence in Abeng.
uses this term, specifically, to describe Clare's *creolization*. In an article entitled "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character," Cliff says that Clare's

. . . name, obviously, is . . . intended to represent her as a crossroads character, with her feet (and head) in (at least) *two worlds*.⁶ Her name first . . . signifies, light-skinned, which she is, and light-skinnedness in a world in which Clare originates, the island of Jamaica in the period of British hegemony, and to which she is transported, the United States in the 1960's, and to which she transports herself, Britain in the 1970's, stands for privilege . . . (265).

Moreover, Clare's movement from *Abeng* to *No Telephone* charts a complete circle, a movement from childhood, to adulthood, to death. As Cliff continues,

She [Clare] is a light-skinned female removed from her homeland in a variety of ways and whose life is a movement back, ragged, interrupted, uncertain, to the homeland. She is fragmented, damaged, incomplete. The novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* describe her fragmentation as well as her movement toward homeland and wholeness (265).

By using a narrative strategy of inversion which allows her to begin the novel at the end of Clare's physical and spiritual sojourn (She is about to engage in her last worldly act, an abortive military ambush), then reveal Clare's adult life through flashbacks--scenes from "look behind,"--only to return again to the end/beginning of the narrative, Cliff seems to be

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⁶My emphasis added.
suggesting, if not directly asserting, via her structure, the Cosmogram's counter-clockwise notion of movement. What thus obtains is a circle within a circle, with the notion of counter-clockwise movement being represented by the narrative's antithetical structure, even as Clare's life journey itself takes on this same pattern of movement. The illustration in Figure 1 captures Cliff's doubling of the Cosmogram.

We gain even more insight into No Telephone To Heaven if we consider the points of intersection between Outlyer ideology, which asserts the need to create a center of their own, and the Cosmogram's preoccupation with this same notion of centering. "The Bakongo [Kongo Peoples] viewed their capital as an ideal realm in which images of centering prevailed. It was a world profoundly informed by . . . an ideal balancing of the vitality of the world . . ." (Thompson 106). Historically, Outlyers defected from colonialist societies to decenter the hegemonic European gaze and to assert their own ideas of nation building and culture. Their defection from the colonialist domain was a bold assertion of their own subjectivity, which subverted the hegemonic colonialist regimes who sought to objectify their beings. Theirs were efforts of decolonization; and, as Frantz Fanon offers, "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men [and women]" (36).

If we consider Clare a crossroads character using Kongo Cosmology, we must emphasize the notion of journeying which is what brings Clare to the "cross roads" and is conceptually endemic to the notion of being at the "crossroads." In other words, in the Kongo Cosmological framework, one does not merely find one's self at the crossroads; one journeys to this point. It is significant, then, to conceptualize Clare's boat passage back home to Jamaica as a metaphor for decolonization, which signifies not only on the middle passage itself, but also on the idea of England being the mother-
The middle part of *No Telephone* which charts Clare's life

Clare's point of existence—this is a metaphorical point of originization.

This is also the point of intersection between the ancestors and the living.

*No Telephone* begins here (Clare is on the threshold of death).

The narrative also ends here—Clare dies "burned into the landscape."

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**Figure 1**
country: "She had arrived in Kingston . . . entering the city on the sea as her ancestors had once done. Some concealed below. Some pacing above . . . Winward Passage, Spanish Main. Contrary images" (No Telephone 168). 7 Clare literally reverses her journey in order to get back "home." Cliff's literary ruse is that she doubles this notion of the "crossroads." On one level, it stands very literally for the creolization of the individual and the actual cultural interstice where one finds oneself in a Westernized manichean world; on another figurative and spiritual level, the crossroads becomes a point of decision making to which one journeys. Hence, one cannot remain at the crossroads, one must make a choice. Even so, in the Kongo Cosmological framework, the choices available to one as one comes to the crossroads are more multiplicitous8 than the choices available to one in the Westernized construct, which frames its choices in binary, manichean terms. In Kongo Cosmology, prospective choices derive from the full circumference of the circle's 360 degrees, and are informed by a utilitarian ethic, not one that celebrates rugged individualism. If we use Kongo Cosmology to consider Clare a crossroads character, then the crossroads/intersection may not only be considered a historical point of reclamation, and heritage, but too, a metaphorical point of creolization, a space where Clare is empowered by the very nature of her mixed heritage, for it affords her insights into the "African, English, and Carib" worlds. This comprehensive insight, as we discussed earlier, is what Outlyer

7 Furthermore, Harry/Harriet's character becomes illumined as Cliff's way of signifying on Tubman's instrumental role in the act of journeying

8 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Chapter One: A Theory of Traditon," The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 3-42. In these pages Gates deals with the idea of the crossroads in Yoruban, Fon, and Dahomey cultures, and the number of choices available to the individual at the crossroads etc.
communities ultimately valued in their leaders. As Fu-Kiau Bunseki explains in Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit*, "To stand upon this sign . . . meant that a person was fully capable of governing people, that [s]he knew the nature of the world, that [s]he had mastered the meaning of life and death" (111). With this insight, Clare, thenceforth, could possibly move about with the confidence of a seer, empowered with insights from all worlds, all aspects of the Cosmogram (Thompson 110). The problem Clare encounters at this crossroads (metaphorically the Outlyer community), set in a Westernized context, is that this social and political context does not respect *creolization* and is highly suspicious of any character who does not resolutely define and identify herself with one racial/sexual entity. Having appropriated the manichean values of the colonialist society, this new Outlyer community finds it difficult to trust a Creole member. This is revealed when the Outlyer 'Chieftainess' interviews Clare for membership into their group:

*Maroon Chieftainess*--Do you think you are morally superior to one of my color?

*Clare*--No.

*Maroon Chieftainess*--Politically?

*Clare*--No.

*Maroon Chieftainess*--Intellectually?

*Clare*--No.

*Maroon Chieftainess*--Are you certain?

*Clare*--You are the color of my grandmother.

*Maroon Chieftainess*--As you well know, that could be as nothing.

*Clare*--I am as certain as I can be.

*Maroon Chieftainess*--But?
Clare--No 'but.' (*No Telephone* 190).

Further, as Cliff reveals in an interview, Clare "... makes this choice and she wants to be part of this group, but she will never feel that she is part of it, and they will never quite accept her either" (Raiskin 64). She is the light-skinned *backra* woman who must be watched closely, lest she betray her comrades.

While the creolized make up of Outlyer communities usually meant that culture would not remain static, but syncretistic, as different groups blended together, sometimes the wide cultural, class, and racial differences that obtained in Outlyer communities threatened to erupt into dissolution, to polarize constituents along ethnic lines. In "Black Women and Survival: A Maroon Case Study," Kenneth Bilby and Filomena Steady point out that "... ethnic diversity was bound to create tensions within ... [societies] ... made up of heterogeneous congeries of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, ... and indeed, at times loomed as a major threat to Maroon unity and stability (456). Cliff remains true to this historical analysis in *No Telephone*, not only by placing Clare "a light-skinned, woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, emigres, Carib, Ashanti, and English ..." in the Outlyers' midst--"alongside people who could have easily hated her"--but also, by re-troping *creolization* to signify on issues of gender and class as sources of tensions in Outlyer communities. As the Outlyers' truck climbs through the Cockpit Country and moves to the site of ambush,

These people--*men and women*--were dressed in similar clothes which became them as uniforms, signifying some

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9See footnote on page 42 for definition.
agreement in purpose—that they were in something together. . . This alikeness was something they needed, which could be important, even vital, to them—for the shades of their skin, places traveled . . . events experienced, things understood, . . . acts of violence committed, books read, music heard, . . . languages recognized . . . varied widely, came between them (No Telephone 4). 10

In this passage the fullness of creolization is represented as coinciding with issues of gender and class, revealing the difficulty Outlyers experienced at times because of their diverse cultural backgrounds and even their gender. Cliff dispels the notion of one homogenous Outlyer matrix by painstakingly cataloging the numerous cultural and class differences which threaten to divide this Outlyer camp. She implies further that issues of trust are no easy feat, for theirs are tender efforts: "They were making something new, approached not without difficulty, with the gravest opposition; the bitterness [and] the fury some held could be strip-mined. . . . Like when it was time for a backra to stand guard while some of the others, the darker ones, slept. . . . Sometimes someone slept with one eye open" (5). Speaking specifically about Outlyer divisions in an interview with Judith Raiskin, Cliff offers that "The problem is that all these people on the truck represent different parts of Jamaican society and they have been brought up to distrust one another" (64). Unfortunately, this distrust that the Outlyers have for each other is what renders their ambush abortive; their attack is betrayed by one of their own "comrades." What is clear when the ambush takes place, however, is that Clare is not the "quashee" who betrays the camp; for, as the colonizer's

10 My emphasis added.
guns spray across the bushes, Clare "ends her life burned into the landscape of Jamaica." this landscape beloved by her mother and her grandmother, but most of all, beloved by Nanny ("Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character 266). Elsewhere, Cliff explains, "... the revolutionary act at the end of the book is sabotaged by somebody and you never know who's done it. Somebody betrays them because they have been colonized to be betrayers of one another and they haven't managed to deal with that" (Raiskin 64).

With such an end, Clare completes her full circle according to the Kongo Cosmology. Yet, if we use Kongo Cosmology to interpret Clare's sojourn, her death is less of a loss than it is an auspicious transition into the world of the ancestors, the world of the great mothers and grandmothers. Properly understood, Clare's death symbolizes a final spiritual connection that will render her even more powerful than she was when she was alive. Cliff, herself implies this when she writes in an article that "Though essentially tragic ... it [Clare's death] is an ending that completes the circle, or rather the triangle, of the character's life" ("Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character" 266). As Thompson explains, once one crosses over into the world of the dead, one is complete, for in the world of the dead there is "the wholeness that comes to a person who understands the ways and powers of both worlds" (109). Moreover, "if the deceased lived a good life, death, a mere crossing over the threshold into another world, was a precondition for being 'carried back into the mainstream of the living, in the name and body of grandchildren of succeeding generations' " (Stuckey 12). There is no question that Clare has lived a "good life," for she literally sacrifices herself in this fight that, as a Creole, she could have very easily disowned. When she notes that "I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old
people. . . . listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart . . .
Stories of Anansi . . . Oshun . . . Shango . . . I have walked the cane . . . ," Clare asserts her connection with the native people, aligns herself with their struggles, their traditions, their laughter, their pain (No Telephone 193).
What thus obtains, despite the Outlyer's subtle prejudice, is that Clare becomes one with the native people, signified very literally by Cliff in the way Clare dies--"burned into the landscape." What is more, Clare's commitment to change--for "things must change"--finds its expression in her teaching history to the island children, "The history of their . . . our homeland" (189 & 193). With this statement not only does Clare claim kinship with the black Jamaicans, she also asserts ownership and personal responsibility for the country. This act of teaching is yet another reversal of the colonialist gaze, for it deconstructs the historical foundations that colonialism has wrought, to rebuild something productive--subjective--which will enable the island children to celebrate their heritage, not to disown it or to be ashamed of it. Clare's investment in the Outlyer struggle is thus a personal one, one which will no doubt carry on the traditions of the forgotten ancestors. As the novel ends, with day breaking and the island birds rendering their morning songs, the reader gets a sense of continuity from the repetitiveness of their songs: "cutacoo, cutacoo, cutacoo/coo, cu, cu, coo/coo, cu, cu, coo . . ." (208). Cliff's final emphasis on nature seems to complement the Cosmogram's notion of reincarnation, for "In her death [Clare has complete identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestors' bones" ("Clare Savage as A Crossroads Character" 265).

The height of Cliff's use of creolization as a trope to signify on gender occurs when she introduces Harry/Harriet, Clare's transsexual friend who
convinces Clare to join the Outlyers. Like Clare, Harry/Harriet is a creolized crossroads character of sorts, but his/her creolization stems not so much from being a light-skinned Creole, but more importantly, from being both male and female in a colonialist society which insists that gender is a "being" and not a "doing," and erroneously conflates biological sex with gender expression, assuming a "natural" and logical relationship between the two (Butler 25). In a remarkable conflation of creolization and gender, which poignantly subverts this paradigm, Cliff uses Harry/Harriet to assert critique on Western society's preoccupation with gender dichotomization. Harry/Harriet, as Cliff tells us elsewhere, "... is the most complete character in [this] book ... " (Adisa 276). Because the cultural language of gender is so predicated on binary categories of "being," Harry/Harriet's character confounds how we might even conceptualize or formulate speech about him/her. "Constraint is thus built into what language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender" (Butler 9). As gender critic Judith Butler posits:

Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of the "person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (17).

Indeed, Harry/Harriet's gender expression is quite "unintelligible" in the Westernized construct of sexuality, for Harry/Harriet claims to have been born as both sun and moon: "... I was born this way, that I know." he says "Not just sun, but sun and moon" (No Telephone 128). To the extent that
Harry/Harriet describes him/herself as both sun and moon, he/she implicitly connotes associations with Kongo Cosmology because in the Kongo Cosmological framework the sun and the moon are the central points of both worlds, the living and the dead, and by extension represent a full range of experience. What this means then, is that Harry/Harriet possesses the knowledge and the power of both the ancestors and the living. By the virtue of his/her gender creolization he/she is continuously connected with both spheres. Moreover, in Kongo Cosmology each sphere, from sun to moon, represents, respectively, the male and female bastions of power. As Robert Farris Thompson tells us: "The summit of the Kongo pattern symbolizes not only noon but also maleness, north. . . . Correspondingly, the bottom equals midnight, femaleness, south, the highest point of a person's otherworldly strength" (109). This interpretation proves significant to Harry/Harriet's role in No Telephone since not only is he/she instrumental as the catalyst for Clare's decision to become an Outlyer, but more importantly, he/she functions as a nurse, a healer of poor people, a role which connotes, in a spiritual context, giftedness. For example, when Clare reveals that she is best suited for teaching because she is suited for little else, "... nursing, for example. The laying on of hands," we may interpret her conceptualization of nursing as an allusion to Harry/Harriet's innate power to heal (193). Harry/Harriet's role as nurse, then, is not meant to be considered purely in the literal sense, but, metaphorically, as a signification of giftedness and ancestral power.

Nevertheless, Harry/Harriet is effective as a nurse in both the literal and the figurative sense. He/She is both a healer of people and country:

Once her working hours at the hospital were finished, Harriet traveled through the yards of downtown, in her uniform. . . .
Harriet nursed all manner of illness and wound, turning from none. Brushing though barriers of colored plastic strands, dipping herself, touching here and there. . . . Harriet had been studying the healing practices. At the university and with the old women in the country, women who knew the properties of roots and leaves and how to apply spells effectively. One old woman, one who kenned Harriet's history called her Mawu-Lisa, sun and moon, male and female deity of some of their ancestors (171)

Even more important, if we return to Cliff's comment in her article about Clare, which states that Clare is "damaged, incomplete," then Harry/Harriet's role as nurse takes on a broader configuration of the term nurse, for "It was with Harriet and at her suggestion that Clare went to St. Elizabeth for the first time in twenty years [to reclaim her heritage], to find her grandmother's place . . . and visit the river forest of her girlhood" (171). When Clare is contemplating coming back to Jamaica, it is Harry/Harriet who tells her "You cyann think England is your place. . . . Come home. . . . [You] could help bring us into the present. Jamaica's children have to work to make her change. It will be worthwhile . . . believe me. . . . (127 & 131). When Clare in turn asks Harry/Harriet, "Harry, how come you talk this way when at the party you were going on about dancing in England before the Queen?," Harry/Harriet explains that his flashy "Battyman" showmanship is nothing but a mere camouflage which enables him to survive in the Westernized, heterosexualist context: "Oh, man girlfriend, is nuh what dem

11My emphasis added to highlight correspondence with Kongo Cosmology.

Significantly, it is the rape of Harry/Harriet by a white police officer, as Harry/Harriet is on the way to "the market in Crossroads" which makes a further connection with Kongo Cosmology, a connection that now signifies, overtly, on the notion of the "crossroads" (129). Harry/Harriet's graphic description of his/her rape provides insight into this interpretation, but should not be misinterpreted as the reason for his/her bi/sexuality. Rather, the contrary is true if we take to heart Harry/Harriet's description of his/her identity as both sun and moon. When Harry tells us, "No need to get deep. No need to tell them my asshole was split as a bwai by an officer. . . . bemedaled, in the garments of Her Majesty. . . . No man, I am merely the person who felt the overgrown cock of a big whiteman pierce the asshole of a lickle Black bwai," he/she reveals that it is the rape itself which, paradoxically, replaces his wholeness with a dichotomy (128 & 130). Keeping in mind that Harry/Harriet was whole, both sun and moon, before the rape, we may interpret the entry of the phallus as a dividing line, an intrusion which now creates division and, quite paradoxically, the need to differentiate sun from moon, male from female. Whereas Harry/Harriet, being a crossroads character, previously embodied a range of gender expression--the full circumference of the Kongo Cosmogram--he/she now has only half of that circumference, since his/her w(hole) on a very literal and figurative level has been split. Thus, Harry/Harriet's options for gender expression are taken him with the phallocentric "coming" of the white man. As this white colonial officer literally "comes" into his space, Harry/Harriet's
(w)hole crossroads gets fractionalized, ruptured. The following diagrams illustrate this concept.

The options available to Harry before his rape

Not only is gender represented as male and female, but the full range of the subtleties that come between is represented as well—the "unintelligible" genders.

After Harry/Harriet's rape the following obtains:

This interpretation of Harry/Harriet's rape proves even more significant to understanding his/her choice to "become woman" in the latter portion of the novel. However, the significance of his/her decision lies not in conceptualizing the rape as a robbing of Harry/Harriet's manhood, but
rather, in understanding that Cliff plays upon the connotative association of the "coming of the white man" to emphasize the West's introduction of division into the New World, its rendering asunder what has previously been whole. In fact, if we consider Simone Beauvoir's ideas on 'becoming woman" in the Second Sex, wherein she considers the body a situation, such that there is "nothing that guarantees that the 'one' who becomes a woman is necessarily female," then we understand that gender is, as Butler explains, "a doing" and not "a being" (Butler 25). Furthermore, "If gender is a 'doing,' rather than a 'being,' . . . then becoming a woman is a process that can resist naturalization, because performances always threaten to exceed representations" (Robinson 9). Considering Butler's analysis of gender as performative expression, independent of the biological organs, it is indeed, quite intelligible to conceptualize Harry/Harriet as a multi-gendered being. The problem is that Harry/Harriet is situated in a social context where gender expression is heterosexualized; and, "[t]he heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine,' where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female' " (Butler 17). Still, it is necessary to point out that Harry/Harriet's multi-genderedness threatens to confound even the most liberal of gender theories. As readers and critics, we must proceed with extreme linguistic caution when considering Harry/Harriet's gender expression, for "The cultural matrix [ours] through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'--that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (Butler 17). Moreover, if we follow Beauvoir's and Butler's analyses, which are useful, we must still proceed
with caution, using their theories as conceptual stepping stones to fathom the complexity of this character who insists that he/she is born (which translates into innateness) as both male and female.

Harry/Harriet's choice to be woman, then, is nothing but gender expression and camouflage, one aspect of him/herself, deployed for survival in this Westernized construct preoccupied with binary choice. Hers' is move that subverts not only gender paradigms, but the colonialist patriarchal construct as well, since in refusing to be man she rejects patriarchal privilege. He/She understands that it is impossible to live "split" in a heterosexualized domain that demands resolute choice: "...The time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make our choice. Cyaan live split. Not in this world" (No Telephone 131). At this juncture, it is important for us to place emphasis on Harry/Harriet's comment "Not in this world;" for, in this statement, the implicit suggestion is that in another place and time multi-genderedness would be acceptable, unproblematic. But, if Harry/Harriet's choice to become woman concedes to the West's demands for choice, she still problematizes the notion of gender by choosing to dress like a woman, be a woman, and yet also be a lover of both men and women. The height of Cliff's gender conjuring comes when she discloses a scene wherein Harry/Harriet and Clare playfully kiss as lovers on the beach: "Resting from riding the breakers, warmed by their feast and the sun, they lay side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to, laughing" (130). It is with this scene that Cliff completely re-tropes the act of sex, which as she reveals, is nothing but gender expression itself. Harry's choice to be woman, then, is but a subversion, enmeshed in camouflage. Interestingly, even if we were we to consider him/her as innately woman, and woman alone (albeit this
would be an error), gender would still be problematized by Harriet and Clare's lesbianism, another expression of gender/sexuality which confounds a strictly heterosexual paradigm.\textsuperscript{12} Gender and sexuality thus remain "unintelligible" in Cliff's narrative. Moreover, if "[i]ntelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire," that Harry/Harriet and Clare do not engage in an actual act of penetration during their intimate encounter, amounts to Cliff's re-troping of "sex," to signify on how Western society has culturally constructed its conceptualization, and by extension, its expression. It seems that for Cliff, and Harry/Harriet, penetration, or the use of biological organs in sexual expression is not a necessity. Further textual proof to this end obtains when Harriet tells Clare that she has finally made the choice to become woman. Harry/Harriet explains "...you know darling, castration ain't de main t'ing...not a-tall, a-tall" (168). Clearly, Harriet does not revel in the glory of phallocentrism. The brilliance of Cliff's gender conjuring is that she re-configures gender expression to include intimacy outside of penetration, thereby confounding a heterosexual paradigm. In fact, based on Cliff's re-troping of the type of intimate engagement that could possibly constitute "sex," Harriet has now acquired the power to subvert the heterosexual paradigm deliberately; because what might obtain--could possibly obtain--in a male gender encounter without the act of penetration is what Harriet's culture considers homosexuality, since her biological sex organ is, in a Westernized

\textsuperscript{12}While it might be incorrect to definitively characterize Harriet as innately woman, in both a heterosexualist and a bi-gendered construct she might definitely be so considered because of her outer "womanly" appearance. Even so, Cliff has structured this scene such that those who read from a heterosexualist perspective are now confounded by Clare and Harriet's lovemaking; for according to appearances, they are two women. For those who read with a multi-gendered gaze, Harriet's "performative expression" is but one of many.
paradigm, considered decidedly male. It would seem then, that Harriet confounds the West's preoccupation with phallocentrism in more ways than one. Her decision to "become woman" is a move that ultimately aligns her with the great grandmother conjurers who Cliff so richly celebrates. And, while it is unclear whether or not Harriet dies in the abortive guerrilla ambush, what is clear is that despite the gender oppression which obtains in her society, she manages to maintain her connections with the great grandmother ancestors by choosing to become moon, the pinnacle of spiritual strength.

Without doubt, when we employ a theoretical reading of Outlyerism to No Telephone To Heaven, conjuring creolization becomes a master trope. It is through the subversion of race, gender, and sexuality paradigms that Cliff makes her mark. The stereotypical expectation that a creolized racial background will render one weak and perhaps more willing to side with the white power structure is subverted by Clare's life, for she relinquishes both racial and class privilege to join the Outlyers, even though the Outlyers doubt her allegiance. Harriet too relinquishes patriarchal privilege, since she must make a choice in this social context, but still manages to defect to a group where she can subvert oppressive gender constructions. These unexpected inversions, which are parts of the trope of ambush, are Cliff's own ingredients for literary and historical conjuring.
Conclusion

It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. We must not be content therefore with delving into the past of a people in order to find coherent elements which will counteract colonialism's attempts of falsify and harm. We must work and fight with the same rhythm as the people to construct the future... (Fanon 227& 233).

In keeping with Cliff's circular motif, it is most appropriate to end with this quotation with which we first begun. Indeed, with the writing of Abeng and No Telephone to Heaven, Michelle Cliff has lived up to Fanon's call for revolutionary thinking in the artistic sphere. As a literary and historical conjurer, she shapes the form and content of her novels to move to and with the rhythms of Outlyerism, using a powerful historical abeng to call "official" versions of African resistance into question. While the Outlyers historically used the abeng in their matrix of military intelligence, Cliff uses her texts as signs in a matrix of historical and dialectical signification. What results from her remarkable literary and historical conjuring are tropological connections that enter into dialogue with the ancestors, and will continue this dialogue, by virtue of Cliff's written narratives, for years to come. By employing the strategies used by the Outlyers as integral parts of her narratives' form and content, Cliff situates herself inside the Outlyers' struggle against colonialist

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1My emphasis added.
hegemony, the struggle to decenter the European gaze. As her narratives assume the cadences of Outlyerism, from conjuring, to rapid textual shifts, to textual ambush, to camouflage and beyond, Cliff's writing may be described as what Fanon calls the "literature of combat" (240). For Fanon, a literature of combat calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It molds national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons. It is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space (240).

Without doubt, memory and the re-writing of history are Cliff's primary tools for ancestral celebration, but more importantly, creative resistance, which should rightly assist any physical revolution. Moreover, astute revolutionaries know that because the shape and form of revolutionary struggle against European hegemony and cultural imperialism changes with each historical epoch; "[e]ach generation must . . . discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (206). Informed with the power of the ashe, Cliff assumes the intellectual and historical responsibility to mete justice, as the Great Grandmother Warrior Nanny once did. If Cliff truly believes that "at her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practices, and food--she assists in the rites of passage, protects, and teaches--she may be informed with the ashe, the power to make things happen, the responsibility to mete justice," then Cliff herself is, by the sheer excellence of her work, one of the Nanny's progeny, for in both Abeng and No Telephone, her primary foci never stray far from
these seminal points of ancestral connection ("Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character" 267).

Although the scope of this project did not include Cliff's latest novel, *Free Enterprise*, it seems that this theory of *Outlyerism*, as well as a literary interpretation of Kongo Cosmology, could work well in a literary analysis of this novel as well. In fact, future literary theorists should find that a theory of *Outlyerism* provides a new contextual framework for conceptualizing and theorizing texts that deal with African resistance, from the folktales, to Harriet Jacobs, to Richard Wright, to James Baldwin, to the new Black Women's Renaissance.
Works Consulted


