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THE MOBILITY OF MEMORY AND SHAME: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S FICTION 1980'S-1990'S

by

Akia Jackson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy
degree in English in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Miriam Thaggert

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I dedicate this dissertation to all the Black women of the African diaspora working to expose the most intimate parts of themselves not only for their growth, but also to assist other Black people of the African diaspora in understanding their own.

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to whom I will be forever grateful and indebted to as I continue to grow personally and professionally.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the mixed legacy of shame. I work through the interrelationship between productive shame and debilitating shame and a character's journey through this spectrum. In my research, I define shame not in the pejorative, but rather I repurpose the term to show its beneficiality in reshaping Black female characters during the period of Black Arts and Power Movements in America and the Caribbean. Essentially, my dissertation will argue that although debilitating shame seems overwhelmingly negative for the female characters, gradually they come to reassess this shame as a positive asset that helps them reevaluate societal and nationalistic expectations associated with their Blackness. I seek to redefine the globalized multiple dimensions of shame that Black authors confront throughout their novels because shame involves an often painful, sudden awareness of the self and trauma previously endured.

Thus, the fluidity of Black transnational experiences frame my interrogation of the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on the cultural history and collective shame of Afro-diasporic descended characters in Morrison's *Tar Baby* (1981), Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985), Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). My project complicates mobility by dissecting the disconnections that arise from separation from homelands, family, and cultural familiarity. I analyze the four novels through an ordered methodology of migration, disruption, discontinuity, and the renaming debilitating shame as a positive asset. This methodology informs my argument on the middle ground and Black female characters occupying multiple identities in their movement through different nation-states and empires.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The emergence of the Black Arts and Power movements creates a space for Black women to be vocal about their role in literary fiction. This dissertation will examine twentieth-century migration fiction by Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, and Edwidge Danticat in the politically polarizing moment of the 1980s-1990s. I couple the texts of these four authors because each exposes different transatlantic relationships to America and the British empire; I do this to show the different Black transnational alliances developing as a unifying communicative process that involves circulatory and contradictory ideas of Blackness. I utilize the idea of shame to dissect the formation and definitions of Black identities as the authors are constructing it in their different novels.

In my argument their globalized perspectives are their efforts to bridge the diverse histories within the African diaspora. Furthermore, I draw on raced affect theory to deconstruct the depth of debilitating shame for the Black female characters Morrison, Kincaid, Cliff and Danticat create in their texts. Their novels track Black transnational contours of Black expression and account for the ways that Afro-inspired expression is molded into cultural capital for Black writers. Thus, the discourse between fluidity, Blackness, global locations, and the affect theory of shame frames my interrogation of the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on the cultural history and collective politics of Afro-diasporic descended characters in Morrison's *Tar Baby* (1981), Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985), Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994).

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INTRODUCTION

THE APORIAS OF THE AFRO-DIASPORIC SUBJECT: TRANSGRESSIONS OF BLACK GLOBAL AESTHETICS

Myriam Chancy ruminates in *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* that living “in-between” spaces always makes the road home longer, harder, and more complicated for the African diasporic sensibility. She lays bare the moments of shared conflict in the counter-historical narratives of African-American and Afro-Caribbean postcolonial women writers, and their principal contentions of redefining the perceived singular history of their multifaceted backgrounds. When Chancy observes that the “very mechanism of alienation becomes the mechanism for liberation; this positive contradiction within exile illuminates a way to find home” (14), she speaks to how and when Black women nationally and internationally re-appropriate systems of oppression for their growth, visibility, and productivity. Her text reveals that once Black diasporic women wield alternative representations of power, particularly in the form of fiction in their literary texts, they can effectively interrupt antiquated hierarchal models for their readers. Although Chancy writes outside of the U.S. her message of mobilizing resistance against literary disenfranchisement translates across national borders. Her concomitant ideas resonate closely to the revisionary Afro-diasporic stories of Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danitcat, and Michelle Cliff; each woman, like Chancy, concentrates on creating a relevant space for Black women’s voices to connect to the history of Africa.

The main argument in this dissertation frames Chancy’s contention of living in the in-between with the idea of home, coupled with Gregory J. Seigworth’s and Melissa Gregg’s affective investigation of in-between-ness. I also will introduce Saidiya Hartman’s use of the idea of the middle ground and mobility, as well as borrow from Odile Ferly’s concept of the

mangrove that resituates Edouard Glissant's inclusion of the single rhizome. Each critical theorist interacts with my definition of debilitating shame in a different manner for the purposes of the characters I will outline throughout this dissertation.¹ I define Chancy's argument of the in-between as an avenue to understand character alienation in the novels, and why this allows them space for introspection in order to find definitions of home both in distant places and when they return to their actual ancestral home. This too connects to Seigworth's and Gregg's idea that one cannot capture, alter, or control their affective feelings that usher in emotions of debilitating shame. In many ways I connect Hartman's version of the middle ground to Chancy's, Seigworth's, and Gregg's assertions that the in-between exemplifies misrecognition of the self in that site of alienation and forces a re-evaluation of personhood. It is not until the female characters in the novels accept the unification of themselves valued in both places and employ acts upon their surroundings that they begin to comprehend the relevance of repurposing their debilitating shame for positive functionality. My full examination of Glissant in relation to my definition of debilitating shame explores his argument as a valid, yet at times anachronistic formulation of Caribbean discourses for Afro-Caribbean women moving into the latter portion of the twentieth century. In contrast, Odile Ferly's text offers a much more engaged conceptualization of Black women's interlinkages to the islands in the Caribbean from a contemporary perspective. I utilize Ferly's idea of the mangrove to interface with Glissant's single rhizome model.

Ferly gently critiques Glissant's adapted theory of rhizomic thought in his text *Poetics of Relation*. She outlines in her book, *A Poetics of Relation: Caribbean Women's Writing at the*

¹ Throughout this dissertation I refer to shame in three ways to describe its effect on characters in the different novels: negative, debilitating/debilitating, and enfeebling to illustrate how it weakens the mental intentionality of the Black female protagonists in the text. At some points if shame is not named through the lens of the aforementioned terms, I argue that the context of that argument situates the type of shame I am referencing at that particular juncture of the chapter.

New Millennium that Glissant's ideology favors "the egalitarian structure of the rhizome over the stratified single root, diversity over unicity, ambivalence and polyphony over unequivocal normalization, and conceives identity as Relation rather than filiation" (16). Ferly recognizes portions of Glissant's argument as liberating but acknowledges that it does contain traces of the root-mindset that has proven restrictive to some vision of Caribbeanness. Thus, my use of Glissant institutes the rhizomic paradigm that clings to homogeneity as the phase of the debilitating shame for Black women in each of the novels. Whereas, centering aspects of the mangrove in my argument about the journey to positive shame symbolizes new realms of representation and seeks to engage with the constant changes of transnational migration. Arguably, in Black women writers showing less interest in root thinking, their works are more grounded in the identity of the region itself, which concurrently makes their ideological positions fundamentally more open-ended.

Such moments of Afro-diasporic exchange, reflective of Chancy's mechanisms of alienation and liberation, do not merely exist in isolation to expose the Black woman's experience but work in synchrony with dimensions of affect theory. The different aspects of affect helps Morrison, Cliff, Kincaid, and Danticat map and name the critical relationality of the fluid discursive patterns of the characters in their texts. However, constructing discourses around gendered, Black affect is wholly dependent on the historical period that frames both the writer's interaction with her novel, and character interpretation. The impetus behind Black women beginning to dissect the varied facets of their subjectivities through fiction rests on the influences of the Black Arts Movement and its aftermath—because the movement establishes Black artist as authoritarians of their own cultural traditions and masters of a Black aesthetic.² It begins to

² See Larry Neal's article "The Black Arts Movement" (1968) for more information about the long-term impact of the Black Arts Movement on Black artists in the 1960s-1980s in America.

inform Black radical opposition to the colonizer/colonized or slave-master/slave dichotomy that, for centuries, stifled the advancement of Black expression. Though this defiance to mistreatment in America was not a new concept, to African Americans, it was the Black Arts movement that spurred Black writers to invest in the emancipation of the Black community dispersed around the world. This image of Blackness began to constitute a nation of multiplicitous peoples of African descent agitating for autonomy and participating in critiquing Western dogmas. Increasingly, it became important for Black authors to reveal how it *felt* to be Black not only in America, but also in transnational locations.

This emphasis on the differing levels of feelings for Black authors begins to infiltrate their writings in the 1960's, and effectually reshapes the philosophical sign-systems undergirding Black literature. Paradoxically, the assertion of this newfound inclusion based Blackness in the U.S. exalted Black manhood as the center of change, while simultaneously subordinating the contributions of Black women writers. Male artists and intellectuals, such as Amiri Baraka (Everett Leroi Jones), and Stokley Carmichael, used the movement to destabilize privileged markers of whiteness that subjugated Black men to the peripheries of society; yet, these same "revolutionaries" failed to condemn the effacement of Black women.³ Black men marked as progressives during this time continued to partake in "misgynoir"-excluding the literary and theoretical works of Black women within the movement.⁴ In combating this marginalization some Black women began to advocate for their place, and published works such as *Ain't I A Woman* (1981) by bell hooks and *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* (1977) by Barbara Christian. hooks argues, "the black power movement made synonymous black liberation and the

³ For more information about the Black male aesthetics during the Black Arts movement see Addison Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic* (1971).

⁴ Misogynoir is a term coined by Black queer feminist Moya Bailey in 2010 to address misogyny directed towards Black women in American visual culture. She defines the term as the intersection of bias that focuses on race and gender as negative or subordinated view of Black women.

effort to create a social structure wherein black men could assert themselves as patriarchs, controlling community, family, and kin” (98), and women such as hooks and Christian aimed to undermine Black men’s ideologies of regulating change in the Black community. Amid the shifting politics dominating Black rhetoric in the arts movement, Black women intentionally started to look beyond national borders to cultivate a more distinct Black diasporic female subject.

Black women writers utilize literary fiction to probe and name the limits of identifying with an American national identity. With the outgrowth of decolonization in many heavily African populated nation-states, the “race question” gains global importance in relationship to historical accounts of slavery and oppression. The value of U.S. citizenship increasingly depreciates for Black Americans as they obtain more international knowledge about the prevalence of colonialism and exploitation of Black bodies and labor in countries around the world. Their texts challenged and untangled how diasporic spatialities created an alternative balance between reifying mobility and consigning Black women to a fixed space. Each author locates the significant impact of geographies, gender, and the metaphors in constructing the Black migrant. Often this complex concept strived for intersectional inclusion spanning transnational borders, but the theory of a collective identity uniting all Black womanhood frequently fell short because of gaps in the idea of homogeneity. Carole Boyce Davies theorized that the uniformity produced “a kind of flirting with danger of a totalizing discourse” (26) to the detriment of Black women.⁵ While American Black women could represent their dispossession in the U.S., with relative connections to access in terms of writing and travel, their relationship to homemaking appears somewhat amicable. Whereas for other Afro-diasporic women “home” and

⁵ See Carole Boyce Davies’ *Black Women, Writing and Identity, Migrations of the Subject* (2002) for more information about how Blackness is internationally color-coded.

its renderings seemed to range from forms of happiness, to fear, to irretrievable sites of displacement always with a different undertone than the Black American women writers.

With this unintentional national privilege Black American women recognized their position in needing to make room for other Black women's voices of the diaspora. The old idea of identity as a system of relation only acted as one component of the Black experience regardless of location. Writings by Black women began to depend on how a society participated in global relationships, which included migration, modernity, and postmodernity. Cheryl Sterling's editorial "The Word in the World – Transnationalism and African/African Diasporic Women's Writing," describes transnationalism as:

An open signifier; it can denote diversity or sameness, contested sites or terrains, or intellectual movements, and the international movements of peoples, ideas and things. In many ways, the term transnationalism functions like a cognate of the terms diaspora, internationalism, and globalization, or even an amalgam of all three. (2)

Sterling names transnationalism as an open signifier because it decenters Blackness as confined to one idea from a global perspective. Entrenching Black narratives in transnationalism required Black women to unlearn Western paradigms of power that silenced other subjugated persons of color. It also allowed writers such as Toni Morrison in her 1981 novel *Tar Baby* to discuss the intersectional conversations that occur when national/international alliances are split in fiction. Morrison creates a traveling female protagonist, Jadine Childs, who exists within a mixed fabric of identity relations: American, Black, migrant, woman, educated, fashion model, privileged, multilingual, and resident of an island. In her attempt to upend social conventions setting the tone of the Black Arts Movement, Morrison astutely constructs Jadine as the image of mobility and modernity— while Son, the male protagonist, represents home and stagnancy. To emphasize

the tension between these two discrepant models of diaspora, the mythologized Isle des Chevaliers, an imagined Caribbean island, acts as the median between America and Africa for the characters. Like Sterling notes the transnationalism Morrison utilizes signifies the paradox of Son and Jadine's intimate relationship in the novel.

It is also important to expose the aspects of realism that Morrison's text employs through deliberately steering her characters away from essentialized characteristics of Blackness. The portrait of realism Morrison shows in *Tar Baby* demonstrates the limiting conservatism and elitism of Jadine—as an American—even as the character tries to break from these cultural mores. This description of Jadine is emblematic of the changing tone of America for Black Americans, while concurrently highlighting the issues of Caribbean nations. It speaks to the displacement many Black majority nation-states feel as colonial powers vacate their islands and countries, and the people's difficulty in understanding the gravity of their independence from imperial influences. Jadine's arduous journey to liberation is symbolic of what is happening for Afro-descended peoples in the 1960's-1980's when Black nationalistic movements are declining and white patronage is decreasing. For the first time Morrison creates a Black American woman not invested in being a carrier of culture through the mark of childbirth or childcare. Readers identify Son as the conveyor of Black culture in a non-American space, which was not a role Black American men often occupied in literature. Morrison crafts Jadine to look for a conception of self beyond the given logic of racial determinism, when she wishes to be “not American—not black—just me” (48). This emphasis on individuality rather than communal allegiance, sets a tone of self-growth for Black women outside of normative fixed domestic conventions. The idea fosters a trend that Blackness can exist beyond the reductive constraints of patriarchal American history and politics.

Thus, when Jamaica Kincaid interviews with the *Mississippi Review* in 1991 and the interviewer asks her why she never feels the need to claim the existence of a Black world or a Black sensibility, she responds: “When I write about these people it would never occur to me to describe their race, except as an aesthetic” (51), because she notes that she does not want her reader to automatically think about power relationships in her fiction. She goes on to cite that “Americans rather like to have things very much defined or to have things very much to be what they say they are” (51), which further indicates Kincaid’s distance from American racial categories even though she recognizes the hierarchy of power relationships between the Black and the white race.⁶ Here, it is of importance to communicate that race relations operated differently in Caribbean nation-states under the auspices of British rule, because the Black power movements reverberating across America did not impact Caribbean countries in the same way. Antigua did not gain its independence until 1981, which places any conversations of Black pride to the posterior of Black Antiguan identities.⁷ In contrast to Toni Morrison working within this moment of Black uplift, Kincaid’s background as a colonial subject of the British Empire changes her perspective about her Blackness and the need to place race at the forefront of her literary fiction. In the latter portion of this interview Kincaid goes on to explain that since everyone on her island was Black she did not feel the need to explicitly define race in such rigid terms, because in writing about Antigua and its people the implication to the reader is that Blackness is always present. Throughout her semi-autobiographical 1985 novel *Annie John*, Kincaid establishes the stages of girlhood to womanhood as divided identities that develop from the conflicts of culture, location, history, and tradition for her young protagonist. While Morrison

⁶ For the full interview of Kincaid see Vorda Allan and Jamaica Kincaid. “An Interview with Jamaica Kincaid.” *Mississippi Review* (1996) 49–76.

⁷ See Brian Dyde’s *A History of Antigua: The Unsuspected Isle* (2000) for more information about the comprehensive history of Antiguan colonial occupation to their current modern condition.

centers Jadine's relation to Black culture on her connection to a man, Annie John remains a more traditional portrait of women as the bearers of culture. However, Kincaid complicates this intimate relationship to culture as Annie both wanting to maintain ties to Antiguan traditions, while also wanting to distance herself from the problematic issues within the history of the culture.

Kincaid illustrates that this incongruent conflict with national identity forces Annie to reconcile her imbalanced affinity with the colonial education system. In each part of Annie John's day she looks on at the flag raising, which Kincaid shows to be the overarching shadow of the British Empire that requires, "our eyes following the Union Jack as it was raised up; then we swore allegiance to our country, by which was meant England" (115). Therefore, this passage indicates Antiguan deference and subservience to English authority—the people of this country quite literally must look up to this imperial power. Although Annie John initially cooperates in these practices of revering British presence, Kincaid mobilizes one crucial element that effects Annie's praise of Antigua and Britain, and it lies in her mother's nationality. Annie Senior is a creole Black woman from the Dominican Republic, which changes how she teaches young Annie the customs of Antigua. The mother appears to respect British traditions, but does not reiterate them in the home to Annie, particularly the Anglican religion. Therefore, when Annie is in school and defaces the image of Christopher Columbus, Kincaid creates a readily available critique of the colonial school system in this act of contempt. She makes Annie John resent the figure of Columbus that was the "discover" of her home, which in turn foregrounds Kincaid's severe censure of colonial dominance. Kincaid provides an interesting counter-opinion about Blackness compared to the writings of Morrison because though she claims not to name race in

the same capacity as Morrison, the distinctions she makes about the racial dynamics in Antigua speaks clearly to the narrow designations of racial and national injustices against Black people.

The unmistakable differences between the two writers, even though they share similar identities as Black women, further substantiates the holistic images of Blackness that happens in the aftermath of the Black Arts Movement. Unlike Morrison, who uses mobility as a privilege of Jadine's American citizenry—Kincaid's character Annie John only travels out of necessity for the welfare of her family. However, both authors show the female protagonists of their texts first reject imperial control in their lives, only to later embrace it as a core part of their personhood. When Jadine tries to engage with American Blackness she feels rejected, and subsequently returns to France because she believes this is the only locale that embraces her Blackness; likewise Annie John refutes the significance of Columbus in Antigua as a child, but later travels to England to become a nurse and circumstantially may develop a deeper devotion to the empire. The contradictions of Black life for the characters point to the diversity of African American and Afro-Caribbean women's experiences from the working class to the elite. Morrison and Kincaid each intrinsically capture the varying interconnected issues central to British and American imperialism, migration, and dislocation. Even when their narratives seek to search for Afro-diasporic identities and entities outside the parameters of whiteness, the ineradicable stain of empire propels Annie and Jadine to continue to believe in the falsehood of their own subordination.

Similarly in Michelle Cliff's 1987 novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff's main character Clare Savage, also has trouble syncretizing her Afro-Jamaicaness into the multitude of identities she encounters as she travels. Unlike Kincaid's Caribbean portrayal of a pre-independent Antigua and the heavy supremacy of the British crown, Cliff sets her story in a post-independent

Jamaica giving the reader a glimpse of nation building for a former colony. Throughout the novel Clare struggles with the dialectics of home and the migratory meanings of Blackness. In the short time Clare spends in America, in Cliff's sequel to *Abeng* (1984), this protagonist has the most meaningful interactions with Black American civil rights movements and with the localized violence Blacks experienced from white Americans. Cliff takes a storytelling cue from Morrison and depicts the friction that ensues within migrating Black families, however she adds another dimension to her story that shows the division between families that can transpire with this movement. While in *Tar Baby*, Jadine may have minor disputes with her aunt and uncle but they all identify, at least in some sense, with a Philadelphian Black American consciousness; in the Savage family there are many interlocking parts to both their Black, white, and Jamaican identities. Cliff creates this sharp contrast to communicate how historically entrenched power structures like colonialism and slavery can intimately affect the interpersonal relationships in a family. The dis-memberment of the Savages elucidates a different sphere of transnational "privilege" that readers cannot experience through Kincaid or Morrison's writing.

Kitty and Boy's marriage, upon migrating to America, marks the first juncture of antitheses for the Savage family—because while Kitty wants to use her Afro-Jamaican roots to somewhat identify with Black Americans, if only for the sake of inclusion, Boy, conversely uses his Jamaican whiteness to function as the opposite, forsaking any associations to Blackness in the United States. Heather Russell cites Cliff's distress in using Kitty and Boy's marriage as the focal point of Jamaican mobility to America, and reveals that "Cliff's challenge as an author writing from a culture of colonialism is a struggle to get wholeness from fragmentation while working within fragmentation. Such symbiosis between wholeness, fragmentation, and content is

fully emblemized through the characters” (104).⁸ Clare looks to her parents for that sense of wholeness that Cliff is alluding to, but the schism between Kitty and Boy and their individual fragmentation prevents them from modeling a holistic image for their children. Kitty cannot understand how her Blackness fits into America with the label of immigrant or foreign attached to her person. Technically, what most fragments Kitty is her lack of knowledge of U.S. race relations, and the implication of entitlement that accompanies her lightskin. Boy, in contrast, uses his whiteness to gain advantages in America, and forces Clare to fragment a portion of her identity in order to access the same privileges. An integral part of the Savage racial experience in America is that they exist in the liminal spectrum of race because they are not entirely Black, therefore they are not at the bottom of class relations—but being Jamaican white precludes them from acquiring the same liberties as white Americans.

Cliff illustrates that since the sociopolitical landscape of America reduces the Savages’ involvement in nation-building, Kitty returns to Jamaica where her sense of belonging, to her, does not feel so readily erased. Boy remains in the United States and continues to chase the idea of the American dream and acceptance through his phenotypical appearance. For awhile Cliff positions Clare as resistant to the concept of her Jamaican whiteness, because of the explicit association to her father’s greed. She travels to England, the mother country of Jamaica, hoping to escape from America to avoid the uncensored racial hatred that plagued much of her familial time in the country. However, going to school in London breeds much of the same racial animosity only with less societal awareness about the social ills. As Clare ages, Cliff gradually alters Clare’s geopolitical cognizance and dedication to racial issues of violence in transnational spaces: from her forced aloofness in England to her growing feeling of responsibility to

⁸ See Heather Russell’s *Legba’s Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic* (2009) for an in-depth discussion of the metanarratives for the African Atlantic subject pre and post-independence.

Jamaica.⁹ The trajectory of Clare's Afro-Caribbean subjectivity indicates that layers of deconstruction had to occur for the image of her Black womanhood to become an important entity for her. Cliff seems to be asserting that the relationship to home is not innocent and idyllic; it is fraught with conflict, tension, bitterness and struggle for Clare. The final stages of *No Telephone to Heaven*, when Clare joins the guerilla counterinsurgency group, speaks to the unfettered journey of Black women not only in Cliff's construction of Jamaica, but also from a globalized perspective in their agitation for visibility.

In 1994 Edwidge Danticat employs all of the tensions that the previous authors explore when she writes *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Since Danticat's writing of her novel is chronologically the furthest from the Black Arts Movement, she mobilizes a multi-layered discussion on how Black women are continuously caught in matrixes of disempowerment. This notion is even more complicated when projected onto immigrant Black women with few resources or no recourse to assert their voices for change. Although Haiti gained independence more than a century before Danticat writes this text, political upheavals and corrupt economics still textured the climate of the small Caribbean island during the publication of the novel. Danticat delineates the generational experiences of four main female characters in her text: Ifé, Atie, Martine, and Sophie Caco. Each woman has a fractured cultural relationship to the pressures, repressions, and traumas of their nation-state Haiti. However, Danticat creates an interesting family dynamic with the Caco women, because it is unlike the preceding families that Black women authors create in their novels. She creates a solely matrilineal family with very little male interaction for the Cacos, besides reproduction. Even though Martine travels to America, it is out of the necessity to escape pain, it does not stem from a desire to be American. While in New York, Martine does

⁹ I use the term geopolitical in this dissertation to mean the politics related to international relations as it is influenced by geographical factors of place, space, and time.

not assimilate to American cultural traditions and Danticat only expresses Martine's need to obtain citizenship to bring Sophie to the city. When Sophie arrives to the U.S. as a child, Martine shows her the ethnic enclave of Little Haiti, where she shops, sends money back home, and visits local Haitian restaurants; this is to verify to the child the veracity of her Haitian identity, rather than the value of an American one. Marc, Martine's Haitian lover, is yet another symbol of her disinterest in allowing any parts of America to infiltrate her personal life. The only indication of Americanization that marks Martine is her job as an overnight caretaker for an elderly invalid white woman. What makes this job distinctly American is that in Haiti children take care of their elderly parents, not strangers in a retirement home. It shows that Americans have no indebted duty to their families when they are ill and effectively discard them for another to initiate their care.

Danticat creates little mention of how Black centered movements in America impacted Sophie and Martine. She produces this dynamic in her text because it challenges the notion that immigrants want to come to America to integrate into U.S. culture—but with her own examples of Haitian nationals it displays how detached many immigrants are to possessing a place in the American landscape. Even in the restaurant, Marc, Martine and Sophie visit the Haitians only discuss Haitian politics with no mention of America in any way. Martine works hard to maintain this same paradigm for Sophie, sending her to a Haitian Catholic school in the city to retain her cultural affiliations to the nation. In addition Martine also initiates the customary *testing* tradition Ifè performed on her and Atie in their teen years.¹⁰ This push to parent her daughter based on Haitian customs, only in another country propels, Sophie to understand her place in America in a different manner than Martine. What happens in the deteriorating relationship between Sophie

¹⁰ *Testing* is the Haitian practice of using your fingers to vaginally test a woman to see if her hymen is broken from sexual intercourse. I detail this practice later in Chapter two of this dissertation.

and Martine is the distance within their nationalities. Progressively, Sophie begins to see herself as an American citizen and subsume her individual thinking to match that of other Americans. In contrast, Martine retains the repressive cultural trauma of Haiti and reiterates it to her child. In *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature*, Donette Francis argues, “Since Black Caribbean women are targets of colonial, national, and neoimperial subordination, their quotidian practices of belonging in intimate spheres lie in their unconscious marginalization, and violation of other Caribbean women” (40). Francis posits that Martine’s behavior lacks alternative thoughts about her Black female body because she internalized a broken, distorted, and violent image of her home. The moment she begins to *test* Sophie, Danticat shows her insufficient closure with the sexual trauma she experienced in Haiti. Thus, when the American Joseph appears as an exit from the strict ethnocentric rituals of Martine, Sophie takes the opportunity to leave.

After Sophie deserts Martine, Danticat introduces a new facet of Afro-diasporic transnational experience that involves a dualistic relationship to both spaces of home. In many of the other texts, the female protagonists only use one diasporic location to achieve their version of liberation at the end; however, Danticat’s unification of both Haiti and America speaks to her bridging the gaps between constructed homemade places, and ancestral home spaces. Sophie’s return to Haiti as an adult with her child, Brigitte, serves three purposes for the character: to understand how the blemishes of intergenerational Haitian practices still impact her, to find closure for the pervasive sexual violence her mother chose to continue on her in America, and to finally make peace with the testing ritual so she does not repeat those acts on her own child. Revisiting Haiti explores the long-term ramifications of the violence perpetuated during the Duvalier regime on poor Haitians, both women and men. Danticat seeks to demonstrate the real

implications and intersections of how personal and political trauma intersect for subjugated Black Caribbeans. At the same time, upon returning to America, Sophie uses both the lessons of Haiti and America to confront the sexual violence she endured. She joins a sex phobia group with three other diasporic women and reconfigures the tone of her relationship to sexual intimacy. The manner in which a woman reclaims authority over her own body became a repeated concept for Black American women after the Black Arts Movement. Danticat condemns the entire country of Haiti for disregarding these brutalities and inhumane political policies towards women with little to no justice dispensed to the culprits.

Sophie, Clare, Annie, and Jadine are just a few examples of the glaring deficiencies of male centered nationalistic discourses and its failure to replace and re-theorize patriarchal imperatives in favor of a more gender equitable praxis through the lens of fiction. The post-Black Arts era interrogates new epistemologies as viable dialogues for Black feeling and freedom. Throughout this dissertation I take the enduring dialectic between material Black female enfranchisement and the emergent field of raced affect theory to meticulously examine the overlay of shame onto Morrison's, Kincaid's, Cliff's and Danticat's migration literature.¹¹ For this project, I intend to capture the moments that the reader can feel the author fumbling with writing about the affect of shame through the characterizations of their Black female protagonists. This capitulation of Black women's vulnerability discloses how the top-down structure of many Black centered movements forced Black women to face the challenges of asserting their presence, while Black men actively overpowered and suppressed their voices. In a conscious effort to re-structure the language of Black empowerment, Black women politicized

¹¹ Although many scholars in the field of affect studies discuss Black women's affect as angry— and I do agree that it is useful to acknowledge this framework especially in terms of what Sara Ahmed claims affect impacts understandings of race—it is important to consider how layered elements of the African diaspora influence other forms of affect before anger becomes the focal point of the argument around Black female emotionality.

the spectrum of their shame. The early to mid 1990's created a critical turn for theorists in terms of questioning the emotive state of the mind and the body, as ideas focused more on the individual as opposed to communal responsibility. More accurately, for Black women, affect exposed the fallacy that shame should be private, and effectively demonstrated that what was often misread as Black women's anger, derived from feelings of shame. I borrow Seigworth and Gregg's term for defining affect in their chapter "An Inventory of Shimmers" and they interpret affect as:

arising in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacity to act and be acted upon. Affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters; affect is integral to a body's perpetual becoming. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter. (3)¹²

This Seigworth and Gregg denotation of affect as in-between-ness elucidates the position of Black women that both pledged allegiance to the Black pride movements, but also wanted the free expression to define their own stories. Essentially, their affect was entangled in the way the world acted upon their Black bodies rather than their acts on the world. Therefore affect, particularly the affect of shame, was viewed as a negative emotion. If Seigworth and Gregg use affect as an integral part to the body's perpetual becoming, then the initial stages of this becoming begin from a negative ideation. Individuals experience the affect of shame as core to self-evaluation in the presence of other persons. For people of African descent in America this self-conscious reaction was magnified next to whiteness, and this was especially true for Black colonial subjects that lacked even more resources for self-awareness than Black Americans.

¹² See the *Affect Theory Reader* (2009) for different perspectives and approaches on naming and writing about affect from different authors, including Seigworth and Gregg.

I want to make the distinction throughout this investigation of shame that although America was experiencing this cultural shift in terms of the importance of affect for the individual person, many of the Caribbean Black women were still working through how to separate the communal affect of shame from the individual affect. Much of the Caribbean women's negative shame arose from feeling a duty to protect their countries and homes regardless of their mobility to other spaces. While Jadine internalizes shame because of her individual isolation from the Black community in America, Morrison shows that Jadine's character does not think about the implications of shame for the Black Americans she encounters only her own self-interest. Jadine's shame was not connected to her Americanness, but rather the inadequacy of her Blackness in her mobility. I argue that this cultural gap between Black American and Black Caribbean women writers situates the affect of shame into different globalized perspectives for readers, even though it still retains a negative tone in their stories at the beginning. For Kincaid, Cliff, and Danticat, their female protagonists always connect their individual affect of shame to their countries.¹³ Since each character is a colonial subject or subsidiary of colonialism, their shame develops under an intersubjective structure of the affect of shame—their shame is almost always conditioned as an emotion of being exposed to the gaze of the “other.”¹⁴ In Lisa Guenther's article “Shame and the Temporality of Social Life,” she quotes Simone de Beauvoir's argument that shame “is an effect of oppression, both for the woman whose embodied existence is marked as shameful, and for the beneficiary of colonial domination who feels ashamed of her privilege” (23). Though I agree with Guenther's use of de Beauvoir's reasoning about shame for women, I think in the case of Black women writers from the

¹³ Martine and Sophie are technically no longer colonial subjects since Haiti gained its independence in 1804, however until 1947 Haiti still paid debts to France. French influence over the country also still weighed heavily on Haitian identity, including their language and cultural affiliations into the present.

¹⁴ I mean “other” here to signal the presence of a colonial power in the country as the marked gaze for the female characters from Antigua, Jamaica, and Haiti.

Caribbean the idea of shame and its relationship to privilege is relative considering the positioning of their backgrounds in the novels.

For Kincaid, her portrayal of Annie's shame connects to the child's inherent need to protect Antigua from the constant gaze of the colonizer in the classroom. Initially, Annie's affect of shame reads negatively when she speaks ill of the white British girl in her class that represents the place of empire in her country. She is upset not for her individual sake, but feels shame that the girl experiences such privileges, while she and the other Black students do not have access to the same advantages in Antigua. Likewise, Cliff shows that both Clare and Kitty's devotion to Jamaica shapes the premise of their shame. Kitty tries to adopt the individualism mantra that controls the American narrative when they move to the country, however she feels communal shame for leaving her mother's land once she dies. The idea of community looks different in America and Kitty feels shame that she cannot reconcile her place with people who look similar to her, yet exclude her because she sounds and looks unorthodox. When Kitty could not conform to the social norms of Black America the shame of the social rejection propels her desire to indefinitely return to Jamaica. Kitty's departure precipitates Clare's own proximity to the affect of shame moving into her early adulthood. After seeing her mother's shame, it is impossible for Clare to not associate this affect with negative emotionality. Clare also does not believe in promoting whiteness in the way her father preaches, and as a result exists in a kind middle space as I related earlier about the Savage family's presence in America.

In many ways Kitty's reaction to leaving America makes Clare dislike her Blackness, and subsequently as she travels from the U.S. to England she denies her Afro-Jamaican self quite vehemently. She intimately harbors this debilitating shame and represses it until a racist protest happens that creates a sense of misrecognition for her. In this moment Clare realizes that she

needs to stop avoiding the shame and finally explore it as a process of her own becoming in relationship to Jamaica—not in isolation of the country. This negative conception of shame that drives her closed circuit relationship to her homeland is also true for the characters that Edwidge Danticat creates in her novel. Similar to Clare, Sophie also has a problematic relationship to shame, and nationhood because of her mother. Sophie internalizes Martine’s shame through the cultural practice of *testing*. While in America Sophie goes to a Haitian school, and mainly interacts with other Haitian nationals in New York. Thus, cycles of Haitian generational negative shame reverberate heavily because she self isolates in America. Martine’s own shame and trauma disallows her from moving into her future, and instead she remains stuck in time to the incident of her rape. She cannot reconcile the past for the benefit of her present, and consequently passes this mindset to her child. When Sophie marries Joseph and has her own child, only then is she able to recognize the toxicity of the shame, and her need to return to Haiti to understand the impetus of the shame.

Each story outlines how Black women both in the U.S. and the Caribbean characterize their Black female characters interacting with nationhood and the affect of shame in a multi-layered manner. I assert in this dissertation that the 1980’s-1990’s is a post Black movement moment that allows Black women to express the reasons behind their negative shame and the reasons they feel forced to perpetuate toxic behaviors generationally. However, I also analyze and pinpoint when, how, and why Black American and Afro-Caribbean women writers want to create characters in their novels that confront the ideation of shame as debilitating, and the path to alter this burden. My redefinition of shame seeks to understand the repurposing of shame as productive for the Black female protagonists. I frame the productive aspects of the affect of shame as disrupting complacency and orienting the characters towards a more ethical and

politically conscious mentality that represents their national, Afro-diasporic, and political leanings to achieve forms of solidarity. More significantly, I argue that this repositioning of productive shame opens a relation of identities that Black women occupy through the characters and the authors of these novels. Their characters engage in an unencumbered complex relationship with shame, and while some characters fully embrace and adapt to reinventing debilitating shame for a new more pronounced form of freedom, other characters can only take some facets of productive shame on their journey towards liberation.

In the four novels I investigate I look at the disjunctures of shame between each author's literary depictions of the affect through an ordered methodology. In order to understand the depths of the different globalized perspectives of shame, I structure my methodology first around the impact of migration in the beginning of a character's narrative. Migration is an intrinsic component of comprehending how trans-cultural and transnational historical conversations occurred for the displaced Afro-diasporic subject—more importantly, it highlights the significance of their uprooted identities and is fundamental to discourses framing nation, race, and colonialism. I then utilize the term disruption within my methodology, because the lives of Black women in these novels are explicitly interrupted when their conceptions of home spaces and home making are suddenly removed as consequences of their migration. This rift in the concept of home leads to the next aspect of the character's story, which I name as their stage of discontinuity. I define this term as a rupture with their past and the difficulty of reconnecting or reconciling with their present. Discontinuity blurs the boundaries of nationality, shame, migration, and where their allegiances to a home country should lie, with their nation-state of origin or their adopted homeland. In the process of discontinuity it demands that the Black female protagonist rename a portion of her identity to cope with the changing tone of her

negative affect. The initial three stages of my methodology distinguish the negative phases of the affect of shame for the characters, and their inability to acknowledge the gravity of these debilitating feelings.

The structure of the methodology requires introspection from the authors about the implicit and uninhibited emotionality of Blackness moving over international borders.¹⁵ At the end of my theory I use the productive tone and how it reestablishes a positive resonance to shame as a form of Black women's liberation. This is the moment that helps Morrison, Kincaid, Cliff, and Danticat reframe the presentation of their characters for the journey into their revolutionary futures with freedom at the forefront. The authors show that this revision of shame facilitates a space of relationality and ethical responsibility for the benefit of the Black community globally through the characters in their fiction. The emergence of Black centered movements of inclusivity and empowerment guided Black women to take control over the legacy of their narratives, and provide public outlets for the gamut of their emotionality through literary works. Guenther names the turn towards the affect of shame for Black consciousness as the need, to see "a world where social power is unevenly distributed along axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality...these axes intersect in ways that privilege us in some respects and oppress us in others, entangling us in multiple and conflicting forms of shame" (38). The dynamics of how each author articulates the gravity of their character's shame speaks to the aporias that arise with this weighty affect. With all the ambivalent renderings of affect that only point to one type of emotionality for Black women in all geographic spaces, reconsidering shame throughout the different spheres of the Anglophone/Francophone African diaspora in this

¹⁵ I define the idea of uninhibited emotionality as an unrestrained expression of emotions for the characters that the Black women writers in this dissertation write into existence as they make their characters move from one geographic location to the next.

dissertation offers an intervention into the nuances of Black anger in affect theory and its translation across geopolitical boundaries.

CHAPTER ONE : THE ROOTLESS IN TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY*

Toni Morrison's 1981 novel *Tar Baby* focuses on transnational conceptions of Blackness and negotiations of racial community in interlocking international contexts. For Morrison, this diasporic work disavows geographical boundaries to transcend historic and cultural insularity to promote a comprehensive vision of African peoples in her work. Unlike the other novels in this dissertation, Morrison's American citizenry and global accessibility allows her to construct multiple Black diasporic identities within the space of the imagined Caribbean island: Isle de Chevaliers.¹⁶ Throughout the novel, Morrison illustrates the tensions present between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans— and with this dichotomy she deconstructs the idea of one identity uniting persons of African descent. During a 1983 interview with Nellie McKay for the journal of *Contemporary Literature*, Morrison addresses why she decides to employ migratory settings in *Tar Baby*, but not in her earlier works. She explains: "I wanted this novel to be in a place where the characters largely had no access to any of the escape routes of a large city. When a crisis occurs the characters do not have access to the police or neighbors to interfere, this forces them to do things that would otherwise not be required of them" (417). In this passage Morrison captures the silences of Caribbean life that up to this point do not exist or intermingle within Black American literary discourses. I argue that in Morrison creating this imaginary Caribbean island populated with both privileged and non-privileged people she produces a telling narrative about the hierarchies dominating Caribbean societies and the shadow of American imperialism. Her aim, with locations both inside and outside of the United States, demonstrates the importance of Black bodies traveling and the emotionality inherent in that experience of mobility. The novel forces a critique and re-evaluation of Black womanhood in American

¹⁶ Isle de Chevaliers is an imaginary Caribbean island that Morrison creates in *Tar Baby*. The island is most likely located in the Caribbean Sea alongside countries such as Jamaica, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

nationalistic discourses and challenges the notion of women as fixed subjects. I also supplement my study of Morrison's text with Ferly argument and frame my ideas parallel to her perceptions about "Rhizomic Roots: Nation and Relation," when she contends "that writing relating to the Caribbean address a preoccupation with history, legitimacy, origins and highlights the erasure of women in local Caribbean narratives" (27). Morrison emphasizes that although she gives dialogue to the common Caribbean women their stories are vague and remain untold in a similar manner to their visibility and voices on their home Caribbean islands. Jadine's American identity, in many ways, affords her privileges that she does not share with Alma and Thérèse.

Tar Baby deals with conflicts that are both realistic and symbolic for the cast of characters on Isle de Chevaliers. Valerian and Margaret Street, a former candy manufacturer and former Miss Maine contestant, live in a house they name L'Arbe de Croix on the island with their servants, Ondine, and Sydney.¹⁷ The Streets also serve as the benefactors for Jadine Childs, the niece of Ondine and Sydney, while she attends school in France at the Sorbonne. Throughout the text, Ondine and Sydney revere the Streets for their monetary favor and ability to assist and improve their niece's life away from the racial tensions of America. Their allegiance to Valerian and Margaret blinds them to the couple's individual flaws and forces them to keep secrets to the family's detriment. This idiosyncratic familial distance seemingly helps members of the L'Arbe de Croix household function well within their own paradigms. However, once Son escapes from the harbor of the Queen of France in the middle of the night to stow away and hide at L'Arbe de Croix, his presence upsets the delicate balance in the mansion. Son's arrival alters the perceived depth of both professional and personal relationships at the estate. While each character is at first hesitant to engage and accept Son, Jadine finds herself interested in Son's story. Though Ondine, Sydney and the Streets do not approve of their growing intimacy, Jadine endeavors to build a

¹⁷ Ondine serves as the cook and Sydney serves as Valerian's butler throughout the text.

relationship with Son because he represents links to her African American ancestry and in many ways this makes him more intriguing.

A crucial aspect of Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* is how she relates the character of Jadine Childs to wanting to reconnect to her African American history. The 1970s in Black American literature was a period of recovery and rediscovery for Black women writers. Many themes such as activism, travel, histories of slavery, and the emergence of second-wave feminist or womanist movements showed Black women the significance of gender and Blackness globally. Black people in the United States began to understand the importance of governing their imagery and Morrison places the character Jadine in the industry of modeling to show her mounting introspection about the exposure of positioning her image in mainstream culture. Studying the relevance of Blackness in academic departments gained traction in America in the 1970s as more Black Americans agitated for their independence from white educational models in the country. Earlier methodologies of thought that often relegated Black stories and theories to the posterior of academic departments increasingly began to advertise and encourage Black students to take courses about themselves in traditional classroom spaces. This is also a time when institutions of higher learning started to heavily desegregate their schools to welcome Black students into their departments as both educators and students. The wider turn to fostering Pan-Africanism, communications via newspapers and international travel began to close the gaps between Black people across transnational borders.

It is also of importance that writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker were gaining political capital in the works they produced about the trials and tribulations of Black women in America. Morrison even utilizes *Tar Baby* to speak to the hierarchies and colonization that dominates her imagined Caribbean space Isle de Chevaliers. Her inclusion of the Street

family illustrates the influence of capitalism on Caribbean islands from the perspective of American imperialism. Thus, Morrison is doing two things with her depictions of the island, travel, the Streets, Jadine, the local Caribbean workers, and Ondine and Sydney: she illustrates how access to whiteness can exacerbate class divisions amongst Black people even in global spaces, and also Morrison shows her reader how U.S. influences, historically and culturally, penetrate poor immigrant Black spaces to make America continuously seem superior. Her inclusion of nature also works to combat historical narratives that often forced Blackness, particularly in the 1970's-1980's, to always be attached to the spaces of cityscapes. Morrison's creation of different Black women throughout her novel elucidates that the figure of the Black woman historically and in the current moment can begin to transcend stereotypes and interact with contemporary modes of Black diaspora, while still embracing portions of their Americanness.

Defining Subjectivities

Throughout *Tar Baby*, Morrison offers a multitude of ways to interact with the evolving idea of the Afro-diasporic subject forming in the 1970-1980s in her text. In order to highlight the diversity of Blackness emerging in this moment Morrison foregrounds the schism present in Blackness in what I name the Old World diasporic aesthetics versus the New World diasporic aesthetics that exists in the myriad of African-descended relationships in the novel. I position the Old World aesthetic as representative of Ondine's, Sydney's, and Son's personas, because each signifies fixed connections to America regardless of mobility, and a firm belief that Black women have fixed roles in the Black community. In my argument I do want to provide a distinction between how Morrison distinguishes Ondine and Sydney's Old World aesthetic from Son's. Morrison's depiction of Son's Old World aesthetic does not necessarily involve class

consciousness, but classed aspects do speak to some facets of the aesthetic for Son—such as his choosing of Jadine as a partner. Son’s definition of his Blackness through this Old World perspective is also more inclusive and he forges relationships with the Afro-Caribbean islanders specifically because he does not see their Black identities as markedly different than his own; additionally, Son only sparingly agrees with the idea of white patronage from the Streets. Whereas for Ondine and Sydney, they voluntarily chose not to fraternize with the Afro-descended island people because of their devotion to classism, whiteness, and tradition in their Old World diasporic aesthetic. Though Son, Ondine, and Sydney have gaps in the similarities of their Old World aesthetics, it is still important to each of them to have a significant connection to the land because it signals stability. In contrast, I note that Jadine’s aesthetic disposition forms differently than her aunt and uncle, Ondine and Sydney’s, even though she is also Black American.

For Jadine the foundation of the Old World diasporic aesthetic is an integral portion of her identity because of her aunt and uncle. Thus, she believes in the idea of classism and the superior benefit of proximity to whiteness, and lacks the idea of Black inclusivity since she also does not socialize with the Afro-Caribbeans on the island. I argue that Jadine combines characteristics of the Old aesthetic to form her idea of the New World diasporic aesthetic that is less devoted to stability and land associations and more intrigued with the idea of creating an individualized Black identity separate from nationalistic associations—one that is more concerned with the material look of the aesthetic as opposed to the emotional depth of that materiality. This new diasporic identity for Jadine is dissimilar from Son’s because of her inability to create intimate Afro-diasporic communal connections in her migratory travels to France, Isle de Chevaliers, and the United States. It is my contention that Morrison constructs

this schism to complicate the idea of home-spaces and home-making for the Black characters of her novel that in the past considered America an anchor despite maltreatment in the country.¹⁸ She utilizes Jadine to express the concept of unbelonging in this New World diasporic aesthetic that Carole Boyce Davies coins in her text to demonstrate how Afro-descended women in particular begin to experiment with expressions of Blackness outside of American national borders. In order to comprehend how this New World aesthetic ushers in the idea of unbelonging, I introduce here the idea of the middle ground that I will interact with throughout the duration of this dissertation. I adapt Saidiya Hartman's use of the term middle ground because she discusses the significations and challenges of Black skin traversing globalized environments, and the idea that shared Blackness does not always denote inclusion. I also use the term middle ground to describe that geographically a character may identify with one space of home because of their physical location, but emotionally may associate the idea of home with another locale.

With this multiplicity of subsidiary ideas within the framework of how I am defining Jadine's New World diasporic aesthetic, I argue that these complex conceptualizations facilitate internal conflict and debilitating shame for the protagonist in Morrison's novel. During each stage of Jadine's migratory life she has trouble synthesizing the two aesthetic forms and actively refuses to engage in dissecting the rift. I posit that her initial move to France disrupts her earliest understanding of home and self, and further fragments the sense of isolation she feels on the island despite the presence of her extended family. When she recognizes this disruption of identity in France and her incapacity to connect to other Black women, Jadine temporarily moves back to the island for repose. However, in this time back on Isle de Chevaliers, Jadine does not

¹⁸ I am referencing Son, Ondine, and Sydney and how Morrison shows their deference to American values regarding racial classifications and roles. However, these characters do not consider America as an anchor of their subjectivities.

utilize this time to analyze the negative shame that begins to distort her self-image. Therefore, when she meets Son and moves back to America—living in New York and visiting Florida—the intensity of her debilitating shame appears to create discontinuity for Jadine. She cannot reconcile how a rupture from her past self of the New World aesthetic begins to want elements of the Old World aesthetic with Son. Throughout Jadine’s time in the United States Morrison indicates the dissension of debilitating shame that contributes to the deterioration of Son and Jadine’s relationship. After Jadine realizes the fervor of negativity in her shame, she decides to reclaim her mobility and migrate back to the island to apprehend the different components of her shame in order to parse out and rename it as a positive asset in her life, instead of using others to deal with the trauma of the affective emotion. It is important to note that while Jadine is finding ways to cope with her shame, I also discuss how Son too internalizes debilitating shame and harnesses his own repositioning of shame within his Old World diasporic aesthetic and reconfigures a relationship to African history to his benefit.

Mapping Blackness

In each interpersonal relationship Jadine builds on and off Isle de Chevaliers she must renegotiate different versions of her identity. Jadine constantly feels the need to uphold Black communal values even though she does not live within the national borders of America.¹⁹ Thus, imagining a narrative of home confuses and complicates Jadine’s relationship to America and her time on the island with Son, Ondine, Sydney, Valerian, and Margaret. Conceptually, the home space constructed through migration in Carole Boyce-Davies’s *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* locates many transgressive and disjunctive experiences for an individual. Davies argues “migration produces a sense of this unbelonging and constructed home

¹⁹ See *New York Times* article “Blacks Carry Load of Care for Their Elderly” (1998) by Sara Rimer, which highlights a late 20th century perspective on Black communal relationships with the elderly.

spaces become contradictory, contested spaces, with a locus of misrecognition and alienation” (Davies 131). Since Jadine functions without a concrete constructed home space she continuously remains rootless and has difficulty maintaining her sense of self. Morrison utilizes the character of Jadine to highlight the limitations of re-writing home through the idea of migration and immigration, because none of the characters can fully explore their multiple identities without deep discomfort. Throughout the text Jadine struggles to understand and define the incongruities of cultural identity and belonging in relation to her Blackness while residing in L’Arbe de la Croix.²⁰

Jadine’s journey from Philadelphia, to Isle des Chevaliers, to Paris, to New York, to Eloe, Florida shows her complex and often times difficult transitions from one cross-cultural setting to another. At the beginning of the novel Jadine appears sullen and haughty in her early interactions with her aunt and uncle, Ondine and Sydney, because she seemingly manipulates their kindly spirit. When Jadine first enters the text she is having a conversation with Ondine, “You sure you won’t have some livers? No, thanks, Nanadine, but could I have a cup of chocolate? Ondine smiled. She loved it when her niece called her that... Sure you can, she said and went immediately” (Morrison 38). In order to conform to a sense of belonging to Ondine, Jadine uses an infantile colloquialism that is familiar to her aunt and shows compliance to familial traditions. By affectionately calling her aunt “Nanadine” instead of Ondine, Jadine attempts to employ language in a way that is nostalgic—which creates a constructed home space for herself and her aunt. However, the home space gets conflated here as a myth of unity, rather than the multiple significations present in the familial relationship. Morrison frames Jadine, Ondine and Sydney as New World versus Old World representations of diaspora in the 1970s and the conflicts and tensions addressed in that kinship. Even though Isle de Chevaliers is a fictional island Morrison

²⁰ L’Arbe de la Croix is the name of Valerian and Margaret Street’s home on Isle des Chevaliers.

created, it candidly shows the schism happening between new diasporic politics of Blackness emerging in the Caribbean and the old.²¹ From the beginning it is apparent that Ondine and Sydney have a different nationalistic connection to Isle de Chevaliers than Jadine because they arrived to the island as adults. Their place at L'Arbe de la Croix is also functional for work, not leisure or pleasure, as it is for Jadine and the Streets. Ondine and Sydney understand their roles on the island as essentialized and problematized in relation to historical nationalist discourses with Black bodies and mobility across borders—as laborers, rather than capitalistic consumers. This duty they have as the help strips them of agency in many ways, namely it changes their transnational experience to race and class. Although Ondine and Sydney have American citizenship, they lack power in their Old World diasporic identities and are unable to create a Black community across cultural, geographic and political sites and spaces. The working-class Black diasporic characters remain separate from one another, and unable to exchange cultural interactions. Morrison purposely isolates the two servants from a community in the text and makes their only interaction with other Black people on the island contentious and distant to exemplify the gaps present between Black Americans and Afro-Caribbeans.

Similarly, Jadine's involvement in New World diasporic aesthetics also disconnects her from Black communal participation. A large portion of her time on the island is either spent in isolation or with Margaret, Valerian and her relatives. Instead of forging a tangible relationship with Thérèse, Alma Estée, and Gideon, Jadine never learns their names and refers to them as Yardman and Mary. The significance of Jadine effacing the names of the native Caribbean people exposes the Westernized imperialistic ideologies that she internalized while living on the island. Her perspective of the New World diasporic aesthetic is elitist and does not include the

²¹ *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (2009) by Michael O. West explicates Black Power revolutions happening in the early 1970s in Caribbean countries that had long been subject to colonial rule, such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

under-educated or the poor, unless it is beneficial to her. Since Jadine cannot quite understand how to forge connections to other Afro-descended people on the island, she decides to cope with her unbelonging in Isle de Chevaliers by relocating to Paris, France to study art history at the Sorbonne. Here, it is important to note that escaping to France is Jadine's earliest interaction with debilitating shame in the form of Davies' idea of unbelonging. With the help of Valerian's money, Jadine believes her feelings of marginalization will disappear in the high cosmopolitan culture of France if she finds a way to fit into the mold. She believes the resettlement in a European space will ease the burden of her negative shame and the weight of her American Blackness that she readily feels on the island. Regrettably, Jadine soon learns that although in a different locale, she still feels that her Black body reads as an exotic Other, as she cannot reconcile why this continues to make her feel excluded. While trying to authenticate portions of her identity, Jadine wants to marry Ryk, a white Frenchman, who will undoubtedly give her the sense of belonging she craves. However, an incident in the grocery store with an unnamed woman in yellow forces Jadine to rethink the prospect of marriage:

I guess the person I want to marry is him, but I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl? And if it isn't me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black— just me?

(48)

In this scene Jadine journeys between the multiple identities she inhabits and ponders the utility of their value, if they are not equated to nationality or race. The passage shows Jadine's growing

negative shame and disillusionment towards Blackness as she spends more time in France and away from constructed home spaces.

Destabilizing Home-spaces

Since she could only imagine a non-acceptance narrative of home, Jadine begins to reduce her Americanized Blackness to stereotypes, which effectively illustrates her insufficient knowledge of her own Black body in an international locale. Davies argues that the discontinuity Jadine feels is a result of “both physical and psychic homelessness existing on a continuum which has extreme physical disruptions and outsidership and a variety of nodal points of displacement through exile, migration or movement” (138). Though Jadine tries to build connections and relationships in France, she is physically and emotionally incapable of doing so; specifically, because of the rupture between her oppressive past as a former American citizen and the new revolutionary future she tries to create for herself in Europe. Morrison uses Jadine’s episode to reveal that her insecurities about her Blackness are solely localized within an imagined American context, because many of the clichés she names are non-existent abroad. Moreover, the language inherent in this momentary aside implicates the disruptive loss that embodies Jadine’s instability mentally whilst living internationally. Despite her travel and work in transnational spaces, Jadine’s early inability to establish the idea of a constructed home-space and form a relationship with Gideon, Alma, and Thérèse stifles her capability to comprehend the depths of expressions of Blackness outside the parameters of American rhetoric.

Her encounter with the woman in yellow at the grocery store further destabilizes her confidence in building a stable cultural identity. Many critics such as Angelita Reyes and James Coleman often critique Jadine’s reaction to the woman in yellow because it shows the character’s investment in materialism and capitalistic consumption, and reveals that she is the antithesis of

Black womanhood; they both argue that Morrison uses the woman in yellow as a figure of myth and folklore related to ancient Black ancestral properties.²² Even though, I agree that the woman in yellow is an example of Black folklore for her presentation, and disdain of Jadine's Americanized representation, I argue that Jadine's encounter with the woman in yellow is a pivotal moment of exposure to the gaze of Blackness that she believes invokes her debilitating shame. The total mesmerization with the woman in yellow speaks more profoundly to her beginning to understand the weight of loss cross-culturally to other diasporic Afro descended peoples. She recognizes that the woman in yellow:

Was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was too much hip, too much bust...The skin like tar...eyes too beautiful for lashes to say it...that unphotographable beauty...Jadine followed her profile... a moment before the cataclysm when all loveliness and life was about to disappear she turned on Jadine with a small parting of her lips, shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement below. (46)

In the passage, initially Jadine does not grasp that she objectifies and commodifies the woman's body as useless through her Westernized relationship to the modeling industry. She distances herself from the woman because of her own poor relationship to Blackness, and refuses to recognize the similarities between them. Both women inhabit Black bodies while shopping in a Parisian store, which references their joint dislocation and displacement in a white space. This scene also emphasizes the gaps within the African diaspora and instead of embracing their shared identities they both show visible contempt for the other Black subject. Toni Morrison employs

²²See "Ancient Properties in the New World: The Paradox of the "Other" in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*" by Angelita Reyes to understand her analysis on Jadine's misunderstanding of Black womanhood. In addition see "The Quest for Wholeness in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*" by James Coleman for his critique of Jadine not achieving wholeness because of her detachment from the ancestral roots and presence of Africa.

the illustration of the woman in yellow to indicate to Jadine that her Blackness is not as unique as she thinks in the Parisian city. This experience with the woman changes Jadine's concept of Black mobility and her relationship to the disruption of loss; it is my contention that this disruptive loss exposes Jadine's debilitating shame under the gaze of what she deems an Other in the woman.

Essentially, the idea of coalescing this gaze of the woman in yellow with her own ideology eludes Jadine, and it seems incompatible in closing the middle ground she continuously occupies in her life. While she is in France, Jadine's surroundings are overly superficial and quite alienating. Even though Jadine finishes school in France and works there, she seems to lack the ability to make connections with others, which is most apparent in her fragile relationship with Ryk, and her rude interaction with the woman in yellow. Instead, as an alternative to engaging with these characters as a means to remove herself from the middle ground, Jadine chooses to reject pursuing intimacy, in favor of detachment. In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* Saidiya Hartman argues that understanding the middle ground as an African American between two diasporic links can be a difficult concept to reconcile. Hartman asserts that the desire to fit in with "A black face didn't make me kin...I was a stranger, a wandering seed bereft of the possibility of taking root. The domain of the stranger is always an elusive elsewhere" (4). Jadine embodies the rootless stranger always existing elsewhere in her migration, because she is always looking for different locations to validate a semblance of self-worth. Rootlessness and feelings of abandonment remain constants for Jadine, which makes the middle ground more troublesome for her. In order to recalibrate and possibly redefine her strained relationship to loss, Jadine uses the island to re-concentrate on herself. She wants to believe that a return to her constructed home space in L'Arbe de Croix will offer her solace.

Unfortunately, the unexpected appearance of Son yet again alters her worldly perspective about her Blackness, negative shame, and her sense of cultural belonging.

Recreating American Materialism

The arrival of Son creates another dimension to Jadine's story. Unlike Jadine's New World diasporic aesthetic of Blackness that is colored with classism and elitism, Son has a more encompassing view of expressions of Blackness. When readers meet Son, he appears to be an uprooted character that is similar to Jadine, after he jumps ship to swim inland. In the beginning he self-isolates to evade capture from local authorities, physically hiding in different places to avoid detainment. Once caught by Margaret in her closet, he openly lies about his birth name so he can remain uncoupled from his American identity. However, Son's behavior begins to differentiate from Jadine's while on the island. Since his migration to Isle de Chevaliers is not privileged in the same manner as Jadine's, Son utilizes the island as a space of Black mobilization. In his initial meeting with African Americans, Ondine, Sydney and Jadine the group scornfully regards his presence in their home as less than their own. Sydney is particularly contemptuous to Son and says, "Long as he's in this house, the gun belongs with me...stinking ignorant swamp nigger. He's crazy. Liable to do anything" (101). Sydney's Old World diasporic outlook frames Son in an antiquated master-slave narrative of a Black man hiding in a white woman's closet who must want to rape her and be arrested thereafter. He uses racialized American language to demonize and read Son as a marginal other rather than a Black diasporic body traversing the duality of space and place to redefine the journey of his subjectivity. Ondine, on the other hand is apathetic to understanding Son's plight and only wants to ensure the safety of her niece. In opposition they chose not to include Son in their small familial unit, even though he is also an African American from the United States. Ondine and Sydney's lack of inclusion

with Son shows the classed discrepancies in Black nationalistic attitudes. They cast him out and as a result Son replicates a Black community in Gideon, Thérèse, and Alma.

While Son creates an imagined home space through the three islanders, they do not necessarily see him in the same way. Morrison illustrates that although Black Power is beginning to mobilize in the Caribbean islands, Gideon, Thérèse and Alma Estée do not yet understand its long term implications with respect to nationalism and transnationalism: “With country people’s pride, they paraded the American Negro through the streets of town like a king. Thérèse let it be known to every island Black she saw that they had a visitor from the States, and he was going to spend the night” (149). In this scene Morrison highlights the value of American citizenship to Afro-Caribbeans because of the perceived privilege inherent to the nationalistic association. Each of them understood Son’s presence on the island in different ways that benefitted them for their own purposes. Gideon can re-live the nostalgia of living in the United States and boast about his proximity to hateful American women from the different life he now has on the island. Thérèse wants to inquire about American women’s value systems when it comes to killing babies, since as a former wet nurse she cannot comprehend American women killing children. Alma Estée has a conversation with Son about capitalistic consumption of wigs from the United States and how badly she wants to look similar to the American women in the magazines. Son encourages their questions and has an open willingness to connect to them because they are the only community he is connected to on the island. The three of them go on to tell Son that initially they believed he was a blind horseman from the island. Through the practice of folklore Gideon regales Son with the story of “a race of blind people descended from some slaves who went blind. The slaves could not see how or where to swim. They floated and ended up on that island along with the horses that had swum ashore” (152). The race of blind people in Gideon’s story alludes to a

history of enslavement that Jadine, Ondine and Sydney chose to ignore while actively living on Isle de Chevaliers. They decide to stay in their realm of exclusivity without acknowledging the historical background of the island. Conversely, Son sees this as an opportunity for cultural exchange between the island Blacks and himself; they ask questions about America while he learns the folkloric traditions of Isle de Chevaliers.

His status as an American offers him two avenues of interaction with the Black Caribbean people—African American and inhabiting the space of islander. Intrinsicly, Son uses his mobility to seek out protective spaces for his Blackness, yet Jadine does not do the same in her rootless identity. Son seems to have a quiet disdain for America politically, but he does not view his displacement as a negative aspect of his citizenry. His “conflict between his power and the world’s opinion of it secluded him, made him unilateral. But he had chosen solitude and the company of other solitary people—opted for it...because he never wanted to live in the world their way” (Morrison 166). These lines illustrate Son’s resistance to certain pinned-down identities and his dislike of an overt attachment to a specific homeland. His personal experiences of intellectual and emotional migration can be read discursively as movement outside of prescribed limiting structures. Son comfortably moves as an independent across the dualities and space and place without regard for societal norms. In his time on the ships for work he creates versatile communities of others who have also rejected home spaces for constant mobility. Through Morrison’s framework, Son is openly at peace with his solitude, while Jadine’s solitude precipitates internal turmoil. Jadine and Son’s patterns of immigration to and from different countries are similar because they both deal ineptly with the debilitating shame that loss causes for them. Their perpetual inwardness with solitude displays their lack of coping skills in their adulthood. It is not until Son meets Jadine, Gideon, Thérèse and Alma that he begins to want

another way of being in the world. His burgeoning kinship and intimate relationship with Jadine forces him to re-evaluate his nomadic lifestyle. With Jadine, Son wants to re-negotiate his identity in the United States and terminate the rootlessness of his life.

The only conflict in Son's denouncement of rootlessness is that he does not ask Jadine if she wants the same. From the start this incompatibility creates mistrust and dissension between the couple, and follows them to New York. Upon Son's re-entry into the U.S., he barely recognizes the African Americans that flood the city space of New York. It seems to him they are "...black people in whiteface playing black people in blackface," the differences after so many years unnerved him and he wondered, "How long had he been gone, anyway... was [he] being confronted with a whole new race of people he was once familiar with" (216). Nothing was the same with the American Black people and he feels disconnected and anxiety-ridden without Jadine in the city with him. Son grows weary of the homelessness he feels in America with all the changes that replaced his memories of Blackness at home. On the other hand, when Jadine arrives in New York she experiences the city differently than Son because she uses the city as a workplace and social space, as opposed to re-connecting to images of Blackness. She giggles with glee as she roams the city in a taxicab thinking, "This is home, with an orphan's delight; not Paris, not Baltimore, not Philadelphia. This is home... This would be her city too, her place and now she would take it and give it to him" (222). When Jadine says, "this will be her city too" it indicates yet again her incessant need to belong and the unintentional negative shame that burdens that need. Jadine and Son's views on the city are completely opposite of one another and highlights their recognition of their own unbelonging, despite their status as Americans. Son believes the Black people in the city should be vibrant and not lackluster as they were on his return. He feels the negative affect of shame for Black Americans' ridiculousness on the street

and their blind dedication to their jobs; but Jadine disregards Blackness on the street and is inwardly focused on claiming the city as hers in the coming months. She does not recognize Son's negative shame because she disassociates from his plight of identifying with Black Americans in the city. Her time with Son in New York makes her happy and rids her of feelings of abandonment that have plagued her entire life. Son and Jadine rarely mention L'Arbe de Croix, except when Son thinks of Ondine and the Christmas dinner. He often remembers the debilitating shame he felt when Ondine was too obedient in keeping the white lady's secret in relation to Margaret's secret abuse of her own son Michael. Son sees this blind allegiance to whiteness as a betrayal of Ondine's Blackness and remaining true to oneself.

Afro-Diasporic Disconnections

Son does not understand how Jadine maintains such an enfeebling shameful relationship to the Streets amidst their bad behavior. However, Son does recognize Jadine's bliss away from her tainted family members and asks why she left America since she seems happy there, and Jadine responds, "she always thought she had three choices: marry a dope king or a doctor, model or teach art at Jackson High. In Europe she thought there might be a fourth choice" (225). Through her language Jadine points to the restrictive boundaries of American nationality embedded in both her gender and race with marrying a "drug dealer" or "doctor." In those options she would automatically face barriers that would inevitably block her path to individual growth and personal success. Europe became the fourth option because mobility affords Jadine the opportunity to create her own version of her Black womanhood outside of the limited domestic options in American society, or at least those were her initial thoughts when she arrived in France. However, as the months passed in New York, Jadine and Son began to feel the pinch of those limitations in America in their work. While Jadine earns "\$2,500 for four walks and a

picture spread all in two weeks. Son began to understand that “There wasn't a permanent adult job in the whole of the city for him, so he did teenager's work on occasion and pieces of a grown man's work” (226) and gradually the paucity of job opportunities for Son starts to create a rift between the couple. Son has issues finding work because of his lack of education, and for Jadine there are fewer ways to stand out in the American modeling industry because there are other Black women to compete against for jobs.

Subsequently, Son spirals into negative shame because he does not think he can sufficiently care for Jadine's lifestyle, and though Jadine has difficulty with continuously booking modeling jobs, she maintains that New York is the best place for them. In the meantime Jadine tries fervently to replace their unhappiness with overworking, a social life filled with friends and outings to nightclubs and jook joints. Her plan of staying in New York and spending down time with friends worked for a period of time, but Son begins to ask Jadine repeatedly if they can sojourn to Eloe, Florida soon—his home. Although, Jadine enjoys modeling she begins to feel the gravity of Son's dreadful shame on her consciousness, as well as her own weighing on her decision to stay in the city; consequently she is also beginning to find the American modeling industry exhausting because of their need to perpetuate the image of the teenager through their models. Both of them grow increasingly dissatisfied with their work lives and since Son wants to go visit Florida, Jadine finally agrees to return with him to his hometown. In this moment Jadine believes in submitting to Son's will that the heaviness of her debilitating shame will subside in favor of his happiness. Son too thinks that this will alleviate the strain of negative shame in his life by reconnecting with his family in his hometown.

At the outset, Eloe is a place of disorientation for Jadine, as she shouts, “This is a town? Where are the ninety houses? I see four” (244-245), as Morrison illustrates Jadine's discontent

outside of the city. In contrast, the rural space comforts Son as he greets old friends upon their arrival. He immediately wants to spend time with his friend, Soldier, imploring Jadine to stay behind. While Son begins to use aspects of home to heal his debilitating shame, Jadine falls deeper into the negative affect of shame because Son's abandonment is reminiscent of so many other intimate relationships in her life. Jadine protests staying behind because she is visibly uncomfortable with the dry and awkward conversation with Soldier's, wife Ellen. However, in order to support Son, Jadine decides to stay there despite her early disdain for the small country town. To reduce her crazed feelings of talking about nothing to the country folk, Jadine remembers her camera and begins snapping pictures to cover her inability to fit in with this quaint African American community. Similar to her time in France, Jadine takes the opportunity in Florida as one of voyeurism and spectatorship—she makes the people of Eloë commodities to be consumed like the woman in yellow. Jadine even adjusts her dialect to sound local to belong to the community and not be posited as Son's Northern girl, also known as an Other. For a moment she relishes in the people's attention being diverted to her camera, "click, click, beautiful...fantastic. Hold it hoold it," instead of their eyes focused solely on her, with their wistful comments about nameless Northern relatives (250). Even as she tries to build rapport, it makes Son's absence seem longer and their worshipful stares make her feel odd and more out of place. When he returns, Son snatches the camera from her hands and Jadine turns to him in anger asking, "What's the matter with you?" (251), he did not respond with an answer and Jadine could not comprehend his anger. However, Son understood what the camera meant in Jadine's hands in his hometown and he was aware of her tendency to be voyeuristic for her own benefit. He thought her pictures inappropriate as he tried to re-build his own definitions of home, reuniting with his father, and spending time with old friends. In contrast, Jadine could not fathom his

relationship to intimacy and a rooted identity in Eloë, Florida because she did not have one of her own. Pictures were Jadine's only way to achieve close familiarity with people, like in her modeling career, because language betrayed her efforts to connect to them through conversation and revealed her shame of unbelonging.

The B(I)acklash of Facing Traditions

Son's father would not let Jadine and Son sleep at the same residence and Jadine must stay with Aunt Rosa. In this room with no windows, Morrison demonstrates that Jadine feels trapped and discarded by Son and the people of Eloë. Her movement becomes constricted for the first time in her life, and thus the pressure of debilitating shame begins to figuratively suffocate her in Florida. Here, I contend that Jadine feels alienated despite her proximity to the Black community in the rural town, instead of using the communal space to dissect her shame, Jadine resolves to self-isolate again. By the next morning, Jadine realizes she is ready to leave Eloë sooner rather than later, and determines to stay with Son until Sunday when they are supposed to leave to return to New York. The men enter the kitchen the next day but Son and his friend, Drake, leave and Soldier stays behind asking Jadine, "You all getting hitched?" (253), Jadine replies reluctantly that she guesses so but they had not spoken about their decision just yet. He then compares her to Son's former wife and Jadine resents this comparison, but grows insecure at the mention of another woman in proximity to Son. Soldier's reference of another woman further dislocates Jadine from Florida and Son, and strengthens her decision to depart. That night she struggled to outdo Son's ex-wife Cheyenne, but the unlocked door in her room not only let Cheyenne in metaphorically, but also the rest of the women she feared within the community of Black women:

Rosa and Thérèse and Son's dead mother and Sally Sarah Sadie Brown and Ondine and Soldier's wife Ellen, and Francine from the mental institution and her own dead mother and even the woman in yellow. All there crowding into the room. Some of them she did not know, recognize, but they were all there spoiling her love-making, taking away her sex like succubi, but not his...Pushing each other—nudging for space, they poured out of the dark...What do you want from me, goddamn it! (258)

The women's presence as apparitions frightens Jadine particularly because the images amplify the negative fears of her shame and discontinuity. This moment magnifies Jadine's ostracism from Black women in national and international spaces, and though she travels often her intimate relationships seemingly exude a distant tone. When the ghosts pull out their breasts and bare them to Jadine except for the woman in yellow that held out an extended arm with three eggs in it—Morrison utilizes these figures to examine Jadine's distress of exclusion. First, Jadine sees alienation from Son as he reignites communal connections in Eloë—and next from the apparitions that remind Jadine of her choice to spurn her reproductive role in the Black community. The apparition of her mother signals her lack of closure and problematizes Jadine's discontinuity with the past, and her unwillingness to confront her past self. Morrison critiques Jadine's reluctance to fully accept Ondine as a motherly figure, even though she sacrificed everything for Jadine in Isle de Chevaliers. The image of the island through Thérèse's appearance is a symbol of her difficulty in forging a connection to the Afro-Caribbean community and choosing to remain secluded with the Streets. Lastly, the woman in yellow represents Jadine's ineffectiveness as an intermediary between Afro-diasporic cultures and the loss inherent in that inability. Together, the women depict the palpable nature of Jadine's debilitating shame throughout her travels and shallow feminine interactions. In his book, *Shame:*

A Brief History, Peter N. Stearns frames shame as an emotion that is deeply unconscious for individuals. He contends, “The clearest argument holds that shame first develops in response to failures...and has a core meaning in relating individuals to wider social groups and norms—real or imagined” (17). Through Stearns analysis, from the beginning Jadine’s imagined stereotypes related to her Blackness helped her to believe she was an erroneous choice for a wife for Ryk. Later in the scene when the women crowd her space in the bedroom, Jadine envisions herself as a failure of Black womanhood to the apparitions.

Instead of addressing the issues the ghosts raise for her, Jadine’s fearfulness takes over, and she feels a sharp need to escape Florida. Aunt Rosa and Old Man make Jadine feel naked without Son, and their removal of Son shows Jadine to be literally and figuratively stripped without him. For Jadine, she believes that she tried Son’s Old World diasporic aesthetic of embracing African American culture through stories and antiquated traditions—even partaking and speaking in their local dialect to perform her desire for inclusion. Consequently, the presence of her debilitating shame disallows her inclusion performance from appearing genuine, thus she endures in the unbelonging role Davies defines. Jadine believes the apparitions are a form of punishment for her, which further pushes her away from adopting Son’s worldview as her own. When she tries to enlist the help of Son, he entreats her to stay in Florida, “ One more night, baby. Come on.”(256); and instead of listening to his pleas Jadine decides to expediently leave the rural town ahead of him to make it back to New York where mobility has value. Morrison implicates the Eloe, Florida reminds Jadine of all she lacks friendships, community, support from women, and a stable relationship to the idea of home. The severity of the negative shame overwhelms Jadine and prevents her from coping with the apparitions; and when Son does not return for four days, it begins to heighten Jadine’s anxiety of abandonment. The unintentional

emotionality of debilitating shame is tangible for Jadine because it forces her to recall memories of her mother's death at age twelve. Jadine reflects "her own mother how could you Mama how could you be with them [Ondine and Sydney]. You left me you died you didn't care enough about me to stay alive you knew Daddy was gone and you went too" (261). The mother's passing signifies why Jadine has an inability to concretize intimate relationships with women, primarily because she believes they do not care about her. Therefore, when Son enters her life and shows his investment in Jadine she obsesses over his attention, not realizing that what he represents—as a caretaker, and Black American culture carrier—links to the memory of her mother. Stearns argues that often this debilitating shame turns individuals inward because they cannot interpret the conflation of consternation, anger, guilt and embarrassment.²³ Even though, I agree that often emotions of negative shame can turn a person inwards, in Jadine's case I would argue that she projects her feelings onto Son and his actions rather than performing any introspection.

Redrawing Boundaries

Consequently, when Son finally does return their connection changes and is different than before they left for Eloe. The debilitating shame Jadine experiences in his absence impacts their sexual intimacy and ability to function harmoniously as a couple. Suddenly Jadine begins to enforce the idea of Son attending school again because it will make it less difficult for them to stay in New York City if he finishes at a university. Here, Morrison institutes the clash happening for the New World diasporic subject versus the Old World, because Jadine believes in the prospect of education bettering the lives of Black Americans, while Son does not prescribe to this notion. In Jadine's New World diasporic aesthetic opinion, taking money from Valerian and

²³ Peter Stearns makes a valid argument about shame for individuals, but throughout his text he does not discuss the importance of shame on women of color, or more specifically Black women in the 20th century. His book focuses on the general emotion of shame from childhood to adulthood and its differences from guilt—at many points in the dissertation I use Stearns to ground my argument in the affect theory framework of shame, but I differ from him in using race and gender to alter aspects of his theory for my adaptive use throughout my argument.

Margaret is a way to use resources to create a superior life that affords Blackness a different perspective of the world through education. However, from Son's Old World aesthetic viewpoint, he does not respect the narrative of continuing to take white patronage for Black uplift regardless of his proximity to them. He recommends to Jadine that they can move to other parts of the United States, besides New York for Son to find good long-term work without going back to school. He uses the ships as another option, but Jadine says, "You can't; you're blacklisted. Why do you want to leave me anyway?" (265). This passage exposes three ideas about Jadine: her antagonistic nationalistic relationship to the U.S. has intensified since their return, debilitating shame rears again at the thought of Son abandoning her for the ships, and she develops a contradictory relationship to mobility and devalues movement within America. The prospect of ending up like the women in the apparition scares Jadine, many of them spent their entire lives in the United States. For Morrison the indication of ghosts appearing to Jadine foreshadows her descent into fixed roles and eventually death if she remains in the U.S. with Son. This fear also speaks to the larger inference that the racial climate of America creates unfavorable living conditions for Black women, particularly as Morrison is writing this text on the heels of the Black Arts Movement that systemically disenfranchised the voices and subjectivities of Black women.²⁴ Yet again Jadine feels the generational debilitating shame the women represent weighing down on her consciousness. The images of the huddled women haunted her consciousness for weeks after her return and her fear impedes her from sharing this with Son. Morrison frames Jadine and Son's increasingly hostile relationship as, "One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?" (269). For her, while Son recognizes his role in saving facets of the Black culture in

²⁴ See *Sisters in Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* by B. Collier-Thomas

his Old World diasporic aesthetic identity, this still prevents him from relating to Jadine as a Black woman from the New World aesthetic. Conversely, Jadine feels conflicted because though she thought she cared about similar ideas upon visiting Florida with Son—the trip only confirmed her apathy towards the traditionality of Blackness in America. Despite understanding the need of Black women to be: mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters, Jadine cannot picture herself in any of these roles. Alternatively, she sees that in the Old World aesthetic the Black woman remains responsible for everyone else, but is not granted the agency to care for herself.²⁵ Instead, Jadine sees Black women that bear the gravity of debilitating shame from generations of subordination and immobility tethered to their an inability to resist this perpetual position.

Jadine and Son began to physically fight about their differences about the future of their relationship, and Son gets so livid during their argument he violently hangs Jadine out of the window to make her listen to him. He calls her a mammy in her pursuit to reproduce the seeds of white men and continuing to take care of their children after two hundred years of slavery. Morrison interposes this comment in their fight to signify Son's unconscious aversion to what Jadine's New World aesthetic identity constitutes to him. He believes her to be a constant symbol of the Other and wants to negatively shame her for her lack of attachment to the Black community. Even though she occupies a Black body and chooses to use her mobility to travel to America for his happiness, Son sees Jadine's as outside of his Afro-diasporic mores. Jadine is so disgusted by his comments she yells "I am going to kill you. Kill you" (270), because Son's essentializing rhetoric about her Black womanhood is the reason she left France. Son goes on to tell her the story of the tar baby that symbolizes the allure of Jadine for him. He tells her,

²⁵ See *Black Women, Agency, and the New Black Feminism* (1989) by Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, for a deeper understanding of Black female agency in the 20th century.

Once upon a time there was a farmer—a white farmer. And he had this bullshit bullshit bullshit farm. And a rabbit. A rabbit came along and ate this white farmer's cabbages. So he got this great idea about how to get him. How to, to trap this rabbit. And you know what he did? He made him a tar baby. He made it, you hear me? He made it! (270)

The figure of the tar baby encompasses all of Jadine's internal struggles with solitude, her Blackness, her mobility, the discontinuity that creates disruption, her feelings of loss and her inability to confront and parse out her debilitating shame. All of the black tar surrounds Jadine with her negative feelings and her refusal to address her issues then figuratively spill out of her and keeps Son trapped. Even after he tries to escape to Eloe, Florida temporarily for a few weeks, he is drawn back to the tar of Jadine. Subsequently when he attempts to aid Jadine in solving her longstanding problems and fights them with her, it only pulls him in closer to the tar like substance that is her life and entrenchment in her negative shame. After his behavior, Son is repentant for his comments, but Jadine is solemn in her responses to him. For her the story of the tar baby bares no connection to her current state and she remains in the loop of discontinuity, even as she tells Son that there is nothing anyone can do about the past. Without confronting her issues Jadine tells Son to forget about this own problems with the past and just do better with his future. In a different manner than Jadine for her New World ideologies, Son too begins to feel his own negative shame for the inclusivity of his own Old World diasporic aesthetic. Son realizes he is also close-minded despite his initial belief that nurturing some features of Black national identity were beneficial to every person of African descent. At first he encouraged Jadine to be unconventional with her New World Blackness and even admires it, but not when it began to involve the inclusion of whiteness in the frame of this Black fluidity. Instead of Son and Jadine addressing the gaps in their New/Old World diasporic ideals, each character eschews the opinion

of the other. Morrison illustrates the emblematic incompatibilities that inevitably begin to separate Son and Jadine, and ultimately Morrison is using her protagonists to critique the one-dimensional message of the Black Arts and Power Movements happening in the same period as *Tar Baby*. Eventually Jadine recognizes the futility of Son accepting her, and by extension the Black American community; thus Jadine flees the city without Son or a firm resolution in unpacking her debilitating shame.

Re-Narrating the idea of Home

However returning to Isle de Chevaliers, her only stable construction of a home space, provides Jadine with the first step in deconstructing why this negative affect of shame has overshadowed so many parts of her young life. Davies asserts that the island now exists as, “The mystified notions of home and family being removed from the romantic, idealized moorings, to speak of pain, movement, difficulty, learning and love in complex ways” (18). In many ways before Jadine leaves for Paris, New York, and Elie she does not recognize how intertwined her subjectivity is with Isle de Chevaliers and that her New World diasporic aesthetic is ingrained within the home space of the nation-state. L’Arbe de Croix will always be representative of the relationship Jadine shared with Son in the weeks leading up to her departure for America; however since their relationship is over, the home space of the island seems tainted now. In moving away from Son and the apparitions of the women that darkened her existence in New York and Florida, Jadine turns her debilitating shame into productive shame because she takes the initiative to confront the combination of affective emotions the island evokes for her existence. When Jadine consciously decides to rename her shame as positive, it alters her journey in redefining her Black womanhood in the sphere of mobility. She deliberately uses the island to rebuild the first portion of her past for her present self, and subsequently opts to return to France

for similar reasons. I argue that Morrison makes Jadine's rejoin these geographical spaces because it is the only way for her to build her own version of cultural belonging, and relieve the feeling of unbelonging she feels at the beginning of the novel and throughout her time in America. In repurposing the tone of her shame Jadine also realizes it is important to have a conversation with Ondine, since the images of the women remain in the back of her consciousness. Jadine tells her aunt that the expectations of being a daughter and the responsibility to take care of her family are not important parts of her identity and that she should not feel negative shame about taking an alternate path of Black womanhood. Jadine indicates her lack of interest in staying within the Old World diasporic dimensionality of Blackness, "You are asking me to parent you. Please don't. I can't do that now...There are other ways to be a woman Nanadine. Your way is one, I guess it is, but its not my way...I don't want to be the kind of woman you're talking about" (282). Though this statement injures Ondine, I assert that Jadine feels empowered in her statement and no longer associates negative shame with her identity. At the end of Jadine's journey from each migratory setting she recognizes her rootlessness as a strength rather than a weakness to self-worth. She leaves the island for Paris, France thinking only of Son's sexual acuity, as opposed to the Old World constructs he tried to impose on her throughout their relationship. In the end of the text Morrison re-shapes Jadine's subjectivity to show her movement away from Old World diasporic aesthetic narratives in Black nationalistic discourses to create an Afro-diasporic woman that valued a revised version of personal shame productive to Jadine's benefit, instead of her weighted demise.

CHAPTER TWO: REPOSITIONING TRAUMA AND PAIN IN EDWIDGE

DANTICAT'S *BREATH, EYES, MEMORY*

Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994) by Edwidge Danticat tells the story of Sophie Caco's struggle with matrilineal generational trauma. Many scholars, such as Simone James Alexander and Masoumeh Mehni, read Danticat's novel primarily through the framework of mother-daughter relationships; however, I will analyze the fragmentation of Sophie's self through her experiences in migration and her relationship to debilitating familial shame.²⁶ The journey of the Caco women focuses on their collective inability to confront and address intergenerational pain in multiple forms from virginity *testing* to rape. Danticat's text imaginatively utilizes institutionalized history set during the late 1970s-1980s to show the violent upheavals that textured Haitian politics, in order to place emphasis on why the women suffer so deeply from the macro-traumas of the country. For Grandma Ifé, Atie, Martine, and Sophie, Haiti defines an important part of their subjectivities, but it is their connection to the nation that also exposes their divided desires. In one way the women pledge allegiance to the country of Haiti because it holds their histories and their memories, therefore they feel obliged to carry that identity with them. However, in another way maintaining this bond to Haiti forces each woman to perpetually face and relive painful personal and national past events. This ambivalence, between testifying to the traumas of history and overcoming that history for a healed version of self, emerges as not only Sophie's locus of shame, but also Martine's, her mother. The disruption of migration places Sophie and Martine between the imperative to remember and the compulsion to forget, negotiating the fine boundary linking history and memory. The lack of reconciliation of the past

²⁶ See "M/othering the Nation: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Trope in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*" by Simone James Alexander. In addition see "Analyzing the Problematic Mother-Daughter Relationship in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*" by Masoumeh Mehni for more information about framing the mother-daughter dynamic in Danticat's 1994 text.

and the present for the two women interrupts their path to a coherent resolution by the novel's end.

Throughout the text Danticat creates a problematic relationship to Haiti for her characters exposing how the elements of the past impacted the country's twentieth-century infrastructure. In 1492 Christopher Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola and enslaved the local native populations to mine the land for gold, but the brutal working conditions killed more than half the island's population.²⁷ After the natives began contracting diseases from the Europeans and were too weak to work the land, the Spanish started to import African slaves from other Caribbean islands. Landowners in the Western portion of Hispaniola increased the number of African slaves to about 5,000 by the middle of the 17th century.²⁸ While the Spanish occupied the Western part of the island the French signed the Treaty of Rijswijk in 1697, which formally ceded the Western third of Hispaniola from Spain to France.²⁹ As a result the colony's population grew rapidly during the 18th century and by 1780 nearly two-thirds of France's foreign investments were based out of Saint-Domingue. The slave population expanded to 500,000 by 1789 and the conditions for working the cane fields was horrific and perilous for many of the slaves. Several factors precipitated the beginning of the Haitian Revolution but an important idea to mention is that factions began to grow between French mulattos living in the country and military leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture took advantage of these divisions for the benefit of Haiti's uprising from French rule and eventual independence in 1804.³⁰ Even though Haiti gained

²⁷ See *Columbus: The Four Voyages* (2011) by Laurence Bergeen for more information about Columbus's travels to and form the New World, and when he discovers the island of Hispaniola in 1492.

²⁸ See *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1972) by Sibylle Fischer for an in-depth analysis of the need to important slaves into the colony when native populations began to fail as local slaves.

²⁹ See Paul Sonnino's article "Some Mischievous Questions about the Treaty of Rijswijk" (2000) about the use of the treaty to grant France access to the Western third of Hispaniola.

³⁰ See *Political Parties and Democracy in Haiti* (2001) by Matthew Jerbi for more information about political factions and divisions during Haitian revolution.

independence from France this was only the beginning of the issues that were to plague the small country moving into the 20th century.

The fledging nation-state maintained a relationship to the Dominican Republic because the countries shared the island, but they did not share the same leadership. Haiti had difficulty keeping leaders in office after American occupation from 1915-1934, however in 1957 François “Papa Doc” Duvalier was elected, a former physician, that promised to end the domination of the mulatto elite and re-extend power to the Black masses in Haiti. During his presidency violence in the country continued to ensue and attempts to overthrow him were unsuccessful, so in order to eliminate any more coups Duvalier organized a paramilitary group called the Tonton Macoutes to terrorize the population and maintain his power. His regime forced international isolation, renewed political tensions with the Dominican Republic, and led to the exodus of many Haitian professionals from the nation-state. Likewise, when his son stepped into the presidency in 1971, the basic nature of his time in office mirrored many aspects of his father’s rule until he fled in the 1980’s. Danticat utilizes both the remnants of the Haitian Revolution and the terror instilled during the Duvalier regime to emphasize the turmoil that attachment to national identities can have for Haitians in general, but particularly women characters in her novel. She clarifies that the country’s history marks citizens in indelible ways , whether they remain in the country or not.

Towards a New World

Danticat’s story suggests that what the nation remembers and what it forgets travels beyond its own discrete borders, and that the simultaneous action of sanitizing and memorializing the past continues the original traumas of history, which carries them far beyond the current temporal moment. Ferly frames this discussion as a relationship to “the multiple viewpoints and retrieved testimonies that stress the partially of history, and Danticat’s accounts

split from within challenge the binaries of totalitarian discourse” (78). Despite Atie’s, Martine’s and Sophie’s best efforts to remove their physical bodies from locales of pain, their attempts are useless because their bodies are burdens of embodied memory. At the beginning of the novel, at age twelve while living in Croix-des-Rosets, Sophie is unaware of the circuit of memories that already taints her young body. The push and pull factors between Sophie’s Haitian identity and her American one is a conflict that begins early when Martine sends a cassette recording to Atie saying, “I want my daughter” (Danticat 16). After this moment, Sophie has trouble determining the challenges that will arise when she must part with the only mother figure and home she has ever known in Haiti to leave for America. Initially Sophie fights Atie about leaving Haiti alone asking, “Why can’t you come to New York too” and Atie responds, “We are each going to our mothers. That is what was supposed to happen. She does not want you to forget who your real mother is “ (19-20). From adolescence Sophie objects to social norms that bound her to traditional Haitian mores about family, but Atie adheres to an unspoken Haitian duty. Danticat illustrates that in Sophie asking why she must move, this is Sophie’s first act of redefining her young womanhood; because she does not believe she should blindly follow orders of obligation indebted to cultural duties. In contrast, Atie idealizes her responsibility of taking care of her mother saying “that is what was supposed to happen,” because she thinks it is a moral commitment that she must uphold as a daughter of Haiti. Atie recognizes that she does not control the narrative of her own life and has accepted it “Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body” (21). With these words Atie is passing on a realistic, yet flawed truth to Sophie: that because she will be in America she will have control over everything in her life including her body—but this immigrant myth, Sophie later understands, is untrue.

Before Sophie leaves for America, Tante Atie also reveals to her that she shares many similar traits to Martine, telling Sophie repeatedly “Promise me that you are not going to fight with your mother when you get there. It would be a shame if the two of you got into battles because you share a lot more than you know” (21). Even though Danticat frames Atie’s advice to Sophie in a rhetorical manner, I would argue that the implication of negative shame is implicit in her statement because it necessitates the inference that shame is an undesirable emotion to the child. In this passage Atie equates any disagreement Sophie has with her mother as an enfeebling shame, which forces Sophie into the same permissiveness as Atie. For Sophie any dissent from her mother would not only bring negative shame to Martine, but also to Atie because she disobeyed her wishes. Not realizing the implications of Atie’s comment, Sophie mindlessly accepts this instruction from her aunt and vows to honor her request. Unwittingly, because of this promise, Sophie is now moving under the shadow of generational debilitating shame that disallows nonconformity. Melissa Harris Perry writes about the incommunicable weight of shame on Black women in her text *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* and argues:

In order to understand the politics of shame for Black women, we need to think about fictive kinships and linked fates...The emotion of shame is first social...We do not feel shame in isolation, only when we transgress a social boundary or break a community expectation...shame comes when we fear exposure and evaluation by others. (101)

Perry’s argument speaks to the continuous bond Sophie’s actions will permanently have to Grandmé Ifé, Atie and Martine through their familial kinship and linked fates. This passage by Perry illustrates Sophie’s earliest understanding of debilitating shame as breaking a communal expectation to her family, her country, and the fear of evaluation from both about her mistakes.

On Sophie's last trip to La Nouvelle Dame Marie with Tante Atie to say goodbye to her grandmother, Sophie learns of a story about a group of people of creation in Guinea who carry the sky on their head and can bear anything.³¹ Like the negative presence of shame, Sophie learns early that she must also bear problems with stoicism and endure the hardships of emotional affect without complaint. The mental, emotional and physical weight of solemnity and shame become destructive parts of Sophie's life.

Migrations of Adolescent Dissonance

As Sophie leaves Haiti for America, Danticat magnifies the facets of the country that directly contributed to the Caco women's troublesome relationship to the small nation-state. When Atie and Sophie arrive at the Port-au-Prince airport they witness citizens embroiled in political turmoil, burning buildings and throwing rocks to fight back against the Tonton Macoute soldiers.³² This scene shows Sophie two kinds of people of Haiti, those that suffer and those that resist the authority of the country. After Sophie boards the plane, she unexpectedly interacts with a symbol that foreshadows the story of her own existence. It is a small boy, brought to the flight by the same woman overseeing Sophie's international trip to New York. Danticat utilizes the placement of the boy as a micro-representation of the trauma and corruption happening in Haiti as Sophie departs in the early 1980s; and describes the reason behind the boy's disorderly behavior, "What is the matter with him?" The man said in French, His father died in that fire out front. His father was some kind of old government official, très corrupt, très guilty of crimes against the people" (37). The figure of the boy appearing in Sophie's narrative also indirectly alludes to Jean-Claude Duvalier; he was known as Baby Doc, and led Haiti at only nineteen

³¹ See *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1998) by Joan Dayan for more information about Haitian myths and parables.

³² Danticat references the violence of the Tonton Macoute soldiers for the first time. In this scene the soldiers hit students with guns that are rebelling against the name change of the airport from François Duvalier to Maïs Gate. Initially, the airport opens as François Duvalier International Airport in 1965; it was later renamed after his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier who resigned and fled Haiti in 1986.

years of age after his father's sudden death. His father, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, was also guilty of many political crimes against the people of Haiti and created chaos amongst the citizens by instilling fear at the height of his regime.³³ In her novel, Danticat uses the image of a "fatherless country" to signify the disorder it creates from a young age for children and somewhat fledgling nation-states. For Sophie migrating from Haiti creates disruption and exemplifies an early loss for her twelve-year-old self. Here, I argue that disruption is the unexpected movement to New York that interferes with the life Sophie values and shares in Croix-des-Rosets with Atie from infancy. In my research I also adapt the term disruption as a form of loss, and utilize Saidiya Hartman's argument about the disruptiveness of mobility, asserting, "It is the scar between native and citizen. It is both an end and a beginning. It announces the disappearance of the known world and the antipathy of the new one. And the longing and loss in there is no going back to a former condition. Loss remakes you" (100). Hartman's text speaks both to the certainty of a definite separation from Sophie's past self and the uncertainties that await the new Sophie in America.

Upon arrival to the United States Sophie meets her mother for the first time in her life. Instead of immediate acclimation, Sophie's mother, Martine, speaks to her in Haitian Creole to make Sophie feel comfortable. However, Sophie is reticent to respond to her mother in creole and nods in response to her questions at the outset of their initial interaction. Her silence exposes her immediate discomfort with her mother and being in the new space of America surrounded by strangers. When Sophie sees her mother she notices how frail and scrawny her mother appears, which reveals Martine's outward fragility to her daughter. In attempts to erase the image of weakness she believes Sophie sees in her, Martine constantly tells her "don't be afraid" to

³³ See "Haitian International Relations from 1957 to 1971: François Duvalier's Foreign Policy" by Wien Arthus for more information about Duvalier's political policies during his time in office.

emphasize that she has strength for them both in this new chapter of their lives. Once Sophie reaches her new home in New York she begins to feel secure enough to answer some of her mother's questions about Tante Atie and family friends. As Martine becomes more relaxed speaking with Sophie the tone of the conversation shifts to the importance of her role in America as a Haitian woman, and the significance of getting a good education, "You are going to work hard here. You have a chance to become the kind of woman Atie and I have always wanted to be. If you make something of yourself in life, we will all succeed. You can raise our heads" (44). In this conversation, Martine further resists the image of frailty that her body represents. She asserts her role and dominance as Sophie's mother and places the matrilineal legacy of impending success on Sophie's presence in America. Her mother's comments show that her successes will not only benefit the Caco women, but also Haiti because she is a symbol of the country. However in telling Sophie that she must work hard on her schooling in the United States, Martine is also unconsciously admitting to both her own and Atie's failings as Haitian women who wanted to make more of their lives. In her article "Desiring Diaspora: "Testing" the Boundaries of National Identity in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," Clare Counihan argues that Sophie's journey in America "...challenges both the impermeability of state boundaries and geographical fixity of national memory, and the novel's depiction of migration undermines the American myth of immigration as historyless self-reinvention" (38). Consequently, Sophie can never exist as tabula rasa in America because of her relationship to her mother, grandmother and aunt. In effect she is not given the decision to parse out her existence in America on her own, rather it is already decided for her when she arrives to the country.

Creolizing Intermediaries

Likewise, this is true about her connections to occupying the middle ground, which I define as the space between Haitian obligations to family and the individualism that persists in America. Even though the middle ground appears to be a type of double-consciousness, I argue that Sophie does not maintain this allegiance to both countries and therefore cannot exist to occupy both duties at the same time. Martine strongly encourages Sophie to keep Haiti at the forefront of her subjectivity, and relegate any loyalty to America to the background. In the position of a child she maintains this connection to Haiti as a means of obeying her mother, but as she matures so, too, does her connection to the middle ground. Although Sophie recognizes the gravity of her mother's statement about commitment to success for the benefit of the family, her connection to the middle ground often makes her feel marginalized from Ifé, Martine and Atie. Furthermore, as she settles into her new home in New York, Sophie sees a picture and "It is the first time in [her] life that [she] notices that [she] looks like no one in [her] family. She did not look like them when she was a baby and she does not look like them now" (45). Seeing this image concretizes Sophie's feelings of being an outsider in her family. When she begins to comprehend the meaning of the picture it triggers an emotional shift of discontinuity for her. I contend that this discontinuity is the first moment Sophie consciously realizes the rupture with her past self and her need to enter a more present version of her subjectivity. After the picture she cannot reconnect to the happy child in Haiti that was the proud daughter of Martine Caco with no attachment to trauma. Moreover, as nightfall approaches Sophie starts to experience the depths of her discontinuity and her distinctive break with the history of her past self. She has trouble falling asleep that night because of the grandiose changes of meeting her mother, immigrating to a new country, and adjusting to a new home. In the midst of her own dislocated

experience, Sophie must also grapple with her mother's problems. As Sophie lay in the dark that night she heard Martine screaming as though someone was trying to kill her:

[She] rushed over, but [her] mother was alone thrashing against the sheets. [She] shook her and finally woke her up. When she saw [her], she quickly covered her face with her hands and turned away. Are you all right? [Sophie] asked her...It is the night- she said. Sometimes I see horrible visions in my sleep...The nightmares they come and go. (48)

For Sophie, waking her mother from a nightmare deeply solidifies her relationship to discontinuity. For Danticat, it is important that Sophie recognize at an early juncture that she is different from Martine in more ways than just their physical likeness in the novel. At this point in the text, Sophie has not yet fully encountered the breadth of discontinuity since she still knows little information about her mother's life in America—but the nightmare incident leads her to discern that there will be more sharp deviations between Atie and Martine. With Tante Atie, Sophie occupies the role of a child, in going to school and doing household chores to keep the home clean. Danticat demonstrates that Sophie's only adult-like responsibility is helping Tante Atie learn to read occasionally, but it is not her primary duty or obligation in the home. Conversely, on arrival to the United States Sophie's role changes and she inherits the status of caretaker in a more obligatory manner for her mother during moments of sustained trauma in the night. This is also Sophie's first episode with debilitating shame when Martine, "quickly covered her face with her hands and turned away" from Sophie because she bares the face of Martine's rapist. Each time Martine sees Sophie she must confront her past in her daughter's face, which unnerves and panics the mother when Sophie comes to America to live with her. Though Martine attempts to remedy Sophie's fear by feigning fortitude for her daughter, and dismissing the terror of her reaction to the nightmare, it is clear that neither of them can cope with their vulnerability.

Since Sophie is young, she does not quite grasp the severity of her mother's reaction to her presence after the nightmare. Her attempts to comfort her mother seem ineffectual because tears continue down Martine's face as she drifts back to sleep.

While Sophie becomes more familiar with the function of her position in Martine's life in America, she also identifies the physiological toll and weight that shame and trauma now have in her life. The next morning, "New eyes seemed to be looking back at [her]. A new face all together. Someone who had aged in one day... Welcome to New York this face seemed to be saying. Accept your new life. [She] greeted the challenge, like one greets a new day" (49). Sophie recognizes the exigency of her new role, as her mother's daughter and caretaker, and in her old life as Tante Atie's carefree child. The discontinuity that Sophie experiences when feeling that she "had aged in one day" and accepting the challenge of the change in her life creates a desire for her to appease others. She wants to honor Tante Atie by not fighting with her mother, and shield her mother from her own emotions of displacement and fear. Sophie's growing debilitating shame incapacitates and blocks her capacity to care for herself and deconstruct the pieces of her migration, disruption from Haiti, and constructing a more mature version of her twelve-year-old self. Instead of openly trying to cope with the differences between Haiti and America, Sophie strives to employ home-making strategies in New York with her mother. The streets of Flatbush Avenue reminds Sophie of home as she enters the Haiti Express with Martine—this is Sophie's first link to Haiti again, when she learns this is the place where her mother sent money orders and cassette recordings to Haiti. Sophie finds herself admiring the small ethnic enclave of "little Haiti" and the Haitian immigrants' communal atmosphere in New York City, but this appreciation did not remove her desire to "shrink [herself] and slip into the envelope" to return to Tante Atie. In many ways Martine's connection to the cultural Haitian

community on Flatbush Avenue shows Sophie her mother's indifference towards adapting to an American lifestyle and the value of maintaining her cultural and ethnic identity. However, Martine displays contradictory behavior for her daughter because she then stops to buy some face cream that promised to make her skin lighter. This revelation of her mother's skin bleaching further disorients and alienates Sophie from Martine in America. When Martine shows her the small Haitian neighborhood she believes that Martine is proud of her Blackness in relationship to her Haitian identity, however the purchase of the skin cream only serves to validate Sophie's belief that Martine does not want any outward connection to her daughter.

(En)gendering Colonial Narratives

Sophie learns early during her first months in the United States that her Haitian body is not worthy. She sees her mother buying face lightening ointment and immediately afterwards Martine tells her "it [is] important to learn English quickly. Otherwise the American students would make fun of [you] and accuse her of having HBO—Haitian Body Odor or of having AIDS because they [hear] it on television" (51). Physically Sophie sees that Martine does not value her Haitian body in America because she bleaches her skin, but emotionally and culturally Martine still enmeshes herself within the Haitian community. This signals to Sophie that while she should remain culturally tied to Haiti by living near and buying local from them, there are no other benefits to her Haitian identity. Since Sophie is internalizing these ideals at such a young age it translates to negative shame for her physically, linguistically and emotionally. Though Martine believes she is shielding her daughter from the unpleasantness of immigrant life by making comments such as "Haitian Body Odor and having AIDS," these descriptions only further isolate Sophie from her mother and prevent her from building spaces of home-making in America. Moreover, Martine's portrayal of American students creates more anxiety for Sophie because of

her status as an outsider. Later in the evening Sophie's fears of remaining an outsider in America solidify when she meets her mother's lover Marc. The three of them visit Miracin's, a Haitian restaurant, so Sophie can better acquaint herself with Marc and the local Haitian eatery. At dinner Sophie attempts to create another connection to home-making and listens in on the political conversations of the Haitian nationals shouting back and forth at each other. While they quarreled about the konbit system, local transportation, and the quality of food in America compared to in Haiti, Sophie could not help but remember, "In the marketplace in Haiti, whenever people were arguing, others would gather around them and watch and laugh at the colorful language" (54).³⁴ The exchange between the different groups of older immigrants reminds Sophie of a space of happiness in her home country. Danticat uses Sophie's reflective remembrance of home in this scene to frame multiple narratives of the working class, the educated and the presence of American imperialism in Haiti.³⁵ She shows how Sophie's perspective as a child underexposes her to the complexities of her national identity, but her lack of knowledge fosters an affinity for her memory of the nation-state and her sense of belonging.

As voices and sounds of home envelop Sophie, her anxiety begins to ease. However, when her mother introduces her to the waiter that labors to see Martine's likeness in Sophie, she comments that, "He looked at us for a long time. First me, then my mother. I wanted to tell him to stop it. There was no resemblance between us. I knew it" (56). Just when Sophie feels akin to the other Haitian nationals in the room, including her mother and Marc, the waiter's reaction to her appearance causes her recognition of belonging to dissipate. Instantly, Sophie understands her contradictory status as an outsider within this small community. Perry argues that because

³⁴ The konbit system is a type of cooperative labor exchange that the farming system in Haiti where landowners would invite people to help clear, till, plant, weed, and harvest their field. The landowner would provide meals for the workers and usually reciprocate by helping those workers in their own fields.

³⁵ See *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (2016) by Raphael Dalleo for more information about the impact of American imperialism on Haiti, despite the nation-state's long-standing independence.

shame is a response to a social rejection, Sophie sharply comprehends this shame as an evaluation of the self. In response to the sensation of debilitating shame Sophie tries to stuff her mouth with food and stay quiet, in order to pretend not to see the waiter, her mother or Marc. The culmination of realizing her own marginalization at age twelve forces Sophie to find a way to reduce her immediate internal unhappiness. Danticat uses this moment of negative bodily shame to indicate how Martine's own discomfort with her body begins to impact Sophie—this scene serves as an early benchmark of Sophie's body dysmorphia. In his book, *Shame, A Brief History*, Peter N. Stearns discusses the actions of a shamed person, asserting, "With shame people tend to shrink, and characteristically seek to hide because of the emotional dilemma involved... Shame emerges when the child feels that parental love may be threatened or withdrawn; it is this that calls the whole self into question" (19-20). Sophie uses the food to "shrink and hide" from the negative shame she feels that she is somehow different than her mother in the brief interaction with the waiter. Furthermore, Sophie goes on to say, "My mother now had two lives: Marc belonged to her present life, I was a living memory from the past" (57). Since Sophie did not grow up with Martine, she feels neglect from a mother that has not had an active role in her life thus far. Martine's intimacy with Marc greatly impacts the emotional distance between Martine and her daughter. To the young Sophie, Marc interrupts any early rapport between herself and her mother. This passage emphasizes Sophie's disillusionment with her budding relationship with Martine. Though she perceives her place in her mother's life as an emotional crutch, she also discerns the mounting difficulty that will arise in her displacement from Haiti and Atie. Moments before the incident with the waiter Sophie observes displacement as a side effect of migration, which she does not necessarily deem negative. Consequently, after

the episode she senses that displacement articulates and holds a heaviness that she has yet to fully dissect and interpret as a young, Black, immigrant girl.

Even though Sophie knows the gap with her mother is tangible, she attempts to rectify their lack of closeness. One night while she is with Martine at her night job, she asks her mother to stay with her instead of sleeping by the old woman, because she misses home and tires of being alone. Martine acknowledges Sophie's efforts and makes her tea and stays with her for a bit to ask questions of her daughter. As Sophie and Martine settle in she can sense her mother's sadness when she asks her, "Am I the mother you imagined? [Martine] asked, with her eyes half-closed" (60). When Martine inquires about the quality of her role as Sophie's mother, her body language with "eyes half-closed" speaks to her embarrassment. She actively avoids direct eye contact with her daughter because of her own self-doubt. Initially, Sophie drifts into the contrived image she previously had of her mother as Erzulie, a healer of all women and the lavish Virgin Mother.³⁶ Here, both Sophie and Martine experience the weight of their emotional shame: Martine feels she is an insufficient motherly figure and role model for Sophie, while Sophie feels guilt that her mother did not meet her preconceived imagined standards.³⁷ In order to pacify her mother's concerns, and absolve her guilt Sophie responds, "For now I couldn't ask for better" (60). When Martine expresses her own inadequacy to her daughter, though she is young Sophie hears the insecurity in and behind her mother's question. She realizes at this point that her protection of Martine extends beyond physical comfort. Once Martine senses the awkwardness her question creates, she changes the subject to matters of Marc and if Sophie likes him or not, asking "What do you think of Marc...In Haiti, it would not be possible for someone like Marc to love someone like me. He is from a very upstanding family" (60). Although she

³⁶ See Joan Dayan's *Erzulie: A Woman's History of Haiti* (1998) for more information about Erzulie, which refers to the goddess, spirit of loa, of love, of vodun.

³⁷ See Stearns definition on the distinctions between guilt and shame—page 19 of his text

changes topics, her question and comments about Marc still show Martine's struggle with a debilitating shame that makes her believe that she is somehow not good enough. In her relationship with Marc, who is also a Haitian national living in America, she carries repressive nationalistic classist attitudes from Haiti into her intimate relationship with Marc. It is embedded in her memory that class governs one's worth, and for Martine that does not only extend to Haiti, but she also maintains that idea in her new life in the United States. As the conversation continues, Martine understands Sophie's attempts towards intimacy with her and endeavors to persist with her openness and vulnerability. She seeks to expose the origin of her shame with Sophie and briefly explains Sophie's conception to her, but as Sophie hears the language her mother uses, part of her does not want to comprehend the story.

Reevaluating Proximity

Sophie turns away very early from learning the roots of her mother's shame, and in part two of the novel *Danticat* illustrates how this creates tension between Martine and Sophie as they age. At eighteen while Sophie does excel academically at the Haitian Adventist school, she feels dissatisfied with her life. As she enters early adulthood Sophie still feels the need to protect her mother from her true emotions, and could never articulate to her,

[She] hated the Maranatha Bilingual Institution. It was as if [she] had never left Haiti. All the lessons were in French, except for English composition and literature classes. Outside the school, we were the Frenchies, and the students from the public school across the street also called us boat people and stinking Haitians. I spent six years doing nothing but that. School, home, and prayer. (67)

Since Sophie had little knowledge of English upon entering New York, education was supposed to serve as a path towards acclimation into American culture, traditions, and mores. One of the

first ideas Tante Atie expresses about America are all the new experiences Sophie will encounter and that she needs to embrace the adventures. On her journey to New York this is what Sophie looks forward to alongside meeting her mother; but after six years in the city, school and her faith ruin any chance of Americanized acculturation. Her placement at the Adventist institute further concretizes her alienation from home-making strategies in America and any semblance of belonging. American students call her Frenchie, stinking Haitian, and boat person marginalizing her from feeling acceptance and marking her as Other. Unfortunately, her lack of cultural affiliation prevents Sophie from forming any real friendships or relationships with American students and she is left on the fringes of Blackness in the United States. Therefore, her identity as a Haitian national remains intact for her as an immigrant in a cultural manner, but socially Sophie wants interaction from Americans in New York.³⁸ The absence of American influences on Sophie forces her, like Martine, to internalize and continue self-same ethnocentric attitudes in America. Though Sophie voices hatred of staying close to Haitian-centered circles socially, emotionally, and intellectually, none of her actions point to her wanting to escape the amity of the local Haitian community. She dutifully follows orders from her mother and never communicates her emotions.

However, one of the reasons Sophie remains closed off from Americans is because her mother warns her to keep away from those American boys. Therefore, when Sophie meets Joseph her impulse is to hide her immediate attraction to him from her mother. Through the lens of her own trauma Martine creates shame about the body, men, and sexuality for teenaged Sophie, which she only explains as men's intent for sex. For Martine, though she is not completely aware of it, she is empowering Sophie to stand outside of the male gaze. She

³⁸ This is an important moment in the book and shows that although Sophie understands the value in maintaining a cultural relationship to her Haitian identity, she too wants to integrate with American ideals of friendships and intimate relations—as the reader understands later when she forges an intimacy with Joseph.

relegates them to faceless lecherous tyrants that want nothing more from her than the use of her body—because that was how the Tonton Macoutes viewed her—she wants to change this idea for her own daughter. Martine wants to protect Sophie from male attention in a way she was not, so when they pass Joseph’s home, “She wraps her arms tighter around [Sophie], as though to rescue [her] from his stare” (68). Despite her mother’s gestures and advice about not interacting with their neighbor, Sophie is eager to garner Joseph’s attention beyond a simple hello when they walk by his home. Each time Sophie walks past his stoop with her mother, she admits that, “Whenever [she] went by his stoop, [she] felt like [they] were conspiring. At night, [she] fantasized that he was sitting somewhere dreaming about [her], thinking of a way to enter [her] life” (68). Since Sophie has not been able to cultivate many relationships in America, Joseph becomes an entry point for her to experience intimacy with a person aside from her mother. Joseph’s recognition of Sophie makes her feel admired and important, unlike other spaces in her life such as school or church. When the two finally meet one afternoon, Sophie’s need for acceptance is palpable in how she downplays her accent, and says “I wanted to sound completely American, especially for him” (69). In this moment Sophie feels shame with Joseph because she is different, but shortly thereafter Joseph discusses his own connections to the African diaspora with his Louisiana creole identity. This disclosure helps Sophie to feel less Othered and instantly creates a bond between her and Joseph. Danticat’s introduction of the character Joseph creates the first point of dissension for Sophie as she becomes an adult, because he challenges her concept of self, and the rules; more significantly Joseph forces Sophie to question the life that Martine has created for her in America and facilitates her journey to a new found hybridized self-love as a Haitian national and an American citizen.

At their next encounter Joseph shows increased interest in Sophie's education and asks what she wants to study in college, and she responds that she wishes to be a doctor to honor her mother. Joseph inquires further and asks

What if you don't want to be a doctor...[She] had never really dared to dream on [her] own. [He said] It is okay not to have your future on a map...That is not Haitian, [she] said. That's very American...Being a wanderer. The very idea. I am not American, he said. I am African-American. What is the difference? [she said] The African. It means that you and I, we are already part of each other. (72)

Danticat integrates Joseph's identity as already a portion of Sophie's to teach and include her in the memory of the African diaspora. His revelation that he is not American though he is born here shows Sophie that she can inhabit America, and still be uniquely Haitian. His queries teach Sophie about the power in making personal decisions about her life that do not necessarily align with those of her mother. Her life in America should encompass the freedom to embark on ideas she is passionate about in her life, not be limited to her mother's limited ideals of American liberation. As her adoration for Joseph grows, so too does her self-concept. Nonetheless, Sophie still suffers from a debilitating shame that stems from her mother's indoctrination. In an effort to rid herself of the shame she is feeling, one day Sophie decides to seek her mother's approval. During an outing together they board the D train and Sophie asks her mother if she is old enough to like someone, but Martine's response is cold and reeks of nationalistic Haitian views on the proper rituals of first relationships. Once her mother reveals to her that it is cultural protocol that she meets the parents before Sophie and the boy become serious, Sophie hesitates to tell her the real truth about who she likes. Instead of telling her mother that it is Joseph, their neighbor, she

makes up an imaginary Haitian boyfriend naming him Henry Napoleon.³⁹ After hearing the boy is Haitian, Martine seems to feel at ease that Sophie is embarking on the proper decorum in her connection to Henry Napoleon. Though it was not true acceptance, “[Sophie] lean[s] over and kiss[es] her mother’s cheek to show her that [she] appreciate[s] her trying to be a good mother. [She] wants to tell her that [she] love[s] her, but the words would not roll off [her] tongue” (79). In this instance Sophie is yet again trying to emotionally shield and protect Martine from the truth, and she kisses her to alleviate her guilt; but for the first time readers also witness Sophie trying to protect her own self interest with her secret relationship with Joseph. Each time she tries to involve Martine in her life, her mother’s reaction seems to disappoint her and she is not sure how to internalize the rejections. Based on Martine’s previous interactions with Joseph, Sophie knows her mother will not understand her attraction to a middle-aged man. Therefore, she decides to keep the secret hidden, and enjoy late night outings with him while her mother works.

Telling Martine she has a love interest makes Sophie’s life increasingly more difficult. Sophie constantly has to hear Martine discussing how “to choose between the really old-fashioned Haitians and the new-generation Haitians,” and in the meantime Martine endeavors to learn information about the Napoleon family in Haiti. While her mother vets the Napoleons as potential in-laws, Sophie continues to see Joseph behind her back. As she and Joseph become more serious she reveals to Martine that Henry Napoleon is not coming back to the United States, and Martine seems to shrug the information off as harmless. Even though Sophie thinks her mother is apathetic about the imaginary Henry, Martine knows her daughter is not being transparent. The next night when Sophie comes home from an outing with Joseph, Martine is sitting in the living room with a belt waiting for her. Sophie fears physical violence from Martine

³⁹ The naming of Henry Napoleon by Danticat I believe is a reference to Haiti’s once occupation by French rule in the 17th- early 19th centuries. It also is a connection to power and nobility for Haitian nationals because the name is associated with good favor and wealth.

upon seeing the belt, but her mother gently leads her upstairs to her bedroom and lays her down on the bed. There, Sophie lies on the bed while her mother tests her to validate her virginity; to cope with the testing, Sophie uses the Marassas—in order to double herself and separate from the procedure.⁴⁰ In initiating testing for Sophie, Martine, like Grandmé Ifé, passes down bodily/sexual shame to her daughter. By testing her Haitian child Martine proves herself a mother of the nation in transferring patriarchal state-sanctioned violence against a woman. Although she is in America Martine chooses to carry out self-same repressive ethnocentric practices to the detriment of Sophie. She frames her decision to test Sophie as a form of sacrifice that will help lead the family to social mobility long-term. Sophie cannot see past the violence the testing inflicts on her life and her body, and the rift between she and Martine grows larger. Consequently, it also creates division with her and Joseph and he starts to become cold towards her, but she refuses to tell him about the tests. With her only intimate relationships shunning her, she realizes, “I was feeling alone and lost, like there was no longer any reason for me to live” (87). For Sophie migration, discontinuity, disruption, shame, and testing all align to disorient her subjectivity. In order to regain balance, Sophie utilizes the memory of Haitian storytelling to guide her through her own trials. She reminisces on the story of the woman who walked around with blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin, and for twelve years no human could heal her ills. Finally, the bleeding woman went to Erzulie and asked her for a transformation into a butterfly and she never bled again. I would argue that Sophie’s use of this parable illustrates her belief that mobility, through the image of the butterfly, helps a person heal from their trauma because they must physically remove themselves from the site of pain (89). Ferly additionally

⁴⁰ See *Outward Evil, Inward Battle: Human Memory in Literature* (2013) edited by Benjamin Hart Fishkin, Adaku T. Ankumah, Festus Fru Ndeh, and Bill F. Ndi to fully understand the Marassas. The tradition of the Ibegi in Africa, Marassa twins are very special, and frequently have special powers. Danticat uses this African myth to describe two people inside of one body: one to deal with the bad, and the other to enjoy the good.

argues, “Pain, the Haitian tale suggests, is regarded as inherent to a woman’s condition” (42), which highlights that bodily harm is a form of social control for the nation-state of Haiti. Women generationally participate in the perpetuation of female oppression even through the stories they tell to supposedly give women strength in their lives. Sophie relies on this memorial to Haitian oral tradition to metaphorically expose her own struggles of bleeding, albeit in a figurative manner.

For seven years in America Sophie denies herself the opportunity to live her life as her own because of a duty to her mother, aunt, and grandmother. When Sophie decides that her life is her own, she completes an act that solidifies her body as her own:

[her] flesh ripped apart as [she] pressed the pestle into it. [She] could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. It was gone, the veil that always held [her] mother’s finger back every time she tested [her]...when my mother walked into my room to test me. My legs were limp...finally I failed the test. ‘Go’ she said with tears running down her face. (88)

This passage is a pivotal moment for Martine and Sophie and expedites the break in their relationship. The idea of “failing the test” seems to somewhat delight and agitate Sophie, because she knows not only will her mother never look at her the same, but also that she does not have to double herself to survive the testing anymore. In an initial pursuit to gain her mother’s validation, she further receives Martine’s shame and contempt. The veil of Sophie’s hymen symbolizes the fragility of her connection to Martine. She uses the cooking instrument that grinds their Haitian food to penetrate her own body to show her family that she does want to continue to carry their burdens—from the generational shame to the rape. The presence of the blood acts a new form of freedom for Sophie and signals shedding her old insecurities for her

new self. Here too, it is interesting to note that Martine's first emotion is that of grief when she sees the hymen is broken, which signals that her idealized notion of motherhood is also broken. Once Martine is aware that Sophie will not be a martyr for the traditions of Haiti, she evicts her from their home. The only person Sophie can find solace in is Joseph but he never quite understands Sophie's self-imposed violence. In his undertaking to comfort Sophie the two of them conceive a child on the first night they have intercourse. Despite the arrival of their child, Brigitte and Joseph's support, Sophie continues to feel alone until she decides to journey back to Haiti.

The Limitations of Subversion

The presence of isolation and the weight of shame follow Sophie on her visit to see Tante Atie and Grandmé Ifé. She notes that on her drive to La Nouvelle Dame Marie with the taxi driver that the sun slaps her face as though she has done something wrong. Counihan argues, "The novel cannot bear to either remember or forget what it is to be Haitian: [Taxi driver] People who have been away from Haiti fewer years than you, they return and pretend they speak no Creole. [Sophie] Some people need to forget. [D] You do not need to forget. [S] I need to remember" (95). The brief conversation between them that Counihan emphasizes reveals the dislocations of diaspora—caught between desires, the people who have been away from Haiti can neither stay away nor return to Haiti as home. The middle ground Sophie occupies casts her as a perpetual outsider: first in her family, next in schooling, and finally an exiled foreigner in her home country. While in Haiti Sophie determines to get answers about the testing that so devastatingly forces her to leave her mother. Throughout her joyful reunion with Atie and Ifé, they both urge her to forgive and talk to her mother for the benefit of the child. Ifé reminds her that even though she is upset with Martine, "The tree has not split one mite... we can visit with all our kin, simply by looking into [Brigitte's] face" and their reconciliation will be for the

child's benefit. Her grandmother's statement reminds her that the past always confronts her in Haiti, just as it did in America because she is a national monument to her country. As she settles into her mother's rooms and the implicit memories the space holds she wonders if her daughter will inherit the same familial problems she does. The baby reminds Sophie of the shame she associates with her body before and after pregnancy. She still feels extremely fat and acquires bulimia, an eating disorder, to deal with frustration regarding her body. Though she feels debilitating shame about it, she cannot bare to discuss it with her aunt and grandmother in the first days of her visit. However, now that she is an adult Sophie begins to see what obligation to a mother does to a daughter's life. She sees her Tante Atie spiraling further into her overt depression, and realizes that the toxicity of Ifé and Atie's relationship mirrors the one she used to share with Martine.

Atie's inconsistent behavior troubles Ifé and the two constantly argue. Although Ifé should appreciate her daughter's commitment to familial responsibility, she wants her child to be happy and tells Sophie, "I do not want to go [to New York]. But Atie, she should go She cannot stay out of duty...I would tell her if she ever engaged me in talk" (119). This passage shows that Ifé realizes the dangers in the idea of duty and how it creates conflict in a family. Atie and Ifé's relationship mirrors that of Sophie and Martine's: all women have trouble communicating with one another, but none of them will concede to the other. To gain perspective about her own problems with shame and communication Sophie listens to the stories her grandmother tells her about the lark and the girl and the man and the stained sheets. She does not quite understand them out of context, and finally musters the strength to ask her grandmother why she performed the testing at all. Ifé responds,

If your child is disgraced, you are disgraced...the mother is responsible for her [daughter's] purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family...The burden was not mine alone...you must know that everything a mother does, she does for her child's own good. You cannot always carry the pain. You must liberate yourself. (157)

The truth that Ifé shares with Sophie resonates with her deeply, as her grandmother hands her the Erzulie statue and says “My heart, it weeps like a river for the pain we have caused you” which validates Sophie's feelings of sadness. She affirms that the burden was not hers alone which is why women pass the practice down to their daughters through each generation. With a child of her own she sees both sides of Ifé's argument and weeps for the pain she has suffered through and the unconscious burdens she will pass to Brigitte. Her grandmother admits she went along with the corrupt values inherent to Haitian culture and realizes the error in her judgment with both children. She recognizes that she kept them pure to no benefit of their own. Neither daughter marries, and both resent her in some way for the life they lead today. It is when Sophie confronts Ifé that she expresses shame and regret for her decisions to follow and uphold cultural norms of raising young women in Haiti. Even though she tells Sophie to exorcise her pain, she does not tell Martine and Atie the same information because of the weaknesses in their relationships. She gives Sophie permission to release herself from the burdens of her ancestors and remove her child from the violence that colored their lives for decades.

In the final step to confront her issues, Sophie finally faces her mother in Haiti. Her grandmother's words about releasing her pain resonate when she sees her mother and she realizes “My old sympathy [is] coming back” (169). Her empathy towards her mother does not deter her from asking the same question she did of Ifé about the virginity testing. Martine agrees

to tell her only if she never asks her of it again, and responds “because my mother had done it to me...I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related...The testing and the rape. I live both every day. I want to be your friend...because you saved my life many times” (170). When Martine expresses palpable regret at her decision to continue the tradition of testing with Sophie, it helps her daughter comprehend Martine’s sustained contrition in repeating this act on her child. For Sophie, this is a step towards healing because Martine finally acknowledges her subjectivity as different than her own in this moment. This dialogue between Sophie and Martine is a joint space of confronting debilitating shame and redefining the purpose of shame in their lives. Sophie in particular has a much greater understanding of how to cope with the social stigma of negative shame and the positive ramifications it has in healing her intimate relationship with Martine, Atie, and her Ifé. I adapt Perry’s notion of reconfiguring negative shame and in order to restructure the affect of shame towards beneficence, each woman had to change the ideas inherent in the collective rules and shared expectations of the emotion for their construction of womanhood to exist in the male-dominated Haiti. Though the corrosiveness of shame is unavoidable for the Caco women, it is the management of shame that dictates how it will function in their lives and how it passes on to their children. Once Sophie concedes that shame will not be malignant in her life or Brigitte’s she actively removes a portion of the weight that shame has had on her entire life. During Martine and Sophie’s departure from Haiti, an old hunchback woman tells them to find peace, and these words foreshadow how Sophie and Martine choose to look for that peace. As a first stride towards a tranquil mindset Sophie shares her bodily disorder with Martine, but since Martine still has difficulty expressing herself she shrugs her confession off as nothing more than a hard adjustment to the American lifestyle. She tells her daughter “You have become very American...you are different...I want things to be

good with us now,” signaling to Sophie that she does not understand her differences but wants to connect to her anyway (180). Her attitude still creates some dissonance for Sophie but she comprehends that her mother is trying to change.

Trajectories of Self-Definition

When they return to America Martine and Sophie continue to try rebuilding from the scars of the past. Martine apologizes to Sophie about burning her belongings from her bedroom after she left because of her own shame. She confesses that she believed Sophie would return to her humiliated, soaking in her own shame begging for another chance. Martine attempts her own stride towards peace in being transparent with Sophie about her pregnancy with Marc. She admits her shame that she does not want the child because of her past with Sophie, and the lingering trauma of the rape that still haunts her each night. Sophie encourages her mother to have the child because it will be a second chance to be a mother, but Martine cannot see past the pain. She tells Sophie, “I’ve had the second chance of my life by being spared from death from this cancer. I can’t ask too much” (190). These lines illustrate how Martine lets shame and trauma envelop her life without recourse. She is afraid to get help and re-live past incidents that led to her current unhappiness and internalized sadness. Sophie hears the unwillingness to get help in her mother’s voice and resigns that it is the best decision for her to not repeat a similar pattern in her own life. Thus, once she settles back into her life in Providence, she rejoins the other two members of her sexual phobia group and returns to Rena, her therapist. In joining two women of the diaspora they each endeavor to fix the small broken pieces of themselves in order to be free. In further framing her connection with the African diaspora her therapist Rena is an initiated Santeria priestess; her relationship to Rena marks the spiritual healing journey not only for herself, but also the ancestors of all Afro-descended people to search for their liberation.

Unlike her mother, Atie, and Ifé, Sophie insists on narrating her trauma en route to the cure. As Sophie finds ways to name and refine her debilitating shame for productive purposes, Martine drowns under the weight of shame's obligations on her in mind, body and soul. In effect, she commits suicide as the only and final way she knows to confront the psychological toll of national memory and the gravity of shame. It is nearly impossible to return home to Haiti, and for Martine that argument proves to be true. After her mother is laid to rest Sophie returns to the cane fields to reclaim the collective memory of her mother and redefine her final journey to Haiti, thus repurposing her shame for a small portion of liberation. Although Martine commits suicide and does not fully achieve redefining the trauma of her negative shame, I argue that Danticat utilizes suicide as construct of renamed shame for Martine. Suicide places Martine at peace with her pain and dying frees her of having to confront the trauma of the rape any longer in her life. Although the image of suicide is troubling as a form of liberation, it helps Martine escape the condition of female pain that Haiti continuously sanctioned on her female body.

CHAPTER THREE: DISEMBODIED MEMORIES OF DIASPORA IN JAMAICA

KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN*

Annie John (1985) is a coming of age story by Jamaica Kincaid that follows the titular character as she matures from age ten to seventeen. Unlike the other novels in this dissertation, Kincaid's text is predominately set in the Caribbean with no relationship to the United States; therefore the protagonist experiences migration at the end of her story instead of the beginning. This text also differs because readers do not follow Annie into adulthood, only to the edge of her teenage years upon leaving the island, which in some ways reduces the intensity of reading her debilitating shame. With the other Black female protagonists, the reader is a participant in their mobility, and sharply experiences the spectrum of shame the character encounters in each location and different stages of their adulthood. However, with Annie it is difficult to interpret the depth of her shame as she enters adulthood outside the frame of the novel, and this provides an interesting contrast in thinking about the affect of shame in childhood under the gaze, domination, and influence of empire. The narrative examines the triumphs and difficulties of a Black colonial family in 1950s-1960s Antigua through the perspective of an adolescent Annie John.⁴¹ She first describes the early portion of her childhood, as "paradise" because of the doting relationship she has with her parents and the everyday simplicity of her life. Annie excels in school and has close friendships with many of the girls in school when she enters the first "form."⁴² Even in the midst of her obsession with death, Annie remains a jovial child that is anxious to please her mother and receive high marks in the classroom. Annie manages to maintain stellar behavior until she turns fifteen, and feels unhappier than she ever has in her life—but she fails to communicate that to others. The despondency she begins to demonstrate

⁴¹ See *No Women Jump Out: Gender Exclusion, Labour Organization and Political Leadership in Antigua 1917-1970* (2013) by Christolyn A. Williams for a detailed explanation of women's role in Antigua before the country's independence in 1981.

⁴² Kincaid refers to the latter portion of elementary school as the "first form" from the 1950's Antiguan usage of the term.

creates a disruption in her life, both academically and personally. Gradually her relationships deteriorate, first with her friends and then with the person she values most, her mother. She begins to desire a life beyond the borders of Antigua and to start anew in “Somewhere, Belgium” where she is unknown to people, instead of the memories that surround her at home.

The discontinuity shifts and interrupts Annie’s ability to connect with those around her and it manifests as a “dark thing,” or a form of depression inside her that she cannot quite delineate to others. She has trouble rectifying the adult she is with the child she used to be in her home life. The physiological presence of the “dark thing” makes Annie frail and unable to attend school or interact with her peers. In the depths of her illness Annie John unconsciously succeeds in repairing some of the broken rapport with her parents. This restoration, with her mother in particular, is partially due to her grandmother’s arrival, which aids Annie in regaining a link to her matrilineal cultural history in Dominica through Ma Chess’s spirituality. After her paralyzing sickness Annie finds it difficult to exist as she once did in the role of star student and popular amongst her classmates. Once she realizes she cannot reconcile any version of her past self, Annie moves into what is known as the middle ground—physically relocating herself from Antigua to England.⁴³ With this migration Annie socially, economically, emotionally, and politically initiates her own discontinuity, meaning she will force herself to function through multiple identities upon arrival to the empire. Kincaid does not detail Annie’s time in England, but the reader is to understand that she can cope in the space as an intermediary between the empire and her home country. As Annie approaches the jetty, the burden of this unspoken middle-ground responsibility weighs her down almost making her believe she has made a

⁴³ I define the term middle ground in this dissertation to mean existing through multiple identities during mobility and trying to form a connection to your lived location, while still trying to nurture the affinity for your home country. I use middle ground as a subsidiary idea of discontinuity to explain and create an actual occupied physical space for the Black female protagonists that shows their desolation and detachment in migration.

mistake in departing. As the ship retreats from the dock, Annie concludes that because she is an adult she must see the journey to its end. Kincaid's ending of *Annie John* emphasizes the imbalances that occur for colonial subjects and their ultimate powerlessness to escape the shadow of empire in their lives.

Throughout this chapter I will develop my argument through insights from affect, critical race, and Caribbean studies theorists; including the work of Saidiya Hartman, Myriam J.A. Chancy, Sara Ahmed, Peter Stearns, and Édouard Glissant that will build the framework of my engagement with *Annie John*. I will also incorporate references to Odile Ferly's counterargument to Glissant, which highlights the marginalization of women in Glissant's original theory of relation. The works of these authors engage a raced, transnational, psychological and philosophical affective approach in understanding the postcolonial layers of Kincaid's Antigua in the story and the creation of the main character. I will use Hartman's critical perspective to discuss the presence of loss in Annie's childhood, and the reason it pushes her into the middle-ground before she recognizes why it has happened. To supplement Hartman's discourse I will utilize Ahmed and Stearns to explore the placement of the colonial school system in the text, and its relevant role in further displacing Annie's relationship to her subjectivity in the space of empire. In critiquing the presence of empire, I will employ Glissant's theory of dissecting the spatial politics of the Caribbean, and offer Ferly's analysis as an updated perspective on the liberatory poetics of Caribbean women's writing. I will also consider Chancy's argument about safe spaces for Afro-Caribbean women once they embark on understanding the role of their lives in the middle-ground. With each author I also seek to understand how the presence of multicultural backgrounds in the Caribbean are an almost constant signifier of the struggle for individuality of identity and selfhood for Annie John in particular. Even though she wants to

sever the mother connection to her home country and to her mother, she has a large degree of difficulty achieving this task by the time of her departure for England. However, the imposed colonial behavior, values, and traditions both from her mother and the ominous shadow of the empire precipitates a form of liberation from discontinuity, shame, and isolation that Annie did not readily expect to gain leaving the island at seventeen. Like the stories of many other Black female protagonists I explicate in this dissertation, home is not a site of clear identity formation, but rather a complex location where a sense of belonging is often uprooted and convoluted for each character as they come of age.

For Kincaid, she wanted to dissect the intricate network of relations in pre-independent Antigua that dominated Annie's childhood on the small island. When Christopher Columbus landed on the island and decided to rename it the Church of Santa Maria de la Antigua in Seville in 1493, the Spanish had trouble settling it in the 1500's and abandoned their efforts because of a bitter drought devastating the land.⁴⁴ Thus in 1629 the French also attempted to establish a settlement on the island, but their efforts were not sustainable. The first colonial power to establish permanent rule over the island was Britain in 1632, and the empire retained their influence by cultivating tobacco and sugarcane plantations despite raids from the native Caribs.⁴⁵ The neighboring island of Barbuda was settled in 1678, and by the 18th century active trading of slaves was developed as a source of labor to maintain the sugarcane fields. However in 1834 when the slaves were emancipated this shifted the island's economic prosperity and created sites of conflict between former slaves and slave owners. In order to maintain order over the Black population the British instituted labor codes and social controls to legitimize free labor over

⁴⁴ See *Caribbean Islands History, History of British Virgin Islands: Early History and People Emigration* (2005) by Uzo Marvin for a more specific examination of Antiguan historical origins.

⁴⁵ See footnote four for a more in-depth analysis of the native Taino and Arawak raids by Caribs in Antigua at the time of European intrusion.

apprenticeship post emancipation and into the early 1900s⁴⁶. Antigua was the only island to initiate this system after the end of slavery. This created a monopoly on land for the planter class and kept ex-slaves dependent on landowners. The period from 1918-1951 marked the occupation of white creole hegemony in twentieth-century Antigua.

However labor parties began to materialize to resist the power of white rule on the island and by 1958 Antigua became an independent member of the West Indies Federation. When Jamaica left the Federation in 1962, the alliance dissolved and Antigua and three other colonies attempted to create the East Caribbean Federation in 1966 but that effort failed too.⁴⁷ In the year 1967 Antigua became a self-governing associated state of Britain with the Empire remaining responsible for foreign affairs and defense. For 14 years Antigua and Barbuda maintained this status under British protection because they could not negotiate acquisition of autonomous political rights. When Barbuda requested separate independence from Antigua their entreaty was rejected and ultimately that portion of the island joined Antigua in 1981 to be a connected sovereign nation. Although understanding the journey to post independence is important in this dissertation, I think it is of even more significance that Kincaid wanted to expose readers to the overbearing nature of Empire in her text. She reveals the people's inability to remove their lives from the mark of colonialism in school, religion, and each day in their towns as the British flag rose over them. The scenes that Kincaid describes illustrate how exclusionary the presence of Empire is for the deprived Black population of the country, particularly Annie John's family.

Figures of Belonging

The nature of death is the first episode of disruption for ten-year-old Annie John because it changes the way she views her life. Annie's initial encounter with death is the cemetery just

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

beyond their temporary house on Fort Road, where she sees apparitions of small children from afar. When her mother reveals to her that the figures are deceased children, it astounds and frightens Annie. She admits that she has never known anyone personally that died, and “until then, [she] had not known that children died” (Kincaid 4). While her mother’s disclosure startles her, it also fascinates her and she increasingly begins to obsess about death—taking time to stand in her yard waiting each day for funerals to arrive to the cemetery. The supernatural elements and stories of the living dead captivate Annie John, until a girl named Nalda dies in her mother’s arms one day. Though Annie does not know Nalda well, the distant loss creates a shift in her interpersonal interactions with others. Both Annie’s mother and father participate in Nalda’s funeral services, but they exclude her from the burial preparation. Annie realizes that

[She] then began to look at [her] mother’s hands differently. They had stroked the dead girl’s forehead; they had bathed and dressed her...[Her] mother would come back from the dead girl’s house smelling of bay rum, a scent that for a long time afterward would make [her] feel ill...[She] could not bear to have [her] mother caress [her] or touch [her] food...[She] especially couldn’t bear the sight of her hands lying still in her lap. (6)

Her methodical description of how her mother’s hands repel her illustrates a breach in the intimacy of their relationship. The thought of her mother offering her affection to the dead girl and the smell of the bay rum remind Annie that her mother “stroked the dead girl’s forehead and bathed and dressed her,” solidifying a distinct separation between them. Nalda’s death also signals to Annie the tenuousness of life, not only hers but that of her parents. In order to avoid her fear, Annie begins to discuss her fixation on her dullard schoolmate Sonia and the ease in teasing “such a dunce.” However, after Annie learns that Sonia’s mother has died, her whimsical descriptions of Sonia turn disdainful. She decides to stop playing with her, saying, “she seemed

such a shameful thing, a girl whose mother had died and left her alone in the world” (8). Annie yet again abandons an intimate relationship because of the disruption of death, and her inability to confront the loss it engenders. She inherently identifies loss with shame for Sonia and immediately connects the two emotions, even though she does not fully understand how to deal with them. The loss that Annie continually ignores stems from what Saidiya Hartman refers to in her text *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* as feeling like the proverbial outsider. While Hartman applies the term to her journey into Africa as an American outsider and her lack of closeness to local Ghanaians, in contrast Annie John already occupies an intimate place amongst her countrymen but when people who are close to her share the intimacy of their love and affection with the dead, she feels erased, jealous, and unable to affect a rapport with the person any further. The feelings of loss, exclusion, and shame do not end for Annie at her mother’s preparation of Nalda’s body, or the shame she believes is emanating off Sonia—but rather these ideas create a deep break in Annie John that she is unsure she can mend.

The Circling Hand of Exile

Annie recognizes the distance with her mother and attempts to remedy the small gap between them. She relishes in their mutual participation in ritualized baths that are ordered by the local obeah woman, and known to keep the bad spirits away.⁴⁸ The baths assists Annie in regaining closeness to her mother, not only physically, but also spiritually. Their special baths together contained “...barks and flowers...together with all sorts of oils, [that] were boiled in the same large caldron...As [they] sat in this bath, [her] mother would bathe different parts of [her] body; then she would do the same to herself” (14). The practice of cleansing spirits helps Annie John understand the cultural history of her mother’s home country of Dominica, and the

⁴⁸ Obeah practices-means the Antiguan term for a local form of “voodoo” or an adapted version from Dominica, since that is her mother’s home country.

syncretization of the ritual from an Antiguan obeah woman, Ma Jolie. The baths also foster the imprint of cultural memory for Annie and teaches her how the two cultures can co-exist through her mother. For Annie these baths include her in tradition, while eliminating the presence of Nalda from their relationship. Closing this chasm re-allows Annie to feel important to be with her mother in private and in public spaces. More specifically, when they go to the market everyone wants her mother's attention and Annie is proud to be in the company of her mother as vendors beg and barter to gain her business. Though she is not fully aware of it yet, Annie's mother is her earliest exposure to the middle ground because the mother is living between cultures, languages, nations, and empires—because she is not a native of Antigua. Myriam J.A. Chancy articulates the middle ground in her book *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* as an idea she coins as in-between-ness. She argues this phrasing is for, “Afro-Caribbean emigrant women who may not have the support of an established community within their adoptive countries, and such forced denial often produces a sense of acute alienation” (Chancy 11). This voluntary departure from her home country makes Annie John's mother a proverbial outsider, thus she receives condemnation from the local women for her difference. In addition to her foreign status, she also marries Annie's father and has an illegitimate child, Annie, with him; her actions make her the subject of negative shame on the island and many women dislike and try to harm her for these reasons.⁴⁹ The mother's debilitating shame is public because of the child, and Kincaid cleverly writes her background as foreign to show their hostility is much deeper than infidelity, but rather it transcends to what the mother may represent politically and economically in her difference. Annie Senior comes from a country

⁴⁹ Here I name Annie as an illegitimate child for two reasons. The first reason is because she is the child of a woman from the Dominican Republic. Therefore Annie is not a legitimate child of Antigua because her mother identifies with a different nationality, despite living in Antigua and marrying a man from the country. The second reason is because Kincaid states in the text that Annie John's father has older children from previous relationships from local Antiguan woman that he has since divorced. However, the women attack Annie John's mother in anger because of his marriage to the Dominican foreign woman that birthed, what I name his illegitimate child, Annie John.

that gained independence in the 1800's from both Haiti and Spain, so she also represents a form of Black freedom that Antiguanians do not quite understand in the 1950's-1960's.⁵⁰ Kincaid exemplifies the mother's middle-ground status even in Annie Sr.'s ability to travel to Antigua as a migrant, which shows her relative access juxtaposed next to that of local Antiguanians. This implicit difference helps the mother maintain distance with the locals and effectively spurn anger and ostracism. However, since the mother does not acknowledge her rejection within Antigua, Annie does not learn how to manage the differing angles of the middle ground or in-betweenness as Chancy refers to it. Therefore, during her childhood any issues causing tension appear transitory, or easily remediated through avoidance.

At her age Annie strongly believes that following everything her mother does will always keep them connected. However, she still cannot disassociate her mother from tropes of death as she details the story of how her mother left Dominica by small boat, and on the way a hurricane blew the boat off course and it was lost at sea for about five days. Even in the wake of this crisis Annie explains her mother's heroism alongside death, but tries to highlight her ability to cheat death and survive her voluntary exile from Dominica. She respects that even though her mother and grandfather quarreled, it was important for her mother to maintain portions of her cultural memory by protecting the items in the trunk. Similar to the practices of the obeah, the trunk symbolizes the memory of migration and further solidifies the materiality of cultural recollection. Despite Annie's age, she appreciates that her mother now uses the trunk to keep memories that belong to her because it reveals how Annie is a part of her migration story. In contrast when she hears her father's story about his relationship to his parents, she realizes that not every parent wants their child to be important in their migration narrative. As a child Annie

⁵⁰ See *We Dream Together: Dominican Independence, Haiti, and the Fight for Caribbean Freedom* by Anne Eller for more information about Dominican mobility after the Dominican War of Independence in 1844.

seeks much of her identity through the lens of her parents' lives. Alternately, in the summer of the year she turns twelve Annie begins to recognize changes about her body that appear odd, such as "[she] had grown taller; most of [her] clothes no longer fit...[it] was as if I had turned into a strange animal" (25). This passage indicates that Annie begins to look at herself as other when she identifies herself with an animal. Although, she is clearly aware of this transition Annie continues to try and cower behind the figure of her mother. The fear of her difference rears when she goes dress shopping with her mother, a task that always linked them because Annie habitually chose the same cloth dress patterns as Annie John Sr. This time though, her mother replies, "Oh, no. You are getting too old for that. You just cannot go around the rest of you life looking like a little me" (26). For Annie this admission of difference in a public place angers her and marks the mother yet again in a position of opposition from her daughter. She feels that Annie John Sr. pushes her away from childhood before she is ready to cope with early adolescence alone. When her mother says these words, Annie responds that

...[she] felt the earth swept away from under [her]...[because] it wasn't just what she said, it was the way she said it...but [she] was never able to wear [her] own dress or see [her] mother in hers without feeling bitterness and hatred, directed not so much toward [her] mother as toward, [she] suppose[s], life in general. As if that were not enough, [her] mother informed [her] that [she] was on the verge of becoming a young lady. (27)

The words 'a young lady' signals betrayal to the young Annie John. When she likens 'the earth being swept away from under her' it shows the mental discontinuity that occurs for Annie and the misrecognition of self. Metaphorically, death reappears in the form of alienating her from her mother and her childhood.

Each time Annie tries to reconnect with her mother there are few signs of their reunification as harmonious mother and daughter. In order to garner her mother's attention Annie John asks her to review the contents of the trunk with her again, but her mother refuses in a demeanor that is altogether unfamiliar to her daughter. Consequently, Annie begins to disregard her etiquette classes and piano lessons and achieves her mother's discontent. When the piano teacher tells Annie John Sr. of her child's misdeeds, "she turn[s] and walk[s] away from [her]...What a new thing this was for [her]: [her] mother's back turned on [her] in disgust" (28). This is the first time Annie realizes that a rupture has taken place from the person she used to be to the person she is now—the 'old' Annie wants to please her mother and remain the perfect image of a daughter, whereas the 'new' Annie John does not care how much her actions displease her mother as long as she receives scrutiny. As she grows older, Annie often sees the corners of her mother's mouth turned down in disapproval of her actions. This troubles Annie but it is not until her mother says "...in your own house you might choose another way" that she realizes that the day will come when they will live apart and "[her] throat hurts from the tears [she] bottle[s] up tight inside" just thinking about their physical separation (29). This scene is the first time Kincaid illustrates Annie's affect through her physiological discomfort—in this case her throat hurts. While in other episodes of the text the reader can sense perturbation in examples of "the earth was swept from under me, or the scent of bay rum made me feel ill," here her pain is palpable. Even though there are many definitions of affect theory that involve psychoanalysis, my examination of affect will focus on how often Annie John starts acting on emotions before she consciously recognizes what they are and how to name them. At some points the affects are not hers to name but rather an emotionality that transfers from her mother that she does not quite understand at twelve years of age. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed thinks of affects as

contagious and utilizes Eve Sedgwick's argument that shame is a particularly contagious form of affect because proximity and social relation generates this similar emotion in someone else.

Ahmed argues, "The implication of [Sedgwick's] argument is that affects are sustained in being passed around: shame creates shame in others, and happiness creates happiness in others, and so on" (25). Although this is a useful way to identify the structure of discontinuity that Annie John may be experiencing, it is also important to discern that this model might work on the perception that the transference is occurring between two adults, instead of a child and an adult. This slight difference communicates the weight of the affect in an unusual manner to Annie John.

She interprets many of her mother's statements as one idea when they in fact are meant another way. For instance when she makes her bed 'incorrectly' Annie observes that her mother is upset with the placement of the bedspread and believes she brings shame on her mother with this small error. Annie "...regret[s] very much not doing that one little thing that would have pleased her. [She] had lately become careless, [her] mother said and [she] could only silently agree with her" (32). Since she craves her mother's approval, the fuss her mother makes about the bedspread seems much deeper to Annie. Here, she cannot quite name her mother's affective feelings and assumes her mother to be angry or ashamed, but really Annie is hypersensitive to satisfying her mother—therefore she is self-critiquing. With a mother-daughter relationship the reader surmises that the power differential will always stay with the mother because that is how authoritarian relationships work with children and adults. However, in Annie's case her affect actually dominates her interactions with her mother and Annie controls the framework of their kinship in her early adolescence. When Annie acts out negatively she in turn receives a negative reaction from her mother. In much of the first portion of the text Annie's mother yields to her desires. Likewise this is true later when Annie returns from Sunday school, with a certificate for

best student in hand ready to regain her mother's favor. When she gets home Annie cannot find her parents but then she hears sounds coming from their bedroom. She goes to the door and

...could see that [her] mother and father were lying in their bed. It didn't interest me what they were doing—only that my mother's hand was on the small of my father's back and that it was making a circular motion. But her hand! It was white and bony, as if it had long been dead...It seemed not to be her hand and yet it could only be her hand, so well did I know it. (34)

This passage re-introduces Annie to loss. Again her mother's hands become the symbol of the loss she cannot escape—contributing even further to her sense of disruption and discontinuity. The father's presence expedites the disintegration of her relationship with her mother. Annie always believes that she connects to her mother in a manner that is unattainable to others around her; however when she sees that her father is with her mother in a way she cannot be, she does not recognize her mother or herself. Hartman's argument about loss is that there is "...disappointment [in] that there is no going back to a former condition. Loss remakes you. Return is as much about the world to which you no longer belong as it is about the one in which you have yet to make a home" (138). Immediately Annie realizes that her warm loving bond with her mother will never return to how it was before she observes this event. Annie focuses on the description of the hand because from her perspective the hand is pushing her from one world, into one she does not recognize. When she witnesses her parents having sex it is this disruption in her childhood that concretizes her removal from the space of childhood. Annie reiterates the idea of death because she is so entrenched in the image of her mother, seeing this act makes her believe a special part of her subjectivity has also died. In this moment she loses any semblance of power or emotional authority she thinks she has over her mother. The gravity of shame envelops

Annie during this episode, but she does not know how to dissect this affect yet. Instead Annie begins to utilize her schoolmate, Gwen, as the subject of her affection to deflect the shame and the rupture at home with her mom.

Abandoning Adoration

Detachment from her old world does not only occur at home for Annie, but also at school. Spending time going to the market, customary Sunday walks with her father, and looking at dated contents of the trunk remind Annie of the death of her intimacy with her parents, especially her mother. The reasons behind her indifference to the etiquette and piano lessons relate to disregarding everything her mother values, including standards or behaviors associated with a colonial conduct. In her early descriptions in the text, there are few allusions to the shadow of British colonial power on the island. It is not until she enters schooling and ignites passionate friendships with Gwen and the Red Girl that she begins to experience the intensity of loss, disruption, and discontinuity that the presence of colonialism brings into her life. Since Annie cannot quite question the motives of her mother, she uses school as a space to explore the new world she is thrust into socially and academically. At the outset of her first school day, Annie feels like an outsider because all the girls seem to know each other fairly well, and “except for [her] no one seemed a stranger to anything or anyone” (36). Unintentionally Annie becomes self-conscious because she does not fit-in with the new girls at her school and she cannot cope with the disjuncture. Kincaid tells readers that Annie John’s palms get physically wet and she again feels the ground seesawing underneath her feet. This episode mirrors Annie’s reaction when her mother tells her she cannot dress similar to her anymore, and replicates Annie’s fear of separation and rejection from others. With her palms wet Annie displays a negative affective reaction that is markedly non-intentional. Since she cannot name her affect she does not engage

her feelings and uses her mother's strategy of avoidance. In an effort to further split from any sense of abandonment she feels, Annie begins to critique the heavy presence of the British empire she notices at her new school. Annie's earliest information about empire comes from an incident of not washing up:

Once when [she] didn't wash, [her] mother had given [her] a long scolding about it, and she ended by saying that it was the only thing she didn't like about English people: they didn't wash often enough, or wash properly when they finally did.

Have you ever noticed how they smell as if they had been bottled up in a fish? [her mother said]. (37)

Even before she begins school Annie has a negative perception of English people because of her mother's comments. Accordingly, Annie views them as dirty and oppositional to Antiguan culture and dislikes their existence at her new school. More explicitly, the appearance of the headmistress, Miss Moore, makes Annie John upset and she declares "[she] knew right away that she had come to Antigua from England, for she looked like a prune left out of its jar a long time..." (37). Like her mother, the empire, Miss Moore, and the other teachers represent authority in Annie's life. However as she enters the new school year Annie determines that she will undermine figures of control to exert agency over her own existence.

On the surface Annie seems to choose Gwen's friendship in a normalized manner, because they share the same likes and dislikes. They begin to do everything together from playing in the schoolyard to walking to and from school each day. As the strength of their friendship grows, Annie confesses that they fell in love and purposely begin to isolate from the other girls in the class. Soon they were inseparable and some of Annie's feelings of alienation slowly begin to dissipate but they do not altogether disappear. Many critics, such as Keja Valens,

have read Gwen and Annie's friendship as the beginning of homosocial desire for the young girls, however in this analysis I argue that Annie utilizes Gwen to ease the many disruptions that are occurring in her life, and to maintain the façade of continuity that she clearly lacks. Annie's mother approves of Gwen because she is a suitable image of a young woman. As Annie constantly tires to understand the rupture of the discontinuity she is experiencing, the warring ideologies force her to believe that Gwen's friendship corresponds most directly with the person she 'should' be for her mother. Initially this course of action satisfies Annie when the year begins. She even reveals that they told each other things, "[they] had judged most private and secret: things [they] had overheard [their] parents say, the things [they] were really afraid of...Except for the ordinary things that naturally came up, [she] never told her about [her] changed feelings for my mother" (48). Even though Annie is seemingly open with Gwen by telling her almost everything about herself, it is difficult for her to model the relationship as one that closely imitates the one with her mother. Here, it is obvious that Annie craves replacing her mother's adoration with Gwen's admiration, but she fears the judgment of being abject. I utilize the term abject to demonstrate that Annie knows another Antiguan girl will deem the schism with her mother ignoble. Unlike her mother, Annie shrinks at the thought of being negatively shamed publicly, particularly by one of her peers. When she cannot endure telling Gwen of her loss in her distant relationship with her mother, she disguises her shame as happiness and continues to share secrets with Gwen. The blossoming relationship with Gwen and some of her other classmates momentarily helps Annie feel less othered. Temporarily her adverse perception of her body becomes positive and she excels at team sports and gains the favor of her classroom teachers because of her intelligence. For a brief period Annie John believes she can name her affect as happy, which Ahmed cites as "intentional affect." In order for Annie to enjoy her

schooling, friends and fleetingly value her body, I employ Ahmed's argument "That happiness exists in the phenomenological sense (directed towards an object) and that it involves a specific kind of intentionality, which [she] describes as end-oriented" (14), effectively showing the Annie's actions towards attaining an idea of happiness in these moments was deliberate. In these instances of purposeful unmitigated bliss Annie chooses to accept happiness and ignore the multiple fragmentations creating tension in her life.

Kincaid foreshadows that the intentionality in Annie's happiness will not last as she describes scenes of the schoolgirls discussing puberty amongst the tombstones near the playground. This image alludes to the idea that death will resurface in reference to Annie's journey into puberty. Thus far in school her happiness has been dependent on her similarities to her classmates and only her slight ability to stand out in regards to academics. Incidentally, her pursuit to emulate happiness abruptly ends on the first day she starts menstruation. Annie announces, "[She] felt strange in a new way—hot and cold...[Her] mother told her all about her own experience coming of age...[She] pretended this information made [them] close— as close as in the old days—but to [her]self [she] said, 'What a serpent!' (53). In this passage Annie's anger is tangible in the way she describes her mother's half-hearted attempt to reconnect with her through storytelling. Although in the past she would have welcomed this endeavor to regain her attention and their closeness, she now rebuffs these undertakings. Since she felt strange, Annie moves back into a space of being unable to describe her affective emotionality. Despite Gwen's openly supportive attitude towards Annie and her offer to wear a cloth as well in sympathy of her friend's condition—Annie cannot divorce herself from the shame she feels. At recess that day among the tombstones Annie exhibits her body like a spectacle to the other girls who were not menstruating yet. Therefore, the change renews her burden of difference and reestablishes her

anxiety in being an outsider. Unexpectedly on this same day Annie senses that the same chasm that exists with her mother is happening between her and Gwen. In spite of this discovery Annie and Gwen vow to continue loving each other as recess ends, but for Annie “The words had a hollow ring, and when [they] looked at each other [they] couldn’t sustain the gaze” (54). Their broken stares and Kincaid’s use of the term hollow in relation to their words, implies the forthcoming division in their friendship and the probable disconnect that will impede anymore depth on either end of the relationship. As Annie returns home later that day she hugs her mother, but realizes that both her connection with her mother and Gwen is irreparably damaged.

Since Annie John perceives the end of the rapport she shares with Gwen and her mother she begins to seek out a new admirer. Annie wants to regain a sense of power now that she has lost it in her most recent friendship. Unlike Gwen who represented good girl colonial values via her presentation with pressed uniforms and tidy hair, the Red Girl is antithetical to Gwen’s persona. Annie first meets the Red Girl while she is resisting gender norms by climbing a guava tree to get the ripened fruit—a task most often reserved for boys. Instantly it registers to Annie that the Red Girl embodies all the traits that her mother would disprove of in a young lady. She also plays marbles with the Skerritt boys, which is a game Annie’s mother strictly forbids her to play.⁵¹ However, the brazen transgressions of the Red Girl excite Annie and she immediately respects the girl’s nonconformist, anti-colonial attitude. She goes on to describe the Red Girl as a “Beautiful thing...her dress was dirty, the skirt and the blouse tearing away; the red hair on her head was matted and tangled...she had such an unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life” (58). The allure of the Red Girl for Annie John is her blatant disrespect of social propriety and how the girl marks it through her clothing and lack of hygiene. She later learns that the Red Girl takes a bath and changes her dress only once a week

⁵¹ Skerritt boys were kids from the neighboring island of Montserrat.

because of her grandmother, and does not like going to Sunday school or brushing her teeth but occasionally her mother makes her brush them. The Red Girl provides Annie with her earliest example of diverging from the path of womanly coloniality that has to this point consumed Annie's life. As their budding friendship grows, Annie too begins to disobey rules, such as her mother's request for her to stay away from the lighthouse and not engage in the game of marbles. In the past when Annie visits the lighthouse going to the top makes her dizzy, but with the Red Girl there she marches to the top boldly without fear. Although Annie has been to the top of the lighthouse before, this time she sees the island in a different way because of her friendship with the Red Girl. Her ascent to the top without vertigo signals her increasing confidence. Eventually, the Red Girl becomes Annie's only way to escape the weight of social conventions, and their meetings in the lighthouse allow Annie to replace the adoration she craves from Gwen and her mother. In many ways the Red Girl acts as a motherly figure to Annie teaching her new things and helping her evolve into a young woman that explores different aspects of her womanhood. The Red Girl is the only other person other than Annie's mother that makes her experience the wide range of her emotionality. When they meet in the lighthouse,

The Red Girl be[gins] to pinch [her]. She pinched hard...At first, [she] vowed not to cry, but it went on for so long that tears [she] could not control steamed down [her] face.

[She] cried so much that [her] chest began to heave and then as if [this] caused [the Red Girl] to have some pity on [her], she stopped pinching and began to kiss [her] on the same spots where shortly before [she] had felt the pain of [the Red Girl's] pinch. Oh, the sensation was delicious—the combination of pinches and kisses. (63)

With the Red Girl Annie unintentionally experiences the extremes of affect. The passage illustrates that although Annie has harnessed personal strength in her friendship with the Red

Girl, she also takes on the role of the person with less power. In her relationships with Gwen and her mother Annie affectively has a power position, because she controls the direction of their emotions with her behavior. However, the Red Girl occupies a much more dominant capacity in their relationship, therefore in her subordinated role Annie allows herself to read and finally name her affective responses. She can pinpoint when she feels happiness and later when she feels sadness, though she cannot control when and why the affect is present in these moments. This is a task that has to this point been difficult for Annie to grasp alone or with Gwen or her mother. However, in enduring the pain of the pinches and the pleasure of the kisses the physiological struggle of this affective multiplicity makes it oddly simple for Annie John to identify her emotionality. She even uses the term delicious to express how the exercise of pinching reveals new facets of her subjectivity. To almost keep a souvenir of how the Red Girl helps her explore that part of herself, Annie keeps the marbles from the games she wins. Since she knows her mother does not approve of the game Annie hides the marbles under the house, similar to how she hides her friendship with the Red Girl. When her mother finds her hiding the marbles one day she angrily chastises Annie John and it becomes increasingly difficult for her to sneak out and see the Red Girl at the lighthouse. In stopping what she believes is incessant marble playing Annie's mother blocks her from the depth of the anti-coloniality that the Red Girl represents, effectively impeding Annie from the affective multiplicity that the presence of the Red Girl helps Annie comprehend. Upon discovery that the Red Girl moves to Anguilla, Annie dreams of her that night and their lives on an island. Kincaid writes the last lines of the chapter showing how Annie views their friendship even as it ends in the dream, "[They sent confusing signals to the ships, causing them to crash on some nearby rocks. How [they] laughed as their cries of joy

turned to cries of sorrow” (72). These last lines of the dream illustrate the pain and pleasure dynamic of their odd friendship and the reasons Annie values it.

Unchaining the Shadow

In the chapters that follow Gwen’s and the Red Girl’s, Annie’s feeling of subservience comes to a climax. She begins to interrogate the reasons she feels subjugated—she recalls that the first moment she recognizes loss and discontinuity happening in her life is after she sees her parents in bed. After this scene she struggles to re-empower herself in her friendships with Gwen, and the Red Girl but succumbs to being the other in both cases. Each morning when the Anglican Church bell tolls it further reinforces Annie’s subjugation and lack of power. Since she lives in a territory under the domain of the British empire, they control the organization of her day in school and explicitly govern the function of her body there. In *Poetics of Relation* by Édouard Glissant, he contends,

When a culture that is expressly composite, such as the culture of Martinique, is touched by another (French) that entered into its composition and continues to determine it, not radically but through the erosion of assimilation, the violence of reaction is intermittent and unsure of itself...For this composite culture is fragile in the extreme, wearing down through contact with a masked colonization. (144)

Glissant’s discussion of relation focuses on the root of identity for colonial subjects and the inherent fragility of the colony after contact with the empire. Glissant argues that all subjugated identities in the colonies are produced and extended in relation to the Other, which is in this case the British in Antigua. Initially, for Annie John, empire enters the classroom in the form of a history lesson and the reward for Annie for participating in her own oppression is to learn more about the empire from the *Roman Britain* book she receives. In addition to the book award,

Annie is named prefect of her peers.⁵² The teacher places Annie in an authority role to indoctrinate Annie and her classmates that control over others is important. However, Annie realizes the flaw in this system and openly declares, “What a mistake the prefect part had been, for I was among the worst-behaved in my class and did not at all believe in setting myself a good example” (74). When Annie expresses this critique of British power dynamics in the classroom, Kincaid demonstrates that although organization is needed, if it is ineffective then it is not successful. Relation provides a useful framework in considering Annie John’s decolonial identity beyond the binary terms of submission and/or resistance to the dominant colonial power. Here, Annie mobilizes her position in the middle ground and does not submit to the systemic idea of the oppression of others they try to enforce on her, and in taking the role she does not resist the standard either. Annie’s tendency to exist in Chancy’s in-between-ness leads to a dialectical tension in her decolonial self-identification, in which she recognizes both the political power of association to the empire, while simultaneously noting that this integrative subjectivity dissolves particularity in favor of the unity of the singular Other. Even though one of Glissant’s primary assertions of relation is that the idea should move beyond polarities of submissive versus dominant, he offers a male-centered theory on sites of connectivity and excludes the gendered and raced Caribbean subject.

Odile Ferly’s *A Poetics of Relation: Caribbean Women’s Writing at the Millennium* asserts a counterargument to Glissant’s male-oriented thesis of relation. In her 2012 re-imagining of Glissant’s *Poetic of Relation*, Ferly provides a shift from the rhizome single and masculinistic root to the mangrove, which is the idea that relation is more multidimensional and inclusive of all parts in totality. She argues that,

⁵² British term defined as senior student authorized to enforce discipline.

Much of early postcolonial male writing illustrates the normalizing [of] reductionism that results from the appeal of root thought...The double writing of [Caribbean women] writers resists depiction of the collective self as monolithic and immutable that is so prevalent in male fiction...instead their societies are fragmented and dynamic...[not] shy[ing] away from postcolonial paradoxes and tensions. (19)

This analysis that women do not have to exist at either end of the spectrum, but can linger in the middle shows the warring dissonance of Annie John. In school it is imperative that she both learn the materials and be a good student, while also understanding her responsibility to resist the problematic structure of colonial education. At her age Annie cannot ascertain how to reconcile this conflict, and decides to ridicule her classmates connected to empire as an alternative. She begins with Hilarene, the sexton's daughter, at the local Anglican Church and she is Annie's fiercest competition in class.⁵³ Kincaid utilizes the figure of Hilarene to further emphasize the dual presence of empire not only comes from the teachers, but also from the students as well; this particular student also symbolizes the heavy influence of the Church at colonial schools. However, Kincaid's incorporation of Ruth, who is directly from England, underlines her negative perception of people from the empire that reside in the country they dominate. Through Annie the reader senses Kincaid's intermittent scorn at these characters, when Annie observes Hilarene as, "A disgusting model of good behavior and keen attention to scholarship. A girl that good would never do for me" while she reports Ruth as a girl she likes but she, "[Is] such a dunce and came from England and had yellow hair" (75).⁵⁴ Effectively in her descriptions Annie deems both girls useless because of their overt connections to the British empire. Though she finds Ruth rather dull, Kincaid highlights Annie's suspicion of her and her lack of knowledge

⁵³ Sexton is a person who looks after a church and churchyard, sometimes acting as bell-ringer and formerly as a gravedigger.

⁵⁴ In *Shame, A Brief History* (2012) by Peter N. Stearns discusses the use of the dunce cap in colonial education.

about the West Indies. Annie admits that she never quite grasps why Ruth lives in a country where she is constantly reminded of the terrible things her ancestors had done to the local people of Antigua. She also elucidates that Ruth should feel even worse since her father is a missionary in Africa. Annie notes that Ruth “had such a lot to be ashamed of” and for the first time Annie seems to regain her power in placing the shame she often feels onto another person.

Unconsciously and unintentionally Annie specifically blames Ruth and her ancestors for the colonial domination of Antigua. She relocates any shame she ever feels about being a subject of the empire back onto Ruth. However, Annie also unintentionally begins to excuse the shame and accepts some partial culpability of it as she explains, “Sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged—with the masters or the slaves...all of us celebrated Queen Victoria’s birthday” (77). Kincaid writes this portion of the text in the language of vague national belonging—Annie’s dialogue seems imbalanced and she is unsure how to communicate her Blackness, and her country’s place in history under the shadow of empire. Kincaid uses this tone in the story to employ the interplay of history and shame on Black colonial subjects; and when Annie mentions her countrymen’s celebration of Queen Victoria’s birthday it seems that Kincaid is criticizing their constant commemoration of their lack of independence from the empire. As Annie ponders the multiplicity of her Black Caribbean experience she happens upon an image of Christopher Columbus in chains in her history book. Even as Annie acknowledges the heavy influence of Queen Victoria in Antigua, she thinks while looking at the image, “What just deserts, [she] thought, for [she] did not like Columbus. [She] loved to see the usually triumphant Columbus brought so low and chained up under the boat...and wrote under it the words ‘The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go’” (79). Kincaid exhibits Annie vandalizing the picture because this is the first act that helps

Annie redefine her debilitating shame as a subject of the empire. When the teacher catches a glimpse of Annie's defacement of the image, she believes it is a shameful act. Annie is sent to the headmistress Miss Moore and removed from her status as prefect and Hilarene replaces her in the position. After the perceived defilement Annie also must copy Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton within a week's time. This teaches Annie that the shadow of empire is so ever-present that even when she is punished she must continue to learn about the 'greatness' of the British empire.

Reconnecting the Pieces

Increasingly as Annie ages she has a more difficult time connecting with others. Annie cannot quite identify the origin of her unhappiness because it is not superficial sadness as it had been in the past—with Gwen or the Red Girl. The year she turns fifteen she describes a physiological bodily response that was an unhappiness, "Something deep inside [her] and when [she] closed [her] eyes [she] could even see it. It sat somewhere—maybe in [her] belly, maybe in [her] heart...it took the shape of a small black ball, all wrapped up in cobwebs...no bigger than a thimble even though it weighed worlds" (85). Kincaid uses the idea of the black ball as a metaphor to characterize Annie's shame and her constant urge to feel sorry for herself. The weight of discontinuity and the doubleness of the middle ground are ideas she never seems to confront, all tumble into this small black ball. She tries to divulge the darkness she feels to Gwen one day as they depart from school, but Gwen is not interested in interrogating the self and misses Annie John's cue for her to be vulnerable and engaged. After this happens Annie's sadness deepens and she self-isolates by actively avoiding Gwen and her other schoolmates. Several repressed episodes, both present and past, sharpen Annie's further descent into the dark space of unhappiness. Most poignantly she feels repeated shame when she remembers the day a

childhood family friend almost accidentally hung himself and she did nothing to help him. The look on her mother's face and the surrounding people shows her that she is an outsider and a coward for her inaction. The same boy from that incident sees Annie on the street and makes fun of her for no foreseeable reason—except to make her feel as badly and as scared as he felt when he nearly died. In disgrace Annie heads home as the black thimble spins from her heart to her belly reminding her of her dark unhappiness. Even though Annie believes home will provide solace, it does not because her mother sees her with the boys and thinks she has made a spectacle of her good (British colonial) manners in front of the four boys. Her mother goes on to say, “After all the years she had spent drumming into [her] the proper way to conduct [herself] when speaking to young men, it had pained her to see [Annie] behave in the manner of a slut in the street and that just to see me had caused her to feel shame. The word slut (in patois) was repeated over and over” (100). The mother privately shames Annie for her public behavior and maliciously insults her daughter because of her own negative connotative relationship to shame and to being identified as a slut in the streets of Antigua. Until this moment Annie always felt residual feelings of affability for her mother—and even after her mother calls her out of her name Annie wants to affectionately embrace her.

However, since Annie's unhappiness gains control over her affective emotionality she cannot control how she speaks out to her mother in anger. In order to gather the most recognizable affect she can express, Annie tells her mother, “Well like father like son, like mother like daughter” to convey the command of the small black ball. When this argument happens Annie recalls that it seems that the earth split open and her mother stood on one side while she on the other. Shortly thereafter long rains come and Annie is unfit to go to school because of a draining unnamed illness. The sickness reduces Annie to a feeble state and she is

mostly incapacitated and virtually tethered to her bed. Her parents comfort and nurse her as much as they can but they cannot find the cure. At one point her mother calls the local obeah, Ma Jolie, to figure out the problem with no real success. Finally, Annie's parents take her to an actual doctor but the illness is still undiagnosed. This is an important portion of the text because Kincaid illustrates in the previous chapters Annie's unwillingness to address issues of loss, disruption, discontinuity and shame; and when she stewes in all four emotional affects it physically, mentally, and emotionally cripples her in this chapter. Since she bottles her immutable emotions and refuses to discuss them she can no longer attain any semblance of happiness intentionally or not. Annie also never reconciles the middle ground or lets herself consciously experience her affects uninhibited. For Kincaid the rain and how it endures for three and a half months symbolizes Annie John's emotional unrest. When her grandmother, Ma Chess, appears from Dominica, Kincaid utilizes the presence of the grandmother to show the differences between modern medicine and cultural medicine. Ma Chess' arrival forces Annie to tell the story that illustrates how a connection to cultural mores and traditions may have saved her uncle's life. After Annie's grandmother arrives, she begins to mysteriously get better from her unnamed sickness. Kincaid places the peculiar entrance of Ma Chess, at this juncture in Annie's life, to show that much of Annie's ailments stems from her distance from the cultural memory of her family. The constant symbol of death hangs over her because she believes the middle ground is between Antigua and Britain—but she really exists as an outlier from her matrilineal relationship to Dominica. This is the symbol of death that haunts her feelings of loss, disruption, discontinuity and shame. After she understands portions of her cultural memory such as her grandmother and her mother's somewhat fractured relationship, she begins to finally understand how to name and direct her affective emotionality.

Walking to the Jetty of Acceptance

As Annie prepares to leave Antigua for England to study nursing in her seventeenth year it becomes clear that death again appears, but this time as a representation of her departure. In order to signal the beginning of her own migration story, Annie asks her father to make her a trunk. Kincaid uses this as a metonym of Annie constructing her own identity as she enters a new realm of her life. While Annie acquires many new items for her trip abroad to start school she also must say goodbye to the memories of Antigua; this includes life events, sad incidents and her friend Gwen. When she sees Gwen, Annie recounts that they had, “Long ago drifted apart, and when [she] saw her now [her] heart nearly split in two with embarrassment at the feelings [she] used to have for her” (137). Kincaid frames Annie’s fractured and fragmented relationship with Gwen to show readers that Annie opens up about her emotionality from the past and in the present moment now when describing Gwen. She does not avoid the goodbye, but rather she faces her distant friend and respects the memories they once created. Even though in Annie’s language it is clear she is not wholly expressive because she uses the term embarrassed she is more expressive than her encounters with Gwen in previous scenes of the novel. This time when she departs from Gwen she is honest that she will not “look back” because she wants to move forward and away from memories that resemble her past self. In the hour and a half walk from her home to the jetty, Annie recounts and dismisses several episodes from her childhood and adolescence that establish her selfhood. She begins to understand the dominance of loss for her own growth, and the reasons for the disruptions in her interpersonal relationships. In remembering these aspects and stories of her life that have been obscured she is able to negotiate and re-position any discontinuity she once felt in Antigua. As she begins to say her final goodbyes to her family she realizes that, “[She] shall never see this again, and the phrase

bobbed up and down inside [her]” (145). The feeling that bobbed up and down is the debilitating shame she feels at almost abandoning the island to live in the empire—which to her feels like a double betrayal. When she reaches the boat and her mother throws her arms around her with big tears streaming down her face, Annie realizes that she will miss the influence of her mother in her life even though she had grown to mildly dislike her presence occasionally. There is an ambiguity in Annie’s affect as she drags herself away from her mother, but still goes to the deck to say goodbye when the boat is leaving. As the ship moves away from the jetty “[Annie] could hear the small waves lap-lapping around the ship. They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out” (148). Kincaid’s final lines of the text embody ambivalence about whether the ship is emptying out its contents or Annie ultimately empties out all of her affective emotions without thoroughly dissecting them.

Annie’s relationship to her debilitating shame was always experientially linked to the gaze of her mother, so when she physically leaves her mother she can begin to repurpose the affect of shame for her liberation. The discontinuity she constantly felt in the rupture between her past self and her present self was regularly impeded by her fixed status in Antigua and living in her mother’s home. However, once Annie commences her migration to London and begins to both redefine her negative shame and inaugurate a revised version of herself as she advances into her future, it will usher in a conscious experience of renewal for Annie John. The boat symbolizes Annie’s commitment to owning her migration story and utilizing the British Empire for her educational benefit as she did growing up in Antigua. I would argue that Kincaid places migration at the end of Annie’s narrative because Annie must learn the utility of her material presence in Antigua as an oppositional subject to the empire as a child, before instituting this ideology in her subjectivity as an adult living in Britain. Kincaid also foreshadows that living in

the empire may change Annie's negative relationship to the colonial power since she has such conflicted emotions about departing from Antigua and her family. The irresolute ending alludes to Annie's mobility and repurposed positive shame as an asset to her growth within the space of the middle ground.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INSTABILITY OF SHAME, PRIVILEGE, AND NATIONAL BORDERS IN MICHELLE CLIFF'S *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN*

Michelle Cliff's novel, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), wrestles with the discernible failures of modernity in a developing nation-state and the blight of neocolonial devastation in 1970s-1980s Jamaica. Through the lens of the postcolonial protagonist, Clare Savage, Cliff endeavors to subvert and destabilize the outdated linear narrative of Jamaican history in the literary imagination. During a 1994 interview for the "Black Women's Culture" issue for the *African American Review*, Cliff tells Opal Adisa that she writes Clare's journey to show that Afro-Jamaicans "cannot depend on anybody to free them from their neo-colonial situation. They have to get out of it themselves. I wanted to show Clare on the truck because I want to display her inching toward wholeness" (276). From the beginning of the text Cliff wants to show how deeply affected Clare is by the colonial structures that limit the freedom of Black Jamaicans. In continuation from her first novel *Abeng* (1984), Cliff continues to utilize the Savage family to uncover the fragmented historical trauma of slavery, and perpetual systems of race, class, and educational stratifications in the Caribbean nation.⁵⁵ However, from the beginning of the novel, Cliff makes apparent that the same repressive ethnocentric ideals that appeared in *Abeng* plague and follow the Savages to America. Many scholars focus on the importance of Clare's identity in relationship to conceptions of nationalism. In contrast, while my research supports that nationalism is an important form of awakening and identity formation for Clare, my intervention examines the role of shame in constructing and critiquing her need to locate spaces of national

⁵⁵ *Abeng*, Cliff's first novel published in 1984 explores 12-year-old Clare Savage's coming of age in Jamaica listening to the stories of slavery and racial history of the island from her grandmother. Throughout her time in rural Jamaica with her grandmother she learns the social ills Jamaican people have perpetuated against the poor and LGBT people; Clare feels great sadness and declares that this will not be apart of her Jamaican identity as she grows and interacts with others in the country. In *Abeng*, Kitty and Boy refuse to confront issues of race with their young children, even though Clare is just learning how privilege operates in her small Caribbean country, she still does not fully understand the impact of oppression for less privileged Jamaicans.

belonging. I interrogate four scenes in the novel that invariably speak to the direct and indirect disruptions present within the Savage family, and the discontinuity that situates their dissent both into collective and individual debilitating shame.⁵⁶ I place Clare at the forefront of my evaluation and how her personal ideological shifts simultaneously fissures her family and her other interpersonal relationships. In order to structure a thorough affective investigation of Clare's subjectivity, I will center arguments from Edouard Glissant, Ulla D. Berg, Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, Heather Russell, Shirley Toland-Dix, and Jennifer J. Smith, alongside other scholars to dissect the depth of Clare's displacement. With Clare's parents, Kitty and Boy Savage guiding her, she has a difficult time discerning her association to Blackness throughout her transnational movement to different countries from America, to England, and back to Jamaica—each nation defines and perceives the value of Clare's race differently. This too influences how Boy and Kitty treat Clare and her sister, Jennie during their travels inside and out of America. These constructed perceptions also impact Clare's ability to make a consistent, coherent home-space to live and work, precisely because she has trouble navigating each community. The nebulous racial system the Savage family initially learns in Jamaica, first unites them in their mobility, but by the novel's end it eventually dissolves their fragile familial union.

Cliff situates *No Telephone to Heaven* in the complicated post-independent years of Jamaican history from the early 1960's-1980s. However, it is of importance to note that Jamaica had a tumultuous political history long before the emergence of their independence from British rule in 1962. Jamaica was one of the first colonies established in the Caribbean and was occupied by the Spanish from 1509 until 1655 when it was captured by British colonial rule.⁵⁷ During British control Jamaica experienced little restricted democratic rule through its local legislature

⁵⁶ Similar to earlier discussions of shame in this dissertation I use it throughout this chapter.

⁵⁷ See *The History of Jamaica from 1494 to 1838* (2009) by Thibault Ehrengardt for more information about the historical origins of Jamaica and the presence of colonial rule in the country.

because it was the exclusive domain of the plantocracy beginning in 1664.⁵⁸ This meant that only wealthy sugar plantation owners and planters held legislative rights and positions to vote in the nation-state. The class of individuals that made up the general population of owners consisted of a small privileged group of mulattos, free blacks and Europeans. However, in the latter part of the 18th century the number of Europeans in Jamaica began to diminish, while the free black and mulatto populace grew in comparison. As a result the lack of European plantation owners increasingly left local power up for seizure for the growing number of mulatto and free black landowners. The country functioned in this manner until the emancipation of slavery in 1834, which created a power struggle between the local legislators and the newly freed slaves. Former free black and mulatto plantation owners began to inflate the price of land and create local militia to enforce the removal of former slaves off the land when they squatted.

The year 1865 brought tensions to a climax when representatives of the newly freed slave groups (Maroons) protested against the restrictive laws that denied their access to land.⁵⁹ The local militia, with help from British colonial troops, violently moved to suppress the local Maroon groups and hung Maroon mulatto leaders such as William Gordon.⁶⁰ After the subdued protest labor conditions for the disenfranchised remained poor and agricultural work endured as the main source of employment for the masses. For over 50 years, citizens of the colony did not rebel against the wealthy continuing to own majority of the lands in Jamaica, however in 1919 a series of labor riots ensued. Disgruntled agricultural workers largely organized the riots to begin to agitate for associations that protected their rights. In order to dispel negative grievances the British sent commissioners to inquire about problems, but this was only to prevent the workers

⁵⁸ See *Elections, Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica, 1944-2007* (2010) by Amanda Sives for a closer examination of Jamaican political party affiliations with the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) and the People's National Labor Party (PNP).

⁵⁹ See *The Mother of Us All: A History of Queen Nanny, Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons* (2000) by Katie Gottlieb for more information about the revolts of the Maroon communities against the landowners.

⁶⁰ See *The Late Rebellion in Jamaica: The History of the 1865 Morant Bay, Jamaica, Rebellion* (1903) by The Ohio Statesmen an in-depth analysis of why the wealthy mulatto, a member of Parliament, William Gordon was hanged in the rebellion.

from forming alliances. This seemed to appease workers for a time, but the recession of the 1930's exacerbated the lack of investment in the workers when sugar prices fell and wages almost disappeared.⁶¹ Labor strikes and political unrest dominated the climate of the Caribbean moving into the late 1940's until the Colonial Development and Welfare Act helped establish legitimate labor organizations for the agricultural workers.⁶² Once labor parties began to mobilize, British authorities publicly committed to structuring a decolonization process for the small nation-state. The West Indian Federation was formed in 1958 and included ten colonies with Jamaica and Trinidad as the two largest and most economically sustainable of the island territories. However in 1961 Alexander Bustamante led a campaign with the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) to have Jamaica withdraw from the Federation out of fear that the weaker economies of the other Caribbean colonies would overburden Jamaica. Once the country left British rule in 1962, a succession of conflicts arose as labor party divisions intensified and ignited political violence in the nation-state amongst party leaders. Cliff's text characterizes this time of turbulence and instability in the newly independent Jamaica. She not only uses her text to illustrate how this unrest impacts the poor, but also the middle and upper classes. *No Telephone to Heaven* aptly utilizes families to depict the fury of the poor, the aloof nature of the rich, and the revolutionary power of those in the middle class. Throughout the text it is apparent that the positives of Jamaica impact the people just as deeply as the negative attributes of the nation-state.

⁶¹ See footnote four for more information about the 1930's recession in Jamaica.

⁶² See "Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1950" (1951) by Bernard H. Bourdillon for more information in the Royal Institute of International Affairs about the importance and formation of this act for the alleged benefit of Jamaican and all Caribbean people.

Gradations of Nationalism

Boy Savage first orchestrates Clare's fourteen-year-old racial shame and indoctrinates her to believe in the superiority of her Jamaican whiteness when they arrive in America.⁶³ Boy descends from a family of Jamaica white slave owners, who vehemently deny any African admixture in their blood lineage. He is staunchly committed to this identity, because of its proximity to whiteness and privilege in Jamaica and America. Cliff aptly utilizes Boy's character to demonstrate the inculcation of Anglo-centrism on British West Indian culture and the rigid belief in the hegemony of the British Empire. Boy's behavior with Clare, Jennie, and Kitty shows his affinity to the hierarchical models of race and class that he learns in Jamaica. Since Boy refuses to detach from binaries that governed his life in his home country, his migration to America remains steeped in the trauma and shame of colonial language, which he then chooses to reiterate to his children in a different nation. Cliff creates Boy as a subject of the Caribbean that refuses to acknowledge the intersections between plantation and colonizers, even in his marriage to Kitty Freeman. Boy rejects Kitty's Afro-Jamaican cultural roots and any connection to the rural countryside of Jamaica that shelters the poorer populations of the small nation-state. In order to understand Boy's sudden dislike for what Kitty's family represents, I utilize Glissant's essay "Cross-Cultural Poetics" where I borrow his argument that Boy's repudiation of the African aspects of Jamaica are "a denial of collective memory, and of regional identity"(xl). Boy's privilege insulates his understanding of how his masculinity and Jamaican whiteness protect him from the inequalities of his home country.

⁶³ Jamaican white as Cliff defines it is not an essential biological category but one intricately connected to class and political choice. In the "Black Women's Culture" interview Cliff recalls to Adisa that growing up "my family exchanged between the terms whites, or reds. So you're passing not because you want to be white but for self-protection. There was an awful color sense, which is almost unspoken. They passed [her parents] until we were with Black people it was a weird situation about our Jamaican whiteness" (274).

Cliff magnifies the macro-trauma of colonization and poverty through the intertwined narrative of Christopher. In the beginning of the novel his story seemingly appears unrelated to the migration of the Savage family, but his stark juxtaposition to Boy illustrates the structural inequities present in 1960-1970s Jamaican society. Like Boy, Christopher learns to believe in the superiority of whiteness and the benefits of physical contiguity to white wealth. In the Dungle he sees examples of their financial privilege through tourism, and people working as servants or maids for Jamaican whites, including women in his own family. Christopher and his grandmother never question or feel shame about the cyclical destitution that surrounds their small shack in the Dungle, and Cliff does not highlight any discontent with their status when she initially introduces the characters. It is not until they meet pastor Brother Josephus that Christopher begins to decry and comprehend the severity of his impoverishment and blind allegiance to a nation that forgets the importance of his existence. Brother Josephus alters their understanding of their faith, Blackness, and national belonging when he challenges their unconscious devotion to white supremacy and empire. The pastor engenders a complicated dynamic for poor Black Jamaicans, because he disputes the weighty authority of the British Empire and challenges the basis of their ideals within the country. Josephus shows the congregants a small profile image of a small dark man with wooly hair, and preaches to the congregants that Jesus was a Black man; but the gathering of people protest that his assertion is false, and tell Josephus that in school they all learn Jesus is white with blue eyes. Cliff creates this scene to unveil the depth at which Black Jamaicans internalize their own inferiority, and their dismissal of anyone critiquing the system (organized religion and educational institutions). To this censure, Josephus responds,

You tell me, where it say in de Bible Jesus white. It no say nowhere in the teachings of Almighty God dat Jesus white. I say to you, Jesus was as Black as dat bwai dere. What you name, bwai—Christopher, sah. When the service was over, Brother Josephus felt a sadness overtake him, as a sadness overtook him after each preachment, as person after person rejected the identification he offered them. (37)

Josephus recognizes the futility of shifting the Black Jamaican mindset in their role in the nation's history, and the people spurn his lessons because it does not resemble or duplicate the prioritized dialogue about empire, hybridity, or creolization in the country. Cliff inserts Josephus as a symbol striving to upend the people's obedience to the colonial system and mobilize them through religion to take control of their nation for actual independence, but because they are so systemically disenfranchised they decline Josephus' call to action. This passage communicates a traumatized nation and people that are both ideologically fragmented, and struggling to own their national history. Josephus is Cliff's first micro-representation of a character confronting negative affective shame in *No Telephone to Heaven*. I utilize Noah Guynn's provisional definition of shame in reference to Brother Josephus addressing the congregation's proximity to debilitating shame. I employ the term provisional to denote their shame as existing in the present moment and Josephus' hope that his exposure to their importance as Afro-Jamaican people within the church will dissect the fissures in their negative feelings of shame. Guynn argues "shame is a negative affective response that arises from the traumatic recognition of negativity within origins and strategies of origination, the impossibility of narrative mastery."⁶⁴ Therefore, Josephus is imploring the people to recognize empowerment in regaining control over the malicious diachronic narrative that overshadowed the contributions of Blackness for centuries on the

⁶⁴ See Noah Guynn's article "Historicizing Shame, Shaming History: Origination and Negativity in the "Eneas" for a more detailed analysis on the pervasive nature of shame in determining the validity of historical truth.

island; he believes that a Black revisionist historiography of religion should supersede the colonial religious teachings for Afro-Jamaicans to irrevocably place them as masters of their own narratives. When Brother Josephus tells Christopher that he looks similar to Black Jesus, he is reclaiming shame and repurposing it to regain control of the religious propaganda that had conditioned many Black Jamaicans into believing in their own subjugation.⁶⁵

Even though Cliff makes the interaction with Josephus brief, his message deepens Christopher's individual evaluation of his Blackness. This validated self-image, Russell contends in the chapter "Disruptions," in her book *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic*, produces an oppositional trajectory for Christopher's life:

Brother Josephus anoints Christopher in the revolutionary tradition of African leaders such as Henri Christophe, who, deeply rooted in his African ancestry, fought for Haitian liberation in Haiti's successful War of Independence against enslavement and colonization. He does this to demonstrate to Christopher physical and spiritual resistance to subjugation and European cultural domination.⁶⁶

Josephus helps Christopher reify himself as a reconfiguration against European primacy. This reconfiguration infiltrates how Christopher connects to religion, because it decolonizes the structure of his subjectivity. This alternative history of religion helps him develop a survival instinct that he does not possess before he meets Josephus. Unknowingly, his grandmother unconsciously nurtures and supports his need to destroy the negative colonial shame of the socio-cultural destructive European shadow that long controlled the whitewashed mentality of native Jamaicans. His grandmother allows him to place the image of Black Jesus on the wall of their

⁶⁵ Here I define reclaimed shame as interacting with the colonial powers that teach negative shame in association to Blackness. Brother Josephus teaches Christopher to reclaim the shame he has internalize in relation to his Black skin and religious figures in the church.

⁶⁶ See Heather Russell's book, *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic*, 94 for more detailed information about Christopher's religious subversion with Brother Josephus.

shack, which becomes a small source of Christopher seeing value in his Black body. Shortly after he begins to gain a semblance of self-fulfillment, his grandmother dies and for two years he plunges back into penurious living conditions—begging day to day to make a few pence.⁶⁷ Cliff highlights that Christopher’s changed emotional state impacts his ability to collect money from tourists because of his sullen stance, and dirty dark appearance. He tries to cling to his grandmother’s Bible and imagines images of Jesus to maintain the façade of his reclaimed shame that Brother Josephus exposes him to, but the more time he spends in the Dungle the more he fears for his own death.⁶⁸ His affect is increasingly despondent, until Mas’ Charles comes to the shantytown to look for a replacement maid for the grandmother’s dead sister, and finds Christopher to take on instead as a gardener. When Charles and his wife arrive to collect Christopher, they intensify his hyperconscious shame by whispering that he stinks, and he overhears their negative commentary. This further traumatizes and worsens his debilitating shame, and “him ‘fraid fe ask dem to stop de cyar, so him peepee ‘pon himself” (43). This interaction accurately depicts the inextricable operations of class, neoliberal ideology, and race at play when they coerce the orphaned poor Black Jamaican child to work for their benefit. Charles and his wife think they are providing Christopher with a sufficient life outside the Dungle working for them, but because of his encounter with Brother Josephus, Christopher recognizes that their proximity to whiteness does not necessarily mean a better life or eventual equal treatment for him. Even in their care he remains dispossessed, continuing to work for others in the city when he grows older. Although, he works and effectively avoids a lifetime in the Dungle, Christopher remains isolated and sullen with few social acquaintances. In adulthood he

⁶⁷ A pence is a British bronze coin and monetary unit equal to one hundredth of a pound.

⁶⁸ Dungle is the Jamaican term for shacks and the slums in Kingston, Jamaica, during the 1960’s that Cliff often refers to in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

begins to regret that he did not properly bury his grandmother and believes that will change his negative affect and progressively pessimistic outlook on his life.

When Christopher tries to enlist the help of the upper middle-class brown Jamaicans, Mas' Charles and his wife Miss Evelyn, Charles sharply rebuffs his request because it has been thirteen years since the grandmother passed away. Christopher grows enraged at his response and kills each one of Charles' family members, including the maid Mavis. Through this act of vengeance Cliff implicates the negative ramifications of color and class stratifications that affects the psyche of destitute Black Jamaicans. The moment Christopher ask Charles to recognize and interact with his humanity, Charles shames him because Christopher, to him, has no right to progress from his status as a lower-class worker. The unpremeditated murders stem from Christopher's feelings of invisibility, voicelessness, and an explicit lack of an identity to Charles and his family. Even before Christopher kills the son Paul H., Paul only thinks of Christopher to help him discard the bodies, not to take over the estate or to grieve the loss of his family. Christopher remains relegated to second-class citizenry within the nation continually, until he murders symbols of the upper-middle class as his own act of resistance. I want to claim here that Christopher's conduct exposes a counter-discourse of liberation to that of Boy Savage and his hegemonic national relationship to Jamaica. The split between Christopher and Boy lie in the manufactured disjuncture of the colonized capitalistic, bourgeois respectability politics of Boy— instead of the revisionist narrative that speaks to the marginalized, deprived Black Jamaican population in the country that Christopher represents. For Boy and Christopher, each of them believe they constitute a different version of the national history; Boy thinks he renders a portrait of transnational modernity, particularly in his move to the United States, whereas, Christopher exemplifies a prehistory African link to the island before imperial intervention. Glissant, like

Christopher, condemns the idea of a single history because, “history ultimately emerges as a fantasy peculiar to the Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes power and condemns other cultures to the periphery” (xxix). Glissant’s argument highlights that in alignment with Western thought, Boy adopts forgetting that native Jamaican populations existed on the island before European invasion—and that multiple layered histories shaped the chronicle of Jamaica over time. When only one feature of the nation-state appears it reveals evidentiary silences and paradoxical absences in the origin of the country; thus leading to the preminent power of imperial influences on the narrative of the region and the information communicated to the people. This theory reiterates and explains Christopher’s descent into insanity after killing the family. His existence at the fringes of society after realizing his abject place outside of it, forces him to confront the aporia with the family.

Resettlement Disenfranchisement

Even though I accept Glissant’s reputable argument about the discriminatory attitudes in the Caribbean towards non-European cultures, it does not erase the fact that Boy, Kitty, and secure advantages based in colonialization and class in their transnational migration to America. When Boy begins to have difficulties in Jamaica because of his gambling addiction, his privilege affords him the option of moving his entire family to the U.S., while Christopher’s troubles lead him further into obscurity, invisibility and continued nameless poverty for much of the novel. However, upon arrival to the U.S. Boy encounters some of Christopher’s debilitating shame on their way to New York City. America creates a different racial dynamic for the Savages, and incites an early feeling of homelessness for some of the family members. On their travels to Georgia, they see a sign outside the NAACP that reads, “A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY,” creating confusion for young Clare because she does not understand the

terminology or the action of lynching (54). Boy, hoping to suppress any fear that may arise in his children with this sign, gives his daughters an innocent excuse for the word. Cliff interposing this scene as the family arrives in America exhibits their insufficient knowledge of 1960s American race relations and how Boy's explicit privilege deafens their experience of national belonging in the U.S. Consequently, when Boy enters a Georgia motel, a predictable narrative arises that immediately delineates Boy as other in a manner he has yet to incur in his life. The motel keeper notices the apricot hue of Boy's skin and greets him with an impolite tone, then curiously inquires, "Now, you wouldn't by any chance be colored folks, would you? Because if you're niggers you can't stay here. You ain't welcome. It ain't legal" (55). The man's direct hostility shocks Boy, and for a brief moment he fumbles with shame, thinking about the mango colored hue of his wife and youngest daughter in the car. In lieu of addressing the man's racism, Boy decides to reach into his memory about a lesson from his schooling about the history of Jamaica in regard to racial designations of Blackness and whiteness—from quadroon qualifications to that of pure African. Boy's flawed ideas of racial classifications and dedication to ignoring his own discontinuity, forces him to assimilate and tell the innkeeper, "I am a white man. My ancestors owned sugar plantations" (57). To gain access to remaking his immigrant subjectivity, Boy transforms his relation to the Caribbean to fit the collective slave history of America. Therefore, his denial of his foreignness creates a paradigm of privilege that transcends the national borders of both Jamaica and the U.S.

Cliff orchestrates this incident as Boy's first perceptible locus of alienation and debilitating shame in America. He displays tangible regret that his whiteness is different from the innkeeper, but he is not the only member of the Savage family that wrestles with the isolating effects of American nativism. Kitty, too, agonizes over the differences she sees in America, such

as the large amount of poverty that mirrors portions of her home country. As a familiar refrain Boy tries to tell her several times, “It will be different in New York” to assuage her overt anxiety (59). In the meantime Kitty struggles to make connections to her new home, but is constantly troubled by the lack of racial integration within public spaces, such as the general stores. At many points during their final days to New York they take secondary roads and use the restroom outside, because of the hostile racial climates they encounter in different states. Upon their final arrival to New York City, Kitty recovers a small piece of, what I call home-making, while they stay with her extended family in Queens until they settle accommodations in the city. The Savage family’s fleeting stay with Kitty’s Jamaican kin provides a detailed window into the national and cultural politics of Blackness in America. Her cousins, Winston and Grace, both work as domestics for a banker and explain to her and Boy that America is not a place to build a home for Jamaicans. Since Winston and Grace are much darker than the Savages they interact with race relations more sharply, and tell Boy “Pass if you can, man. This is not a country for us. No bother with the aggravation for dem love to give aggravation” (61). Initially, Kitty cannot decipher what Winston means by passing and ask him to elaborate, but Grace cuts in and tells her,

The Americans dem don’t understand Jamaicans dem. The Black people here not from us. The white people here not from us. Maggie, the cook in the banker’s kitchen, an American Knee-grow, so she call herself, give me as much contention as the man himself and she cyaan pay we salary. You mek some dollar, you go back home. Mek enough to pay down on a lickle house in Cherry Garden, then we gone like so. (62)

For Kitty, Winston and Grace’s message negates the American dream Boy sells her on their way to New York. Their words augment her already present trepidation about transnational mobility

and leaving home. Cliff utilizes Kitty's cousins as representations of hopeful Jamaican immigrants who want to pursue Americanized ambitions, but feel displaced because of the myopic national narrative about Blackness during the 1960s. The two cousins appear unapologetic and prideful about their steadfast commitment to their Jamaican national identity even though it is inundated with the dominant, hegemonizing language of empire. This intimate view of America they create for her disrupts and distorts Kitty's ability to home-make from the beginning of their time in the new country.

Maladaptive Disruptions

Despite the recommendations of her family, Kitty tries to make a home in America with Boy and her daughters. When the Savages move to an apartment in Brooklyn, Winston and Grace try to maintain a connection with them calling to visit and invite them back to Queens, to help them preserve their communal relations to Jamaica's cultural traditions. Boy displays rampant dislike of keeping tight associations to his national Jamaican identity or to Kitty's family, and eventually the relationship among the cousins is irreparably broken. Kitty worries at this loss because her cousins help her define her subjectivity in America, but Boy declares the necessity of their passing to succeed in the new country for their benefit. Berg and Ramos-Zayas describe Boy's negative affective behavior as, "a colonized body that identified blackness with moral inadequacy. To escape this, the colonized person wears a 'white mask' in an effort to consider themselves universal subjects, equally participating in world societies as the colonizer, internalizing those values into their consciousness" (659). However, I disagree with part of this argument because though I think Boy feels shame about his relationship to Blackness, I do not think he believes it necessitates moral inadequacy. I say this particularly because he does not reject the darker skin of his younger daughter Jennie, nor does Cliff articulate any antipathy

between the father and daughter. It is important to note that Boy does accept the idea of whiteness as a universal mask, but since he chooses to marry Kitty and remain committed to their marriage, I argue that the “white mask” he creates has limitations for him. Cliff reveals passing for Boy as a purely pragmatic decision rather than a deep-seated hatred for his Blackness, but this does not mean that shame does not underlie his reasons for passing. Likewise, Kitty never stops Boy from passing or comments negatively on his decision to use it in positive interest of the family. Her struggle with the new self he engages with rouses a quiet individual discomfort that overshadows her movement and interactions in America.

In her growing despair Kitty tries to envelop herself in the diversity of the immigrant experience in New York. While Boy can seamlessly pass and blend into American society, Kitty’s adjustment is much more complicated. In order to cope with the disconnections from the local West Indian community, Kitty ventures to Bedford-Stuyvesant to find alternative spaces of home. The bodegas and salumerias alleviate some of her feelings of isolation and allow her to reunite with Jamaican foods that remind Kitty of her own national belonging.⁶⁹ Cliff illustrates that this exercise in finding items of home relieves some of Kitty’s shame about Boy forcing her to detach from her Queens family. She tries to ease her transition with transnational mobility and alienation in America, but even “in these shops she broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice, even as she brushed the loose dirt off the yam-skin, imagining its origin in the bush. Resisting a desire to rub the sharp stickiness into her nostrils and around her mouth” (65). Cliff indicates that Kitty experiences home through mental, physical, and emotional affect in how she caresses the shape of the fruit and its contents when held to her face. The smell of the mango reminds Kitty of the bushes and her fingers sticking in the juicy sap with a burning sensation that follows. The psychosocial cultural atmosphere she clings to momentarily

⁶⁹ Salumeria is an Italian delicatessen.

interrupts the deep dread of discontinuity that has set in during her disruptive mobility to America. At one point Kitty seeks to employ religion as a form of respite from her unease, visiting an Episcopal church's cemetery. In the graveyard she spies an ancient stone that marks the passage of Marcus, a man born in Jamaica, a slave in 1702; this interaction with the tombstone sends a signal of fear to Kitty and she panics that she too will meet this fate if she remains in the U.S. Seeing the tombstone is a point of realization for Kitty because although she knew high privilege in Jamaica, in spite of her Afro-Jamaican roots, those parameters do not exist for her in this new country. The image of Marcus as a faithful Jamaican servant next to Grace and Winston bespeaks the longevity of her status in the U.S because of her forever foreignness and the inability to pass.

Nonetheless, America is home for now and she must subsist on behalf of her daughters and husband. Briefly, Kitty remembers lessons from her mother, Miss Mattie, and the preference her mother shows her about their spiritual Jamaican ancestry and inherent connection to the land, despite Kitty's school dismissive attitudes about learning from the earth. She considers the matrilineal lessons she gains from her mother before her passing the greatest gift, and realizes,

The place which explained the world to her—would always be her island. Thinking about her mother's coolness, holding, always holding her knowledge, the things she understood, as the most precious to her. The worst possible loss...to lose the one who taught me everything. It seemed impossible that these things could have vanished into thin air after her mother's death, [it] made her ashamed. (72)

In an interesting way Cliff makes Kitty take ownership and nurture a sense of pride about the island because her mother teaches her to value the natural elements of the nation. When she reimagines the wisdom her mother imparts to her about upholding Jamaica as part of her

subjectivity, it thrusts Kitty into a profound shame she cannot quite comprehend. Cliff poignantly presents the irresolute wavering of Kitty in her sound connection to Jamaica, but her continued need to stay in America for her own children. To avoid thinking about the sadness within her shame and how quickly Boy forced her to leave the island after Miss Mattie's death, she begins to help Boy look for work. Eventually, she and Boy take a job at a local laundry establishment—Boy drives the laundry truck, while Kitty does clerical work alongside two Black women, Georgia and Virginia, folding the cleansed linen for delivery. In Cliff naming the two Black women after two southern states that were heavily segregated in the 1960's, it is emblematic of how the two women separate themselves from Kitty and further shows the character's liminal status as an outcast amongst Black Americans. Despite Kitty's perceived privilege, she desperately wants the approval of these women, but Georgia and Virginia's names almost explicitly mark them as metaphorical pillars of exclusion; however this also marks them as figures of mobility. Georgia and Virginia also act as symbols of the Great Migration in the United States, which also marks their roles as outsiders. Cliff notes that this exacerbates their status as other but a concrete unwillingness to accept Black people they view as Othered in America. Since Kitty and Boy both worked in the tourism industry in Jamaica and lacked higher education, all benefits of their privilege that existed in Jamaica disappears in America. Boy navigates his own sense of national belonging in the U.S. by visiting bars and getting information from other men about jobs and learning a sense of the cultural norms. Kitty continues her visits to the local bodegas for her own construction of belonging, until Boy actively removes this connection to home-making from her as well. He tells her that traveling to Bedford-Stuyvesant is too dangerous to go alone and that he will not continue to accompany any travels there. Accordingly she begins to limit her time there, but still goes behind Boy's back

because this is the only way she can survive the isolating individualistic mentality of America. At work Kitty tries to make friends with the Black women, but they indifferently disregard her gesture because of her accent and the hue of her skin. Neither of the Black women acknowledge Kitty's proximity to Blackness, particularly because she holds a slightly higher position than them at the laundry, therefore they reject her offer of friendship for what they deem privilege.

In contrast Kitty does not believe she gains any advantages in America and feels increasingly more excluded. One day Kitty seeks to remove the barrier with Georgia and Virginia in the packing room but upon her entry the women fall silent, and "Kitty wanted to smash what was between them, the three of them, and shout "Me not dem! The other them." She wanted to tell the women who she really was, but she held back, afraid of what they might think of her...A house-slave inconvenienced by massa whim, while dem worked the cane" (77). Cliff's use of a slave metaphor in describing the antagonism with Georgia and Virginia shows how linked Kitty is to colonial language and ideas of subjugation in relation to Blackness. Talking to the Black women requires Kitty to confront her place as a privileged subject and because she will not publicly acknowledge the racist and sexist foundations that divide them as women and Black people, Kitty effectively remains complicit in the systemic segregation of racial injustice. However, I contend that it is equally important to show that Cliff almost absolves the two local Black women of any responsibility in upholding that same structure of exclusionary prejudice. They chose not to reach back to Kitty when her intentions of wanting to be included appear quite evident, and instead of taking an opportunity to mobilize with another person of color in the Black diaspora they determine her otherness as unworthy. The lack of socialization escalates Kitty's shame and alienation and it grows in size, while her will to remain in America for her family diminishes more each day. Kitty's affect reflects the argument Kelly Oliver makes

in “Alienation’s Double as Burden of the Othered Subject.” Oliver highlights that “Existential and psychoanalytic alienation and angst in the face of freedom and autonomy operate as a screen for a deeper anxiety and guilt that could be described as the return of the repressed” (27).

Although ostensibly Kitty has more freedom and autonomy in America because of the color of her skin, Cliff implies that the character continuously relegates herself to a position of silence despite her access to privilege—privilege, that Kitty knows because of Grace and Winston upon her arrival to America, connects to her color and the value of her complexion. Kitty unconsciously exalts the memory of her island partly because she thinks her independence is unlimited there, so she refuses to critique her colonized role in Jamaica. This is an argument I want to highlight, and while Kitty silently condemns Boy for passing and using his privilege in America—she is unaware of how she continues to downgrade herself to a second-class space because her privilege is marginally limited within the national borders of the United States.

Unable to divulge her incommunicable shame of alienation to anyone, Kitty decides to find another job. She merely believes it will only be a short time before she can secure another job, but finds it an arduous task because employers like her until they hear an accent and delineate her golden skin as other. The summation of rejections saddens and embarrasses Kitty because she begins to feel stuck in the underclass of America. In silent protest of her stifled opportunities, Kitty begins to sign the notes at the laundry that go out with the clean linen from the fictional Mrs. White saying, “HELLO. MRS. WHITE. IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER,” and “AMERICA IS CRUEL. WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACKHEARTED. MARCUS GARVEY WAS RIGHT. She felt free, released” (83). Cliff facilitates this scene to demonstrate Kitty’s nascent resistance to anti-otherness in 1960’s America. When Kitty references Marcus Garvey it alludes to her knowledge of the Pan-African

movement of the 1920's and directly links her to a Black consciousness, though Cliff does not show this dimension of the character as forthrightly when they arrive in the U.S.⁷⁰ Here, Cliff creates a Kitty that begins to agitate for her own liberation. Even though she could not physically express her internal rage aloud, the notecard messages signify the fervor of her fury. This is the first time Kitty rebels against systems in place to suppress her voice and she uses it anyway. I assert that Cliff arranges this scene to convey that although Kitty is dealing with the disruption of moving to America and the discontinuity that occurs as she tries to adapt—the passage highlights Kitty beginning to understand and use her privilege to enfranchise people without the same access to whiteness. When Boy finds the sheaf of pronouncements in her handbag, he confronts Kitty and the shame fleetingly returns as she tries to defend her act of racial defiance. Boy angrily waves the cards in her face asking if she wants to lose her job for such silly entertainment.

First Kitty sulks while her husband reprimands her, and does not immediately respond to his slander. However, she remobilizes the courage she finds to write the messages and breaks her silence once again, but this time verbally rather than in written form. She addresses Boy as an overseer, “Busha, is maybe time we cut the cotta,” which confuses him and he responds to her that he is not a slave driver (83). Kitty continues in code to shield her anger from Clare and Jennie, smiling at Boy “You preffer ‘slave...massa? Is what your American friends call you?” Suddenly, she was in control” (84). Cliff frames this hostility between Kitty and Boy to highlight the unspoken dynamic of slavery that divides them, and though Kitty has lighter skin she still holds her Afro-Jamaican roots very close to her subjectivity. Thus, when Boy questions her act of survival in America she changes her affect to mirror the inferior status of a slave because that

⁷⁰ See Charles Rivers Editors book *Marcus Garvey: The Life and Legacy of the Jamaican Political Leader Who Championed Pan-Africanism* (2017) for more information about the formation of the Pan-African movements in Jamaica and America.

is how their marriage is functioning since their move to Brooklyn. I am asserting that Kitty sees Boy as a representation of whiteness that suffocates all her attempts to find and build home in America. Both the argument with Boy and the laundry messages are ways for Kitty to finally control her subjectivity within the national borders of the U.S., since she struggles to find this balance in the beginning of their migration. Cliff also orchestrates this scene to signify a shared identity of relation between Kitty and Black Americans because just as she sees herself at the bottom of American work conditions, so too did Black Americans, constantly existing at the lowest parts of the employment chain. She appalls Boy with her colonialist language about slavery and he unobtrusively replies that he only wants her to be careful and not to lose her job. Kitty forgives his anger and they make up, but it does not distract her feelings of missing the land and that night she dreams of reclaiming the land just as she has regained control of herself.

Suddenly, Kitty begins to feel fully emboldened within her sense of control, and sends out even more laundry messages of the Aunt Jemima (Mrs. Black) figure into the world. Oliver argues that the courageous version of Kitty that Cliff reconstructs disapproves of continuing to “internalize an image of her colonized self as subhuman lacking a soul, mind, psyche, or an ego that's devoid of agency” (30). Whilst this idea may be true, Kitty’s ego begins to veil the undercurrent of privilege that still obscures portions of her Blackness in America. The next day when she arrives at the laundry, Mr. B seems scattered and immediately tells her that he fired Georgia and Virginia for their misguided messages to the white customers. He shows her the picture of Mrs. Black and laments that their “kind is just no good. Because nether of them would admit to this desecration, and they always stick together” (84). Mr. B.’s negative portrayal of Georgia and Virginia as listless deviants prompts Kitty to confess to the offense, but Mr. B deems her a nice girl that could not commit such a transgression. At this moment Kitty

recognizes what her privilege has done for her up to this point in her life, and quits the laundry that afternoon. Afterwards, Kitty feels so disoriented in her shame that she decides America will only further push her into a person she does not recognize with the racial conditioning that exists within the nation. Her will to continue repurposing her shame into productive resistance returns to a state of oppression, and Kitty does not have the stamina to remake the affective shame she faces for a second time. By the end of the next week she takes Jennie, the younger, darker daughter and returns to Jamaica. She only tells her eldest child to look after herself and her father and does not offer to take Clare and depart with her too.

Naming the Derelicts

Kitty leaves Clare with Boy because she assumes Clare will choose to pass like her father. The abandonment from her mother facilitates Clare's negative sense of shame and loss about America and Jamaica. Here I borrow Ferly use of the intermediary third space to pinpoint Clare as a symbol of this space. Ferly positions Clare as an example of the mangrove with multiple ecosystems at play and with few defined boundaries of "geographic, geopolitical, socio-historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic factors that signals the Pan-Caribbean approach that resists compartmentalization according to former colonial powers and the always shifting boundaries of the Caribbean" (20). This places Clare as an elusive character to denote within the premise of mangrove aesthetics. Cliff most accessibly outlines the intermingling of Clare's shame with Kitty's, however she does not openly delineate the extent of Jennie and Boy's negative affect of shame in comparison to Kitty and Clare.⁷¹ In her desperation Clare tries to

⁷¹ It is of note to mention that Cliff shows the impact of Kitty's mobility on Boy and Jennie. Boy demonstrates his anger when he isolates himself from Clare when Kitty leaves America, and again after Kitty's death. He physically assaults Clare because of his mixed relationship to his own shame after Kitty's dies, but with a lack of dialogue from the character and his remarriage to the Italian woman Cliff erases the depths of his shame as a relative afterthought to the construction of the novel. This is also true for Jennie the reader receives very little dialogue from this character, except her brief conversation with Clare when she returns to America after Kitty's death. The reader only learns of Jennie's own troubles coping with shame as a brief aside that she has fallen heavily into drug use, but again this characterization is not a primary issue of the text.

dismiss the absence of Jennie and Kitty by watching television to numb her anguish. She does not actively question her father about the desertion because Boy keeps up the façade of Kitty's return in a few months. Similar to his wife, Boy surmises that Clare will pass so he continues to counsel her on self-effacement, invisibility and secrets. When Boy enrolls Clare into high school with the principal Mrs. Taylor she questions the authenticity of their race. Mrs. Taylor expediently tells Boy that foreign students begin a year behind so they do not get lost in their schooling. In the past Boy's privilege has worked well to create advantages for him in America, but Mrs. Taylor sees through his guise when he protests that Clare is well educated enough and deserves to be in the correct grade level. However his objections inform her suspicions, and she asks what race Clare is, he responds, "White...of course," as soon as it was out of his mouth he realized his grave error in appending the "of course" (98). This appendage in the sentence reignites the woman's speculation and she categorizes Clare and Boy as white chocolate, in-between, island people that have no place in the school system. Cliff maintains that Clare remains at the peripheries of whiteness in high school because of her relationship with her father. During one of her classes in 1963, the teacher discusses four little girls that were bombed at an Alabama Sunday school. Clare collects the newspaper clipping and carries it around with her, partially to remind herself of her proximity to Blackness and also to her mother—who has stopped writing quite as often. When she returns home from school Boy notices the newspaper images she looks at incessantly and asks her,

Girl, do you want to labor forever as an outsider? You are too much like your mother for your own good. You are an American now. We are not to judge this country, they give us a home. Your mother could never understand that, that's why we lost her" Should a

newscast refer to the burgeoning civil rights movement, her father took care to distract her and himself, with talk of something else. (101)

Boy ceaselessly remains a colonized subject in America. He refuses to acknowledge racial incidents and tries to teach his daughter the same passive behavior. Boy tells teenaged Clare that her Jamaican nationality does not matter anymore, nor should she get too entangled in the national race politics of America since it has nothing to do with them. I argue that Boy shows Clare that national identity is fluid and adaptive, but she wants to nurture her connection to Blackness through her absentee mother.

Consequently her feelings of being an outsider and motherless never subside, because five years after Kitty leaves she dies in Jamaica. Outwardly, Clare creates a stoic response to her mother's death, while Boy is frantically emotional. Boy sees Clare's calm affect and challenges her about it, questioning why she is not more sullen about her mother. His anger overtakes him and suddenly he says, "you callous little bitch I suppose you have more feeling for niggers than for your own mother" (104). In an instant Boy aligns Clare's distant affect with that of Kitty's rejection of him. Clare breathes deeply at his anger and tells him, "My mother was a nigger," but Boy smacks her, she softly affirms after "And so am I" (104). This palpable rift conveys a small portion of Clare beginning to reposition shame for her benefit. Like Kitty she has already experienced the disruption and discontinuity of migration, and now she is arriving at the point of understanding the affect within these emotional spaces. When Jennie returns to America after Kitty's death, Clare tries to recoup memories of her mother through her sister. She interrogates Jennie about why Kitty left her with Boy in the U.S. and Jennie tells her the mother thought she might prosper there since she favored Boy's complexion. In Smith's article "Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*" she argues that, "Cliff positions

Clare's burgeoning political consciousness as simultaneous with her intellectual growth and at each stage of her schooling Clare's consciousness morphs into multiple meanings" (143). Clare recognizes the limitations of her racial identity in America even after she finishes college and decides to reach out to her uncle Frederick for a student fare to London. After her mother's death she discerns that nothing ties her to the boundaries of the U.S and her mother was permanently not coming back to the flawed nation.

Like many other colonial subjects Clare flees to England believing that making a home in the empire will ease the sense of national unbelonging she felt in America. She thought of England as her natural mother country because it was the reason her people existed as they did in Jamaica. Clare consciously represses her shame by entrenching herself in the city of London and ignoring any emotional pull to Jamaica. In order to ease the transition she tries to embody her creole subjectivity when she enters a graduate program in the Classics at the University of London. Her uncle assures her that England is the true place for her now and she could neglect the crude memory of America. Clare struggles a bit to adjust to the changes in England and Dix contends that, "Clare's sojourn in the "mother country" is an essential part of her journey to selfhood. Though she notices the racism in London, Clare tries to ignore it" (47). Clare struggles to reconcile the treatment of darker-skin colonial subjects covering their native dress to assimilate to the cultural environment of London. For a while Clare successfully silences her feelings of non-belonging in London and even befriends a woman from Cambridge named Liz. Clare also even begins to liken herself to Jane Eyre, but quietly knows that she more appropriately resembles the crazed creole woman Bertha in the attic.⁷² Nonetheless, during the

⁷² Initially Clare feels the parallels to *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë' "because she too is motherless, left to wander, solitary, betrayed, with no relations to speak of except for an uncle across the water. This thought comforts her for a time but then she realizes Jane is small, pale, and English. Quickly, she realizes she more closely resembles the wild-maned Bertha, because Bertha was captive, ragôut, mixture, confused, Jamaican. Carib, Cimarron. All that Clare was and did not want to be

school year she makes a trip to Jamaica to thank her uncle for the funds to finish school, and she does not rehash the memory of Kitty. She does not ask where she is buried, nor does she ask after any of her affairs. Clare maintains her privilege using Jamaica as a tourist spot with no affective feelings attached to the vacation. Although she notices many things in Jamaica she finds appealing and saddening, she ignores this desire for what she believes is her own peace. When she returns to London, Liz invites her to Gravesend for her school reunion, and mindlessly Clare agrees to make the trip. Her travels with Liz reintroduce the weight of being an outsider and similar to her mother she wanders to a graveyard nearby for solace. In the cemetery she notices a bronze, female monument that she reads is in “loving memory of their American countrywoman, Pocahontas” (136). Cliff utilizes the image of Pocahontas to remind Clare of her torn relationship to Jamaica and how colonial shadows can misrepresent the narrative of the subjugated.

The monument triggers a shift for Clare and she suddenly leaves Gravesend. Months later the National Front passes by the University when Clare is in a course seminar on Hermetic Tradition. The people of the Front shout, “Kaffirs! Niggers! Wogs! Pakis! Get out! Keep Britain White!” (137). Cliff aptly uses this scene to emphasize Clare’s mounting anger about the hierarchical and racist systems that still govern the empire of Britain. Although Britain has colonized many countries the national government does not take inventory of its own systemic problems with racial issues, and instead continues to colonize others for capitalistic and political gain. It angers Clare that her classmates and professor do not react to the racist hate the National Front loudly spews in a public space. She goes to Liz hoping for consolation after she relates the details of the protest to her friend, but instead Liz misinterprets the impetus of Clare’s

simultaneously.” See more information about the distinction Cliff makes between Jane and Bertha for Clare on pgs. 115-116 in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

indignation. Liz reasons: “I’m sorry. But you needn’t take it personally, you know. C: Why do you say that? L: I mean, you’re hardly the sort they were ranting on about. C: You mean I’m presentable, some of my ancestors were Caribs. L: That’s ancestors. Some of mine worshipped fire,” Liz spoke in a patient tone, apparently unaware of the cold across the table” (139). Liz ignorantly tries to placate Clare’s outrage, and dismisses her statements as antiquated anxiety. After believing for many years that the inclusivity of schooling prepared her for the world, Clare finally understands how disregarding her shame only forces it to fester and maximize. Clare naively believes school will shelter her from the economic, political, and social workings of the world, but when she settles in London she realizes it is just the opposite. The self-denial and gravity of shame begin to take their toll on Clare in the same way it did on Kitty in America.

The motivation that propels Clare’s crisis of shame forward is her friendship with Harry/Harriet and short intimacy with Bobby. Cliff creates these relationships as metaphors of Clare’s inability to confront home because of the memory of her mother. She meets Harry/Harriet in Jamaica on school break and their friendship flourishes quickly, they correspond via letters to one another about the state of Jamaica. Harry/Harriet is a transgender woman that refuses to adhere to the idea of splitting her self-hood between two identities—man or woman—Harry/Harriet chooses to embrace both personas. She writes to Clare that, “Jamaica needs her children...people are leaving in droves—those who can. The poor, the sufferahs, of course remain...there is terrific distress” (140). Harry/Harriet wants Clare to return to her homeland to help it rebuild from the strain of modernity that is further crippling the lower classes. Cliff places Harry/Harriet as a living figure of the nation that links Clare to her mother and the Afro-Jamaican roots she longs to understand and belong to in her own family. Each letter that Harry/Harriet sends Clare is a call to action for socio-political purposes, rather than it’s

appearance as an interpersonal check-in. Despite her constant communication with Harry/Harriet, Clare dismisses any need to return to Jamaica and instead travels to Paris with Bobby, her partner. Clare uses Bobby as a project distraction from facing her own trauma and sadness. He has an open wound that Clare endeavors to help him heal and they travel across London to different doctors to receive help for his injury. At some points certain doctors close the wound temporarily only to have it open and start leaking fluids again. When they cannot find appropriate help in London the two of them venture to Paris, France to receive secondary consultations for Bobby. As Clare travels with him she realizes that Bobby never tells her how he obtained the wound, but he seems reticent to tell her when she ask specific details of the laceration. In an effort to reroute attention from his story Bobby asks Clare why she does not go home to Jamaica, she replies, “I think my basic problem, difficulty, with I do think my father is accountable. If we had not left [Kitty] might well be alive, if he had listened to her fears, we might have returned to where we belonged. Home would not be something in my head” (153). Cliff deliberately exposes Clare’s pent-up anger at Boy and Kitty, which stifles her own path to wholeness. The complex web of associations facilitates Clare’s negative shame and detracts from her growth as a character and transnational subject.

Bobby encourages her to find a place where she can be apart from her parents, while still being part of them. Here, I argue that Clare fixates on Bobby’s gaping wound because it reminds her of the debilitating shame she internalizes in not confronting her mother for the abandonment, or Boy for his inability to understand the importance of belonging to Blackness. In Clare’s warring to stay with Bobby in France, she fights the desire to help Harry/Harriet confront the problems happening in Jamaica and facing her own troubles. Home is an elusive space for Clare to understand because she leaves each country at pivotal moments of her life. Therefore, she

never gains a conscious perception of what it means to belong and represent a nation. This makes it difficult for her to comprehend her affective grounding of shame in Jamaica. Like Christopher, Clare feels displaced from the nation that is her birthplace and struggles to name her invisibility as a valid part of the nation. Harry/Harriet reminds her that she “cyaan live split. Not in this world” (153). Clare tries to avoid this advice from her friend but after Bobby’s disappearance from France, it forces her to reevaluate the split trajectory of her life. She keeps longing to belong to Jamaica through her mother, however Cliff makes it apparent that her connection must come through her own rediscovery of the island. Even though Clare has revisited the island because of her uncle and aunt, this time at Harry/Harriet’s beckoning she migrates back to Jamaica with purpose. At the beginning of the novel, Cliff illustrates the end of Clare’s journey to liberation in Jamaica as she bears arms on the truck called “No Telephone to Heaven” to demonstrate a Black diasporic women understanding her needs in reclaiming positive ownership of not only the multi-faceted aspects of her shame, but also her narrative, the land, and that of her matrilineal history.

Returning to Loss

With Harry/Harriet’s assistance Clare begins to revolutionize and teach young Jamaicans students the same ideals at school. When Cliff places Clare in an authority position in the classroom it repurposes how she mobilizes the idea of colonial education. In previous scenes Cliff shows Clare only digesting and regurgitating facts about whiteness in relation to her own intellectual acuity. In contrast, teaching provides Clare the authoritarian role that changes the focus of the content in the class; she uses it to empower Jamaican children to understand their responsibility to the national history of their country. Ultimately, Clare begins to leverage her privilege in the interest of working-class Jamaican citizens. She clears the ruins from her

grandmother's land to honor the legacy of her Afro-Jamaican roots and reshape another layer of her debilitating shame into a productive space.⁷³ To further liberate the country from the damaging colonial history, Clare joins the guerilla counterinsurgency group to declare her commitment to revolutionary action. While Clare tentatively returns to her home nation with renewed allegiance, the capitalistic activities of the British Empire and America conspire to pillage resources from Jamaica for a movie set to debase a Maroon warrior. In conspiring with her comrades to attack Cockpit country to obstruct the movie, Clare relinquishes her indebted national servitude to both the U.S. and Great Britain.⁷⁴ Effectively, Clare utilizes the affliction of her shame to productively reframe it for herself, her family, and the native Afro-Jamaican citizen in their own nation.

⁷³ Ruinate is a distinctive Jamaican term used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into bush.

⁷⁴ Cockpit country is an area of Trelawny and Saint Elizabeth parishes of Jamaica. Cliff recreates this area of the country in her text because historically it was known for its difficult territory and Maroons used the terrain to escape local plantations to develop their own small communities outside of Spanish and British colonial control.

CONCLUSION: THE MIGRATORY POSITIONALITIES OF SHAME AND ITS UNTANGLING FOR PRODUCTIVE LIBERATION FOR AFRO-DIASPORIC WOMEN

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation each protagonist struggles to articulate the transnational dialectics of home on their migratory journeys. Morrison, Danticat, Kincaid, and Cliff illustrate that the space of home is not necessarily a neat construction of belonging and solace for Afro-descended women, particularly in the 1970's-1980s. As Black American women began to agitate for their subjectivities to be visible in the national discourse of America, movements such as the Black Arts and Power Movements helped them understand that oppression and subjugation was not only an issue for Black women in America, but also around the world. This complex and convoluted relation to home emphasized and perpetuated the problematic ideas about women's identities and facilitated the impetus of their debilitating shame. In the early portion of the 1960's-1970s many Caribbean islands begin to gain independence and looked to the United States for examples of Black resistance to white hegemony in their emergent nation-states; but I would argue that with the lack of accessibility from one nation to the other many Afro-Caribbeans did not know the extent of the disorganization within movements towards Black empowerment.⁷⁵ Although countries such as Jamaica and Haiti already had long-standing relationships with the United States, the political and economic complications stifled sustained interactions. It is important to highlight that although these relationships existed between America and the Caribbean, Afro-descended people were excluded from political positions or made to pay empire debts to support their country. When leaders did materialize from these Caribbean islands in the early part of the 20th century to mobilize Afro-diasporic connections in favor of unity for all forms of Blackness, such as Marcus

⁷⁵ See the *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (2009) by Ongiri Amy Abugo, for more information about the successes and failures of the Black Power movement in America.

Garvey or Louis Borno, they were replaced or removed from public consumption.⁷⁶ Therefore, when Haiti finished repaying France in the 1940's, and the West Indies Federation collapsed, and Jamaica achieved its independence in 1962 the nation-states lacked the wealth and organizational leadership to support their sovereignty.⁷⁷

Consequently, the sustained absence of steadfast Black leaders necessitated turmoil on the Caribbean islands moving into the 1980's. When the West Indies Federation disintegrated after Jamaica gained independence, Antigua and Barbuda were also impacted and tried to nominate meaningful leaders to campaign on their behalf for early independence from the British Empire. However, internal party strife between the Antiguan Labor Party and the Progressive Labor Movement delayed their bid for independence from Britain until 1981.⁷⁸ Similar issues with labor parties arose in Jamaica during the 1980's between the Jamaican Labor Party and Prime Minister Michael Manley's People's National Party because the two groups had radically different ideologies about the sovereign direction of the country.⁷⁹ With this political tension in place throughout Jamaica, violence erupted in Kingston and under Manley's leadership the country grew more divided as resources for the small island depleted under his guidance. Likewise in Haiti, the 1980's saw significant political problems in the aftermath of François Duvalier's presidency. His son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier continued the political misdeeds of his father with corruption and poverty remaining at the forefront of his legacy. The

⁷⁶ See *Marcus Garvey: The Life and Legacy of the Jamaican Political Leader Who Championed Pan-Africanism* (2017) by Charles Rivers Editors for more extensive insight on Garvey's contributions to 1920's America and the movements he attempted to mobilize during this period. In addition, see the "Treaty Between Haiti and the United States Regarding the Finances, Economic Development and Tranquility of Haiti" in the *American Journal of International Law* for more perspective about Louis Borno's contributions to Haiti and his presidential relationship to the United States.

⁷⁷ The article "The Independence so Hardly Won has been Maintained": C.L.R James and the U.S. Occupation of Haiti" by Raphael Dalleo discusses in depth both U.S occupation of Haiti and their debts to France until 1947. Additionally see "The Jamaican Independence Constitution of 1962" in the *Jamaican Gleaner* by Mary King for the articles and rules outlined for the independence of Jamaica in 1962.

⁷⁸ See "Assaults on Labour in Changing West Indian Economies: Antigua and St. Kitts-Nevis" (1989) by Douglas Midgett to understand the divide happening in the Antiguan political parties in the wake of impending independence.

⁷⁹ For Manley's party they wanted a brand of socialism to run the country since they were competing for a third term. While the opposing party wanted national salvation for the government because they believed Manley's party ruined the economy, promoted violence, and wanted the Communist ideology to invade and take over the country.

despotic Duvalier family's control over Haiti precipitated hundreds of deaths and prolonged violence until Jean-Claude fled the country in 1986. Even though many of these Afro-diasporic leaders and political party disputes illustrate the difficulties for Black majority countries to efficiently govern their nations adequately, each person virtually holds absolute control over their country and has an active role in determining its future. I situate my argument in the 1980's-1990's because this is a moment when Afro-descended people begin to figure out what Blackness meant alongside the implications of economics, politics, and mobility. The Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean countries I include in this dissertation are just starting to understand their identities as independent nation-states and what exercising capitalism means for their home-spaces in the immediate future. In my inclusion of Black Americans, their mobilization comes sooner with their access in the United States, but the apex of their political collaborations, for not only Black domestic benefits of identity, but also global alliances reaches its peak in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The problem I contend with throughout this dissertation is that within many of these political, national, and economic movements of progress, very few included Black women—American, Caribbean, or otherwise—in the creation of this transitional solidarity. Sensing the tangible absence of Black women in this period of radical Afro-diasporic change, I assert that Morrison, Danticat, Kincaid and Cliff seized this moment to capture the narratives of Black women participating to foster resistance to white opposition to their political involvement. In using movement at the center of their fiction these Black women writers are able to portray how the singular relation of Blackness translates differently over geopolitical borders moving into the end of the 20th century. While some of the authors use their fiction to depict the levity of empire on Black women's identities from the perspective of a child poking fun at her white British

classmate; other writers express the depth of trauma and dread of empire on a young child coming of age in a politically tumultuous nation. In their characters, Morrison, Danticat, Cliff and Kincaid create revisionist histories of their countries that include Black women advocating to see themselves in active representations of the country. Each novel addresses forms of Black disenfranchisement in Haiti, Antigua, Jamaica and America from Christopher's home in the Dungle in *No Telephone to Heaven* to Ondine and Sydney's Black servitude in *Tar Baby*. The authors detail the intricate allegiance Black female characters have to spaces they call home in spite of their treatment as inferior persons in these nations. In my research I closely probed how and why this subjugated treatment promoted a negative form of affective shame for the protagonists in the novels.

I locate the basis of my argument within the sphere of the 1980s and 1990s because Afro-diasporic women begin to dissect their introspection in public spaces through their literature. Black women in America start to understand that their works can be experiential, non-linear pieces of work, and that their stories are not the only ones to be told from an intersectional Black perspective. As I interrogated the spectrum of debilitating shame from the beginning of the emotion to the end, through these authors and characters, it illustrated a particular vulnerability to me about Black womanhood that speaks to multiple levels of their existence in differing socio-political environments. Analyzing shame exposes both how Afro-descended women interact with the world, and also how the world interacts with and perceives them: whether that is through their aesthetic, or their actions. The organization of my ordered methodology allowed my project to be fluid in understanding how gender and Blackness function as constructs of the nation it is attached to in each novel. When I centered migration, disruption and discontinuity as the stages of negative or debilitating shame before a character approaches methods to reclaiming their

shame, I wanted to highlight the conscious and the unintentional modes of affect for Black women. At many points in the protagonists' journeys to repurposing shame they fail to outwardly acknowledge the mixture of sadness and rejection they often feel in their migrations from one country or city to another. I utilize my methodology to examine why they cannot name these feelings of ambivalence when they perceive an open exposure to the gaze of others in their travels. As an important parallel to the debilitating shame that they deem themselves susceptible to encountering and the ways they find to remedy this affective emotion, I also thought it of equal interest to focus on why their affinity for their nation-states handicapped or completely impeded their ability to heal from the traumas of the country—when they decided to return, or even after they left.

While in this dissertation I showed that Morrison subverts the idea of nationalistic empathy and home with Jadine's detachment from American spaces, I also demonstrated that Danticat, Cliff, and Kincaid demonstrate the signification of home and healing for the Afro-Caribbean characters. This illustrated the aporias present in the mobility of the Black women protagonists, and though I do believe that returning to America for a brief period of time helps Jadine recognize the need to heal from her perpetual feelings of debilitating shame and homelessness, it was more salient for her to use her mobility to discover this outside of national borders than to maintain ties to America. What I think unites these texts more than divides them is their ability to create routes towards liberation for their Afro-diasporic female characters despite the barriers of debilitating shame and the work it takes to make it productive, or their affiliation to the troubled histories of their home countries; Morrison, Danticat, Kincaid, and Cliff use their fiction to speak to the different issues of the middle ground and move their

characters through migratory settings for their own journeys to their own versions of empowerment.

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