Queer Rebellion in the Novels of Michelle Cliff

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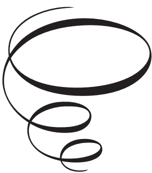
Intersectionality and Sexual Modernity

By

Kaisa Ilmonen

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean is much more than a geographical place. To speak of the Caribbean as a unified archipelago is deeply misleading. The islands are sites of numerous intersecting cultures, languages and ethnicities: these include native Caribbeans, Africans, French, Dutch, English, Jews, and people from the Indian subcontinent. "Caribbean culture" is a whirlwind of diversity; synchretic traditions and religions, creolized languages, and most importantly, ethnically heterogeneous peoples. Geographically the Caribbean refers to over 7000 islands located in the Caribbean basin and the surrounding coasts. Culturally, however, it reaches much further. For example Paul Gilroy has used the metaphor "the Black Atlantic" to emphasize the history of complicated colonial entanglements centered on the Caribbean in his study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993/1996). The Canadian city of Toronto is sometimes called one of the largest Caribbean metropolises, and David Dabydeen has called today's Britain the largest of the Caribbean islands as a result of extensive immigration since the 1950s (see Kutzinski 2001, 10). The Caribbean emerges as an outcome of diasporic movements, cultural syncreticisms, colonization, acculturations, and trade routes. For some, the Caribbean is a consumerist fantasy created by tourist guides, for others it bears the trauma of human trafficking, but for millions it is a dearly beloved home or place of origin. It is an area constituted out of multiple journeys: The Caribbean consists of "islands in between". At the same time, it is both transnational and local, what one might term *a translocal site*.

Caribbean migrant writing has been published worldwide since the 1930s. Jean Rhys' *Voyage to the Dark* (1936) was one of the first novels to describe the experiences of Caribbean expatriates in Europe. The novel was followed by cornerstones such as Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). From the 1980s, a strong front of female migrant authors of Caribbean origin started reflecting on the multi-layered cultural identities in their works. Many of

these authors challenged the notions of “roots”, “origins”, “ethnic backgrounds”, “traditions”, and the limits of language when exploring their identities in order to find ways to define their Caribbeanness. As migrants in London, Paris, New York or Toronto, many authors have tried to reclaim a home and identity in the midst of a foreign culture. In the 1980s, a generation of authors defining themselves in terms of their Caribbean origins began to create new ways to represent Caribbeanness and to reflect its multifaceted, creolized, nature. At the same time the themes of hybridity, imaginary homelands and in-betweenness appeared as crucial constituents of the general corpus of postcolonial literatures.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Michelle Cliff (1946–2016) belonged to the aforementioned 1980s generation of Caribbean migrant writers. She has explored the Caribbean migrant experience in her novels, collections of short stories, and prose poems. Her Caribbean seems to be a translocality constructed out of numerous movements and migrations, a site of diasporic journeys. Her representations sustain the larger imagery of the Caribbean, which has been metaphorized as “the Repeating Islands” by Antonio Benitez-Rojo (1996), a place with no stable origin. The absence of origins is a conspicuous feature of the Caribbean cultural space. As Carole Boyce Davies remarks, the Caribbean is not so much a geographical location as “a site of dissemination of a variety of socio-cultural processes”, as well as a space of “continuous change and the ongoing questioning of self, origin, direction” (1994, 13). Thus, literature has provided a forum for cultural self-definitions for many writers of Caribbean origin.

Cliff uses the local Caribbean traditions and folkloric mythologies in her novels to rewrite the colonial representations of the Caribbean cultural identity. In the preface to her collection of essays and prose poems, *Land of Look Behind* (1985), Cliff writes about reclaiming the effaced African past as a basis for her sense of home and identity:

> To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands us retracing the African past of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification. Or a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the artforms of these of our ancestors and speaking in the *patois* forbidden us. It means realizing our knowledge will always be wanting. It means also, I think, mixing in the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose. (*Land*, 14.)

Here Cliff sets out her methods for recognizing "a complete Caribbean female-self"[1] as an agent of resistance, of creating and imagining. She emphasizes the role of retracing one's own past, personal memories, ancestors, language and modes of representing: the forms of *textual rebellion*. This rebellion over representation is also the starting point of my study of Michelle Cliff's novels *Abeng* (1984), its sequel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and *Free Enterprise* (1993). Thus, I will focus on the processes of rewriting Caribbean history and female identity in the novels. My aim is to map the modes of Cliff's textual rebellion in order to survey her literary journeys towards the decolonization of the Caribbean home and feminist identity.

In this study, my aim is to examine how Cliff's textual rebellion is presented as a site of feminist identity construction within the fluid Caribbean cultural space. I will consider how Cliff's marginalized heroines, as non-white, often non-heterosexual, and as colonized women constitute their textual cultural spaces in order to gain agency. I will explore how the intersecting structures of subordination, alongside inherited colonial legacies, are re-thought in Cliff's novels in order for a Caribbean female subject to feel *at home*. My hypothesis is that the Caribbean cultural space is much more than a location or a place in her novels. It can also be a journey towards resistance, remembering, and identity. The journey cannot be made without a deep sense of history. I agree with Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, who has pointed out that within the Caribbean cultural reality "home" is always itself in a process of construction, the site of multiple simultaneous dialogues (2001, 1). In addition to the culturally situated identity processes, my aim is to explore the complicated relationship between the colonial modernity and Caribbean postcolonial fiction in this study. I will analyze the ways Cliff's novels challenge Western modes of representation while deconstructing the founding *mythos* of modernity. I will consider how her novels undermine and dismantle Eurocentric ways of conceptualizing history, and moreover, how they "reclaim" the Caribbean past. In a broader philosophical frame of reference, this leads to a consideration of the narrative nature of understanding modernity, and how the postcolonial novel can question the colonial "master narratives", for example in regard

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[1] However, "a complete Caribbean self" seems to be an oxymoron in Cliff's writing since, as I will demonstrate later, it is strongly connected to constructing processual and hybrid subjectivities never to be completed. Here, the claim towards a complexity of self is connected to the terminology of the identity politics of the early 80s.

to the Western Enlightenment or racial politics. I want to ask: How does Cliff's fiction subvert the regulatory paradigms of Western versions of the era of Caribbean colonization? And what kind of "liberatory poetics" is needed to confront these versions? I will argue that Cliff's fiction is an attempt to suggest such poetics, textual rebellion, for diasporic Caribbean women of color. Indeed, the aspects of gender and sexuality are crucial for her liberatory poetics. My aim is to explore what kinds of feminist and queer counter-discourses are envisioned in Cliff's novels in order to render the multiple intersecting forms of subordination visible.

However, Cliff's sexually subversive representations have often received a short shrift within Caribbean studies, while they also remain largely unknown among recent queer scholars. Although the topics of Cliff's novels precede many contemporary discussions, such as those concerning "intersectional queer studies" or "queer of color critique", they are not widely analyzed − unlike other lesbian feminist works of the 80s, such as those of Gloria Anzaldùa and Audre Lorde, which have been "rediscovered" by many recent queer scholars. Consequently, one of the objectives of this study is to reflect on the intersections of the multiple simultaneous axes of identity, specifically those of "race", ethnicity, class, gender, and location, but also sexual orientation, and to examine how all these axes are present in the Caribbean journeys depicted by Cliff. I suggest that neither postcolonial, nor feminist, nor queer methodologies alone are sufficient in the context of Cliff's writing: more intersectional points of view are necessary. Furthermore, I aim at an extensive investigation of her three novels: *Abeng, No Telephone to Heaven* and *Free Enterprise*. In addition to my focus on intersectional constitutions of cultural identity, I want to argue that *Free Enterprise* can be read in a continuum with the Clare Savage novels constituting an evolving line regarding the construction of identity.[2]

[2] There are hints in the novels supporting my reading of Clare Savage's character and the protagonist of *Free Enterprise*, Annie Christmas, in a continuum. First of all, they have both emigrated from the Caribbean, but ultimately consider their island as a home. Second, they are both described with similar adjectives, having light skin and green eyes, but most importantly, they both have an ancestor who possessed "a snuffbox carved from the Rock of Gibraltar" (*Abeng*, 29; *Free*, 200, 202). I suggest that the same ancestor and the same features posit them as parallel characters. The protagonist of Cliff's last novel *Into the Interior*, published in 2010, is once again a type of Clare Savage character and could be placed in the same continuum, without the connecting detail of the snuffbox.

Moreover, I want to emphasize that one of the ethical aims of this study is also to apply research concentrated on the Caribbean area by Caribbean scholars. I will try to keep up a dialogue between academic postcolonial theorizing and more radical Caribbean perspectives. This mutually supplementing dialogue becomes fruitful in several ways: while the Caribbean research provides critical local points of view, the Anglo-American research is helpful when examining topics such as queer studies. Finally, I would like to add that as much as this is a study about the Caribbean journeys depicted in Cliff's novels, it inevitably reflects my Caribbean journeys too. The research process has not always been easy, and many times I have been acutely aware of my reading position as a white, Nordic scholar. I hope that my cultural and geographical distance could also benefit my reading and help me to see some of the discussed themes differently.

Chapter One presents the scholarly backgrounds of this book. I will clarify my use of concepts such as postcolonial, power, discourse, intersectionality, Creole, queer and identity, connecting them with theoretical frames of reference. Chapter Two focuses more closely on the novels of Michelle Cliff. I will introduce the basic themes of each novel, highlighting their relation and contribution to Cliff's textual rebellion over representation. In order to examine Cliff's rebellious textuality, I need to focus on the ways her writing uses the textual doubling revealing the Caribbean "flip side" of the coin named "modernization", thus shaking the eurocentricity of the colonial modernity. Chapter Three, therefore, discusses the colonial discourses embedded in the Western understanding of "Modernity". I will consider colonial knowledge as "white mythology", following Jacques Derrida's definition of the term. My further analysis focuses on Cliff's narrative confrontations with these white mythologies, the ways in which she deconstructs the colonialist versions. In this chapter, I will also consider the dubious contributions made by Western Empiricism to categorizations of "race" and sexuality. In this sense, my view on modernity is fundamentally sexual and intersectional.

Rita Felski uses the term "suspicious reading" to describe the scholarly ouvre of exposing hidden truths, drawing out unflattering meanings, or revealing implicit ideologies (2015). Even though suspicious reading has its own shortcomings – as it consider criticality to be the most serious form of thought − Felski admits that suspicious reading is "an especially appealing strategy for feminists, postcolonial critics, queer theorists, and other latecomers to the academy" (2015, 109–110). In this book, I try to extend the suspicious reading strategy of postcolonial and queer studies

into unearthing the imaginative alternatives Cliff provides in her novels – her textual rebellion. While Chapter Three is more about the suspicion, the following chapters are occupied with rebelliousness. Chapters Four and Five move towards Caribbean counter-discourses created in the novels in order to examine what kinds of decolonizing discourses Cliff foregrounds in constituting textual rebellion and liberatory representations for the Caribbean woman. Chapter Four focuses on the myths, Caribbean mythology, as well as on rites and ritual healings described in Cliff's novels. I will argue that in addition to the Caribbean folklore and oral tradition, the depictions of gendered counter-myths, rites, and ritual healings operate as sites of Cliff's rebellious poetics. I will argue that the author is conjuring up a viable feminist past, a Caribbean *herstory,* needed in order to relocate a displaced feminist/postcolonial agency.

In order to fully examine Cliff's herstories, I turn to the notion of "matrilineal genealogy" as a constituent of the Caribbean female identity in Chapter Five. I will pay attention to the logic of three generations in her novels: the descriptions of rebellious grandmother and othermother figures are contrasted with the representations of colonized mothers who struggle within imperial ideologies and destructive self images. My claim is that it is the feminist daughter who is able to find her cultural "home" and to construct decolonial feminist identity after re-figuring her matrilineal heritage. Thus, I argue that Cliff's novels become stories of daughters' *Bildung*, describing their troubled journey towards a rediscovered Caribbean heritage "scattered as potash in the cane fields" (*Land*, 14). In order to examine how Cliff's narratives discuss gendered and sexual norms, which are the topic of Chapter Six, I need to establish her counter-discourses. Consequently, in Chapter Six I move on to questions of sexuality and queered histories. In this chapter, I will consider how the queered representations vary in each of the novels, providing a corollary survey of the changing field of theorizing sexualities. Overall, my aim is to examine how gendered, ethnic, sexual or other categorizations of identity become on the one hand culturally creolized, and on the other hand, historically contingent on Michelle Cliff's rebellious textual journey towards a rewritten, transnational, feminist agency.

Michelle Cliff's Works in the Context of Caribbean and US Migrant Writing

Michelle Cliff was born in Kingston, Jamaica in November 1946. In the early 1960s she moved to New York with her family and started school

there. Her parents worked in the fields of economy and administration, and they fared well compared to other immigrant families. The Cliff family maintained their middle-class lifestyle, and her light-skinned parents did not participate in the political movements of the 1960s. The solid economic status of the family made it possible for them to travel between Jamaica and the USA. Michelle Cliff has called the racial passing of her family a schizophrenic experience, but also a mode of self-protection (Adisa 1994, 275). Her parents could and wanted to pass as white, even though they felt uncomfortable because of their experiences of racism. Nevertheless, Cliff herself has claimed Jamaica as her home and she still retains her Jamaican citizenship. (See MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 17, Adisa 1994, Schwartz 1993.)

At university Michelle Cliff majored in European History and graduated with a B.A. in 1969 from Wagner College, New York. She started a career as an editor, and in the early 1970s she moved to London and completed her M.A. in the Italian Renaissance at the Wartburg Institute. After returning to the USA, Cliff advanced in her career in publishing, and in the late seventies she began to publish a lesbian feminist journal, *Sinister Wisdom,* together with her life-long partner, the feminist scholar Adrienne Rich. Cliff's first collection of poetry, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*, was published in 1980. The collection depicts the psychic displacement of a light-skinned Creole, her feelings of alienation, the prejudices of the surrounding society, and the problems of passing. Her next literary production was a semi-autobiographical novel called *Abeng,* published in 1984, describing the life of a pre-teen light-skinned girl, Clare Savage, growing up in Jamaica. Clare's *Bildung* is filled with ambivalence and contradictions regarding skin color, class, gender, and awakening sexuality. In 1985, Cliff published a collection of prose poems and essays called *Land of Look Behind*, which carries on the major themes of *Abeng,* now depicting the consequences of the multiple simultaneous oppressions and the feelings of alienation in more generalized terms. For example, the story of Anne Frank, which haunts the protagonist in *Abeng*, is included in the collection as well. The collection also includes some of the same characters as *Abeng*. Two years later, in 1987, Cliff's second novel *No Telephone to Heaven* was published. The novel continues the story of Clare Savage into her adult years, migrating between the USA, the UK, and Jamaica.

As MacDonald-Smythe concludes, Michelle Cliff's literary voice undergoes some "tonal modifications" (2001, 181) after the 80s. Her writings from the 1980s could be called more Caribbean in the sense that they are

reclaiming the Caribbean island as a home, while the works from the 1990s relocate the themes of resistance, dislocation and home into a more transnational space where the protagonists seek alternative homes (see MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 18–20, and 181–4). In 1990, Cliff published a collection of short stories, originally issued separately in various literary magazines. The collection is named *Bodies of Water*, symbolizing the central themes of its short stories, namely transition, journeying, and crossing borders. The other themes in the collection deal with issues such as abandonment and solitude. Many of the stories' characters feel alienated due to racism, sexism, homophobia, or the sheer evil-mindedness of someone else. The Holocaust, the Vietnam War, domestic violence, slavery, and the violation of civil rights remain in the backgrounds of these traumatized characters. A similar shared experience of oppression is also the main focus of Cliff's next novel, *Free Enterprise* (1993).[3] It consists of an assemblage of historical storylines concerning the abolitionary struggles in the United States during the 19th century. The novel highlights the many different forms of resistance conducted by subordinate groups, whether Jews, women, African Americans, Caribbeans, or lepers. While their struggles might be different, the experience of resistance is shared. *Free Enterprise* makes the reader particularly aware of the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression and the unstable nature of identity categories.

In 1998, Cliff published yet another collection of short stories, *Store of a Million Items*, which once again examines the themes of finding a home in a transnational cultural world and the shared experience of homelessness between differently marginalized people. The United States, metaphorically represented in the collection as a store selling almost anything, cannot offer the protagonists of the stories safety. Ten years later, in 2008, Cliff published a book-length collection of non-fictional essays called *If I Could Write This in Fire*. The collection reflects her own journeys in Jamaica, England, and the USA. Cliff's personal experiences are intertwined with the history of violence, colonialism, even genocide, while the plights of Jamaican history are also woven into the essays. The theme of history is continued in her most recent collection of short stories, published in 2009, *Everything is Now*. The title refers to the continued presence of the past in our lives on the psychological level. Yet, on a more collective level, the collection focuses on characters who need to gather their own history from

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[3] The novel was reprinted in the fall of 2004. A sub-title was added to the second edition, and the novel was called *Free Enterprise. A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*. In this study, I use the first edition.

stories and items not displayed in museums. Finally, in 2010, her last novel *Into the Interior* was published. It is a collection of short story -like chapters forming a novel depicting a young Caribbean woman's travel to the UK to study art history. The chapters describe her multiple queer encounters with people, turning an examining "colonial gaze" towards the former colonizer while trying to search for her own identity. In addition to her own literary career, Cliff also taught creative writing at several universities, and lived most of her life in California. Cliff died of liver disease in June 2016.

Despite where Cliff spent most of her life, her literary works are commonly included in Caribbean literary histories.[4] Caribbean literary history has developed in many significant stages starting from oral literature, or "oraliture", as Robert Aldrich calls "the cultural voice of the slaves", which survived well into the twentieth century to become echoed in contemporary literature (1995, 104). The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the Caribbean novel with authors such as Herbert G. de Lisser, Thomas H. MacDermot, or Claude McKay, who later migrated to the USA. However, the colonial period for literature means assimilation to the ideal of the mother country. (See e.g. *A History of Literature of the Caribbean* 2010; Donnell 2006.) Literary assimilation meant that those who were able to write literature and who had access to books and education had to master the colonial language and modes of art. Nonetheless, in his early work *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970), Kenneth Ramchand points out distinctive characteristics of early West Indian novels. He draws attention to their particular way of depicting the surrounding society "with unusual urgency and unanimity to an analysis and interpretation of their society's ills, including the social and economic deprivation of the majority; the pervasive consciousness of race and color; the cynicism and uncertainty of the native bourgeoisie after independence; the lack of a history to be proud of; and the absence of traditional settled values" (Ramchand 1970/1983, 4). Ramchand's characterization reflects an urgent need for more powerful depictions,

[4] Cliff's works are included in several anthologies and literary histories of Caribbean literature. See for example *Our Caribbean* 2008, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* 2001, *West Indian Literature* 1995, *Defining Jamaican Fiction* 1996, *Her True-True Name. Women's Writing from the Caribbean* 1989 – to name a few. In 1996, editor Pamela Maria Smorkaloff even entitled her anthology of Caribbean literature *If I Could Write This in Fire: An Anthology of Literature from the Caribbean*. The mainheading comes from Cliff's essay.

which engage with identity politics. The literary achievements of the *Négritude* movement were one answer to this need.

The literary *Négritude* movement emerged in Paris during the 1930s. The artists and authors of African and Caribbean origins involved in the movement were inspired by the search for African roots. They turned to Mother Africa when looking for history and the heritage of their own while wanting to define a particular African sensibility. The word *négritude* first appeared in a lengthy poem, *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal* (1939, transl. *Notebook of the Return to the Native Land*), by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire. The movement had an immense effect on Caribbean art and literature, also beyond the Francophone islands. Jamaican literary circles at that time, however, were involved with the Independence movement. *Négritude* was among the first art movements in Europe to define aesthetics not based on Eurocentric ideals. Another Martinican, theoretician and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, however, criticized the movement for being too tied to the past and stressed the commitment to a more universal revolution in the name of liberation. As he states in *Peau Noire, Masque Blancs* (1952, transl. *Black Skins, White Masks*), the important journey for a Caribbean is neither to Europe nor to Africa but to the "global plane of revolution" (qtd in Aldrich 1995, 112). Anglophone West Indian literature became widely recognized in the 1950s, to the extent that previous writing from the region is often overlooked in literary histories. The center of this boom, however, seems to have been London instead of the Caribbean itself, as the city hosted writers such as George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon (Donnel 2006, 11, 15).

Ideas envisioning a more syncretic, multi-voiced Caribbean Creole culture increased during the 1970s. One the most important persons behind these ideas was Edouard Glissant, who demanded that West Indian culture should return to the Caribbean and discover the strengths of 'creolité' itself – its many hybrid characteristics, religions, languages and traditions. Neither colonial Europe, nor mythical Africa, nor Utopian revolution, were as important as the acceptance and value of the multifaceted Caribbean tradition (see Aldrich 1995, 112–115). Glissant draws on Félix Guattari's and Gilles Deleuze's theorizations of rhizomes in conceptualizing Creolité identity as rooted and not rooted at the same time. In an Anglophone context, among many others, the Barbadian author and thinker Edward Kamau Brathwaite and the St. Lucian Nobel laureate poet Derek Walcott have regarded Creole society and culture as a unique continuum of

constant cultural mixings forming not a unity but an array of synchretizations.

In the 1970s, Caribbean literature embraced the themes of boundaries, borders, and oppressive definitions. Many novels of this period described the individual experiences of alienation, loss of home, despair, and even madness in a culture which seemed to have lost its history. The privileges and oppressions following from the racist and classist institutions of Caribbean (post)colonial societies were also thematized in these novels. Moreover, the questions of migration and displacement were common topics in literature, which was also the case with US minority literatures of that time. These themes were often developed in autobiographical fiction describing the painful *Bildung* process of a young protagonist. In addition, female, and in particular girl protagonists became more common in the autobiographical fiction of the seventies. (See Baugh 1995, 64–69.) Examples of such novels include *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) by Merle Hodge and *La Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972, transl. *The Bridge of Beyond*) by Simone Schwartz-Bart. The 1970s form the period of identity politics in Caribbean literature during which a heightened interest in defining the local and specific Creole identities dominated literary production after the migrant themes of the 1960s. Edward Kamau Brathwaite was perhaps one of the most prolific writers at this time. Moreover, such African American influences as black consciousness, the Black aesthetics movement and political radicalism made a massive impact also on Caribbean literature, together with the use of Creole languages and indigenous vernaculars (see e.g. Maes-Jelinek and Ledent 2001).

During the 1980s, Caribbean literature became more widely known globally. As Bénédict Ledent notes, a new generation of Caribbean writers "adopted a more dynamic view of selfhood, one in which the fragmentation inherited from history is no longer a failure" but a "source of creolized sensibility" (2000, 77). However, these works were mainly written and published abroad. The moment of apotheosis for Caribbean literature was Derek Walcott's acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 1992. Moreover, during the 1980s Caribbean literary studies developed rapidly, leading to rewritings of literary histories and more local canon formations – new genealogies of art were urgently needed. Consequently, the early Caribbean slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, first written in 1831, and often regarded as the first Caribbean novel, was re-published in 1987. The new emerging field of postcolonial scholarship took an early interest in Caribbean writing and its unique mixture of cultures. In Anglo-American, as well as Francophone

postcolonial studies, the Caribbean has formed a major frame of reference (for example Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Edouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon). In 1990 the first scholarly anthology concerning Caribbean women's writing, *Out of the Kumbla. Caribbean Women and Literature* (edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido), was published, starting a vibrant and ongoing series of studies.

Many women authors, such as Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid, Pauline Melville, Zee Edgell and Erna Brodber published their first novels during the 1980s.[5] Anglophone Caribbean women's writing of the 1980s seems to be quite consistent in terms of topic, and to a lesser extent, writing style. Race, colonialism, the local oral tradition, and the search for collective identity were some of the basic themes. Education, religion, resistance, and 'coming-of-age' were also common themes. In addition, many authors sought out and rewrote Caribbean history, which had been silenced by Western historiography. The personal and political were intertwined, and the individual processes of searching for one's identity were seen metonymically, as representing the larger processes of tracing collective, national identities. Women's writing presented an acute awareness of the multifaceted, intersecting systems of subordination, mainly those of gender, ethnicity, and class (see Juneja 1995, 89), which is not very far from the concurrent struggles of US feminists of color. For Carine M. Mardorossian, for example, this phase means "a relational model of identity" which challenges the separatism of identity politics favoring more contingent workings of differences (2005, 3).[6] These themes −

[5] Many Caribbean literary histories have cherished the narrative which Alison Donnell labels "a myth of a doubled spontaneous genesis", referring to the idea that 1950s London witnessed the boom of male writers (Lamming, Selvon, Naipaul) which was followed by a second boom centered on Jamaica "with a sudden 'explosion' of women writers" in the 1980s (2006, 11). Donnell, however, points out that the myth renders previous Caribbean women writers invisible, and in her seminal study *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006) highlights the long tradition of women writers that extends to the 1950s and beyond.

[6] Mardorossian builds a three-phased model to conceptualize postcolonial Caribbean literature. For her, the first phase is the era of the 1950s and 1960s, when a large corpus of literature focused on decolonizing rewritings based on "unitary notions of cultural and national identity" (Mardorossian 2005, 2). The second phase no longer highlighted nationalism as a serious alternative to imperialism, but rendered visible several kinds of cultural differences. The third phase of the 1980s and 90s re-imagines identities in a constant flux when different axes of identity are co-constituting each other (Mardorossian 2005, 2–3). Even though Mardorossian does not use the term "intersectionality", she articulates its

alongside literary forms such as first person narration, autobiographical elements, transliterations of oral tradition, and a strong commitment to matrilineal heritage – are also central elements in Michelle Cliff's writing.

Mother and grandmother figures are also characteristic of 1980s Caribbean women's writing. They were often depicted as the keepers of a de-colonized Caribbean past, the mediators of folklore and, as such, routes to a strong Caribbean female identity. Daughters, instead, were often represented as seekers, either homeless migrants alienated by many kinds of power structures, or as fighters capable of resisting oppressive structures. The theme of sexuality has a particular, ambivalent role in Caribbean women's writing. As Elina Valovirta explains in her study *Sexual Feelings: Reading, Affectivity and Sexuality in a Selection of Anglophone Caribbean Women's Writing* (2014), sexuality is "an ambivalent and contested terrain" which has a range of attributes of affective associations (2014, 11). The interconnections between sexuality and affectivity "emerge laden with polarizations on a continuum of ambivalence, fluctuation and inconclusivity" (Valovirta 2014, 11). During the 1980s, Caribbean feminist literature drew a more diverse picture of local characters than the 1970s period of identity politics. For example, Cliff depicts a light-skinned Creole girl at the crossroads of both black and white realities. In addition, Cliff's novels also gender the new, decolonizing "revolutionary" Caribbean literary tradition. As Belinda Edmondson notes, Cliff's works are among the very few novels where the masculine narrative tradition of revolution and resistance is transferred to represent female political agency.[7]

Nevertheless, Michelle Cliff's recognition as a Jamaican author has also been contested while her right to use the "authentic" Jamaican voice has been questioned. Sometimes her "whiteness" has been seen as a sign of "Westernness" and her identification with the African Caribbeans as the

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objectives by using terminology such as "interconnectedness", "relation identity", or "denying discrete categories" (2005, 3–4). The third phase for Mardorossian also involves transnationally connected identities and people, which are also highlighted in Cliff's works of the 1990s. For the wide range of themes particular to the Caribbean women's writing see also Valovirta 2014, 9–14.

[7] Edmondson 1999, 126. Edmondson suggests that the particular Caribbean literary tradition, which she names as "the revolutionary tradition", developed in the novels of male authors such as Wilson Harris, George Lamming, C.L.R. James, and Derek Walcott. According to Edmondson, this "revolution of a black man" is changing into a feminist one in *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff and *Angel* (1987) by Merle Collins. (See Edmondson 1999, 105–38.)

arrogance of a rich American author. Even her feminism has aroused disapproval as it has been considered a reflection of her Western values. The question of Cliff's authenticity came to a head in 1989 when Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson edited an anthology of Caribbean women's writing, *Her True-True Name*. In the author biography, they are sceptical of Cliff's 'Caribbeanness' and comment on her skin color, even though they include her writings in the anthology.[8] Cliff has responded to these reservations many times and emphasized light-skinnedness as being more a sign of class rather than 'race' in Jamaica. She has opposed biological boundaries in defining Caribbeanness and highlighted its hybrid nature (Schwartz 1993). In her essays and interviews, Cliff has sought to define Caribbean culture and literature as a site of diasporic, multicultural consciousness, and claimed recognition for authors living outside the islands. In her later works she has increasingly stressed transnationality and positions 'in-between'.

I do not consider it necessary to frame Cliff's 'biographical' location as the primary context of her fiction. On the contrary, I seek to respect the textual locus of her novels, and explore the contexts her narratives themselves suggest. It seems clear enough that many of these narratives reflect American literary, political and cultural discussions; the queer-feminist themes and the transnational couplings of her writings draw on the US debates concerning the feminism of color, yet Caribbean sensitivities unquestionably permeate her novels. In this study, I therefore employ Anglo-American methodologies and studies of US minority literatures beside Caribbean feminist and literary sources. As MacDonald-Smythe concludes, "the discourse community that she [Cliff] is now part of is itself changing, as her location becomes increasingly transnational. Cliff's recent writings reflect the variety that is core to these discourse communities" and she is "constantly presenting new narratives of becoming from old versions of belonging" (MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 175). In recent literary discussions, Cliff's Caribbeanness is no longer questioned. Her works have been established as representations of multicultural negotiations of diasporic identities. (See MacDonald-Smythe 2001; 19, 174, 181.) My study of her novels also acknowledges these themes.

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[8] See more on this discussion e.g. MacDonald-Smythe 2001, 181; Strachan 2002; 225; Rody 2001, 152. Still, in the article published in 2006, Sika Alaine Dagbovie describes Cliff as someone "whose racial identification provokes scepticism" (2006, 97).

Light-skinnedness was not the only reason why Cliff has been pushed into the margins of the Caribbean literary "canon". Her homosexuality has sometimes been seen as a form of European decadence, not acceptable in Jamaican culture. Cliff has been open about the lesbian themes in her novels as well as her own lesbian identity in all her writings and interviews, and proffers it as a reason why she cannot return to Jamaica, a "repellently homophobic society" (in Schwartz 1993, 601). In her novels, Jamaica remains a place which is not safe for gays and lesbians but which is, nevertheless, home. She devotes her writings to Jamaican traditions and culture, and the heritage of Jamaican mothers and grandmothers, while emphasizing that she cannot ever live there (see MacDonald Smythe 2001, 18 and Schwartz 1993, 601–5). Therefore, I think, it is important to reflect on how Michelle Cliff, among other things, is creating textual space and rewriting a past for silenced Caribbean (homo)sexuality. Therefore, methodologically my aim is to apply the perspective described as "intersectionality" and remain theoretically sensitive to many kinds of differences, whether gender, sexuality, class, or migrancy, even though this study is broadly contextualized in the field of postcolonial studies.

Postcolonial Studies Today

Methodologically, my study of Michelle Cliff's novels draws heavily on postcolonial criticism. However, it broadly combines feminist, queer, and Caribbean studies, therefore approaching the theoretical perspective recently named as *intersectionality*. In this chapter I will define the theoretical concepts I use; terms such as postcolonial and colonial, identity and cultural identity, agency, Creole, intersectionality, and finally queer are discussed in more detail. My objective is to recognize both the differences within the Caribbean female identities, and their socially constructed nature in the context of Cliff's fiction. Postcolonial literary studies is generally understood as a critical method deconstructing colonial modes of representing in literature. According to Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, postcolonial literary studies have many focuses: They might, on the one hand, concentrate on the cultural history of a particular minority group, in which case a postcolonial scholar concentrates on the gaps of historical colonial archives and confronts them by recovering oral "sources of cultural memory" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 14). On the other hand, postcolonial scholarship might recognize double- or intersectional identity constructions and heterogeneity, while having an emphasis on "diverse voices within a 'single' group or location" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 14).

Moreover, the challenges of diaspora, migration, exile, multiply located subjectivities and borderland experiences are widely discussed.[9]

The themes of cultural negotiations and migrant movements have also led the way to strategically emphasizing communalities and localities, or to reconsiderations of whiteness as a “racial identity position” (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 15). While Cliff rewrites the history of Caribbean women, her novels examine the multi-levelled assemblage of oppressive systems which classify a Creole woman as an outsider or an inappropriate person. Her novels reclaim the story of Caribbean women and give them a voice with which they can relate their own versions. Cliff’s mode of representation deconstructs the Victorian novel form, thereby contesting its reliability in structuring the colonial reality while creating a liberatory poetics for her transnational subjects.

Postcolonial studies is an umbrella term for a number of concepts, and it is necessary to define a few of them here. I will base my use of terminology on the definitions by Singh and Schmidt, mentioned earlier, but also on more “classic” postcolonial texts such as those by Elleke Boehmer, Ania Loomba, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin, and Helen Tiffin. I will use the term *imperialism* to refer to either military or symbolic power over another country or nation. Imperialism thus denotes an expansion of the European colonial rule during the 19th century, while *colonialism* refers to both the consolidation and the manifestation of the imperial power (see Boehmer 1995, 2). According to Boehmer, colonialism also signifies “the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants” (1995, 2). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin use the word *colonialism* to name an ideology connected to the European processes of modernization, industrialization, and industrial need for raw materials. For them, the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is based on stabilized racial hierarchies: colonialism includes a “‘civilizing’ task involving education and paternalistic nurture”, a so-called “white man’s burden” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 47). It poses the ideas and values of the colonizer as the natural order of things. It is noteworthy, however, that there is a vital difference between the terms *colonialism* and *colonial*

[9] One of the central tropes in postcolonial studies seems to be the moving subject. For Zygmunt Bauman the idea of the “tourist” epitomizes postmodern life, for Bhabha it is the “migrant” that metaphorizes postcolonial life, for Said the “exiled”, for Deleuze and Guattari “a nomad”, while Stuart Hall writes about “diasporic subjects”, to give a few examples.

− the latter being not so much an ideology as it is an overall “ethos”, the culture created by the colonialist presence.

If the concepts *colonialist* and *colonial* are applied to narratives, their difference becomes clearer. According to Boehmer, colonial narratives reflect the colonial ethos without actually depicting imperialism. Colonial is a more general term meaning “writing concerned with colonial perceptions and experience, written mainly by metropolitans, but also by Creoles and indigenes, during colonial period” (Boehmer 1995, 2). The colonial order is typically presented as “natural” and unquestioned within these narratives. Colonialist narratives, on the contrary, describe colonization – its systems and consequences. Colonialist literature is written by Europeans for other Europeans, and as Boehmer underlines, it is “informed by theories concerning the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire” (1995, 3). While the colonial order is widely described in Cliff’s novels, they criticize it and deconstruct its legitimized nature, making them therefore *postcolonial.*

The terms *postcolonialist and postcolonial* have recently been applied in various ways. In this study “postcolonial” is the critical term referring to a cultural space where colonialism is over but its effects still have an impact on the peoples and their society. Postcolonial criticism aims to examine the very mechanisms, such as art, language, or gender systems, which are still imbued with colonialist modes of thinking. Postcolonial refers to circumstances where previously colonized peoples can construct their historical subjectivities only in subordinating terms. According to Boehmer, “postcolonial” is an umbrella term including a diverse array of critical research and literature. Postcolonial writers sought to oppose discourses which supported colonization and the “colonial order of things” – myths, classificatory systems, imageries of subordination. Postcolonial literature is therefore “deeply marked by experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire” (see Boehmer 1995, 3).[10] Instead, “postcolonialism”, or postcolonialist practices, refer to an ideology or a perspective highlighting colonialist structures in the post-imperial era. Postcolonialist practises are *analyzed by* critical scholars and *carry on* strategies of colonialism. In some cases I also use the term *decolonial*, which in this study refers to the framework of resisting and undoing the

[10] Some theorists use the hyphenated form post-colonial (see e.g. Bongie 1998). Boehmer regards the hyphenated form as a temporal term referring to era after World War II (1995, 3). In this study I will consistently use the terminological logic outlined by Boehmer.

effects of colonialism. I use the term *anticolonial* merely as an antonym for colonial.

Besides colonial/colonialism and postcolonial/postcolonialism, a third pair of terms also appears frequently: *neocolonial/neocolonialism*. "Neocolonial" refers to an era after the colonial order when multi-national corporations, global flows of capital, and unequal uses of resources stabilize, once again, the hierarchy between the West and the rest. Neocolonialist mechanisms are incorporated into economical structures of power, thereby pursuing colonialist dynamics within the developing countries (see Boehmer 1995, 9).[11] Finally, I assert that it is important to add that both postcolonial and neocolonial are problematic concepts. As Constance S. Richards notes, they highlight the colonial experience, excluding other forms of experiences. For example, they are unable to describe the forms of oppressions African Americans and Native Americans face (Richards 2000, 2). We must also keep in mind, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note, that postcolonial studies do not insist on returning to some kind of precolonial "authentic" space. Rather, they address the network of hybrid relationships and foster a dialogue with the European ways of thinking. She claims that postcolonial critique is more a process than an arrival and refers to subverting, challenging, and new ways of reading (Aschcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 20–1). This kind of spectrum of critical re-readings and -writings can also be detected in Cliff's novels. She uses narrative techniques which place the (colonial) story and the (postcolonial) counter-story in dialogue − thus rendering visible the Caribbean reality consisting of simultaneously existing systems of knowledge.

Postcolonial literary research began to emerge during the last decades of the twentieth century in connection with poststructural, feminist, and so called constructivist, postmodern ways of theorizing. Furthermore, Marxist critiques of cultural hegemonies, and (identity) political movements of the 60s and 70s undergirded discussions of postcolonial criticism. Yet Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1977 has often been regarded as its starting point. In his study, Said applies Foucault's theories on discourse and the productive nature of power in analysing how the "orient" was represented and encountered in Europe. Orientalism refers to European

[11] Singh and Schmidt, however, have a different emphasis in their understanding of "neocolonial". They define neocolonial study as a type of theorizing which applies Marxist criticism to an analysis of global capitalism (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 19). I use the term "transnational" in my study for such discussions.

ways of seeing, naming, and stereotyping "the Orient" as its other.[12] This kind of perspective leans on categories such as "race" and "ethnicity". Both terms are difficult to define, and as Stuart Hall states, they are often combined with their discursive structures (2000, 224). The scientific nature of the concept of "race" has been widely discredited within the humanities and the natural sciences long ago.[13] In my study, race refers to a discursive system of exclusion/oppression based on visible markers of difference from the white norm. I agree with Hall that race is a constituted system of socio-economic power and exploitation which "naturalizes its effects" (2000, 222). Ethnicity, on the contrary, is regarded by Hall as "cultural belongingness" (2000, 233).[14] It is a concept referring to a *difference* based on culture and/or religion, rather than a difference based on a physical body. In his more fluid understanding of ethnicity Hall seems to be in dialogue with Werner Sollors, who conceptualizes ethnicity, not as an authencity or an ancient origin, but as an acquired modern sense of belonging. As Sollors argues, it is not "any *a priori* cultural difference that makes ethnicity" but it is constituted in each generation as a powerful symbol providing the sense of originality (1989, xvi and xi–xiv).

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[12] Of course, postcolonial theorizing had also been influenced by earlier studies. Already W.E.B. Du Bois, during the early years of twentieth century, wrote about the "double consciousness" of African-Americans, and Frantz Fanon's pathbreaking work in the 1950s used Lacanian psychoanalysis to study the self-reflection of "racialized" subjects. Moreover, Caribbean writers such as C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire and early Pan-Africanist thinker Marcus Garvey must be mentioned when looking for the roots of postcolonial thinking.

[13] In the field of critical studies in the 80s and 90s this was noted by enclosing the term in quotation marks. They were intended to illustrate that the researcher was aware of the obsolete nature of "race". However, it is a socially constructed category still present in many people's everyday reality, and that is why I do not use quotation marks around it. However, race remains a contested category even in this political sense. Paul Gilroy, for one, distances himself from any kind of use of the term race in his controversial study *Against Race* (2000). Gilroy regards politicized identities which are based on race as "pious ritual in which we always agree that 'race' is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world" [---] (2000, 52). Moreover, for Gilroy, race-based politics means reactive attachment to a category whose origins can be traced to the dubious pseudosciences (2000, 53).

[14] According to Hall, it is important to acknowledge that recently the term "race" has been "ethnicized" whereas "ethnicity" has been "racialized". He claims that biological racism and the talk about cultural difference are becoming more and more intertwined. They constitute "not two different systems but racism's two registers" (Hall 2000, 223).

Postcolonial methodology has also been criticized widely ever since the 1990s – mainly by postcolonial scholars themselves, who are more than active in self-critical interrogation. Its "academic" and "elitist" commitments to Western modes of theorizing have aroused controversy: it has been seen as so preoccupied with constructions and deconstructions of identity positions that particular and local everyday experience has been in danger of becoming blurred. Carole Boyce-Davies argued in 1994 that postcolonial theory is often an overly totalizing (Western, academic) discourse. She called it a "conceptual sweep", which attempts to "contain all of these [non-Western] cultures, movements and peoples in some giant conglomerate-like, monolithic sprawl" (Boyce-Davies 1994, 82). The Westernness of postcolonial theorizing has been discussed extensively, and it has been argued that different kinds of cultures and countries with a colonial background have been colonized over again by the theoretical imperatives of Western universities. Moreover, by teaching many different kinds of non-Western texts side by side in a neatly fenced-off slot called "postcolonial literature", the well-meaning literary intelligentsia in Western universities is bringing about a new ghetto for postcolonial authors, creating corollary pressures for some authors to be defined as postcolonial in order to be read.[15]

The ambiguity of postcolonial discourse has been criticized from early on. On the one hand, according to Boyce-Davies (1994, 85), postcolonial theory defined people as "minorities" and "subjectivities" and then forced them to act as such – "leaving us [---] forever forced to interrogate European discourses". For her, postcolonial theory must be challenged to spell out who has the right to develop new sites of identity – seldom the subject of postcolonial study. (See Boyce-Davies 1994, 80–92). On the other hand, E. San Juan Jr. (2000, 7) speaks of "postcolonial hypnosis by the mysteries of discourse", prohibiting the "postcolonial evangelist" from posing disturbing questions about "concrete historical conjunctures" while allowing him or her to occupy "the realm of floating signifiers". Thus both Davies and San Juan have demanded a decolonization of postcolonial theory itself. However, postcolonial thinking has developed a great deal since the 1990s. It is no longer a monolithic field, and has not only risen from Western universities. For instance, Maureen Moynagh sketches an ethical turn in postcolonial theory which involves two simultaneous vectors: translocality and non-universality recognizing the regional

[15] For more on the problem of Western theory and the new ghettos of postcolonialism, see McLeod 2010, 287–293. See also Ilmonen 2016 on contestations of postcolonial studies.

differences. She uses the term “postnational” in order to signal “discomfort with universalizing impulses and a recognition of a [---] global which is not homogenous” (Moynagh 1999, 111 and 130). Moynagh considers that Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven,* in particular, reflects the ethical translocality she connects to the ethical turn in postcolonial theory.

In *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (2000), San Juan Jr. lashed out heavily at postcolonial theorizing. Postcolonial theorizing, according to him (San Juan 2000, 6), has a “dilettantish” relationship to capitalism. Postcolonial criticism has been unable to fully analyze the myriad ways in which capitalism is involved in transnational, “electronically produced cultural hybridity”, or the drive by late capitalism to govern global multitudes. For San Juan (2000, 6), this is due to postcolonial studies’ tendency to assign “ontological priority to the phenomenon of cultural difference between colonized and colonizer”, ignoring the analysis of “in-between” spaces, critical of capitalism. However, while I accept San Juan’s more intersectional claims regarding postcolonial theorizing, we must ask ourselves: if we do not prioritize any difference but try to drag along all kinds of hegemonies in our analysis, will the task become a “mission impossible”? Will we grow so deeply entangled in our critical web that our political statements become diluted with infinite complexity?

The fundamental criticism directed at postcolonial studies has been the lack of analysis of historical materialism. Arif Dirlik, for one, in his oft-quoted 1994 essay, charged postcoloniality with having become “a projection of the subjectivities and epistemologies of First World intellectuals of Third World origin” (343) who themselves benefit from the unarticulated capitalist logic of postcolonial theory. For Dirlik (1994, 356), global capitalism fuels the condition of postcoloniality seeking a maximum advantage from fetishizing difference: “I would suggest instead that postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism”. Provoked, John McLeod calls Dirlik “an intellectual Luddite”, unprepared to “make sense of the world in new ways and with new vocabularies” and adhering to the “familiar lexicon of Marxist critique” (2010, 297). I would like to argue that while postcolonial critical practice should be able to incorporate Marxist criticism, nothing in the current world of multiplicities can be adequately explained with just one set of critical tools. McLeod has a point in saying that while “postcolonialism is inevitably fated to inhabit the contemporary milieu of capitalist modernity” (2010, 298), that does not inevitably condemn it to complicity with global capitalism.

The primary fallacy of postcolonial critical practice for San Juan, however, combines his previous critical points: the minefields facing the poststructuralist rise of postcolonial theory lay in theorizing agency. San Juan writes that when hybridity, local knowledges, cyborgs, and borderland scripts became slogans of postcoloniality, they tended to "obfuscate the power of the transnational ideology and practice of consumerism" (2000, 8). He seems to be claiming that an inadequate commitment to theorizing agency creates slogans, often related to some kind of utopistic realm of equality in third-space, and clouds scholars' views related to the aforementioned "concrete historical conjunctures" (San Juan 2000, 9). Moreover, he claims that neither liminality, interstitiality, nor even the "third space of enunciation" can save us from the claims of historical materialism and the complex analysis of agency. I think that San Juan is right in saying that postcolonial critics tend to remove the colonizer/colonized relationship "from their circumstantial ground" (2000, 9); this results in separating the phenomenon analyzed from its larger structure while leaving this structure intact. However, I do not think that all postcolonial scholars have failed to analyze agency, even in the context of historical structures. The much maligned Homi K. Bhabha (1995), for example, has argued with extreme intricacy regarding the issue of agency in a poststructuralist framework; which, sadly enough, often remains unstudied and misargued – leaving Bhabha, unfairly, floating with the signifiers.

In 2010, *Modern Fiction Studies* published a theme issue on the current state of postcolonial theory. In their introduction, Alfred J. López and Robert P. Marzec raise yet another critical point: the problem of the multiplicity of national and colonial histories, of individual variations of race, class, ethnicity and gender. Their claim is that no meta-theoretical model has ever done them all justice; they suggest that the most immediate danger posed by the signifier "postcolonial" is "that of renouncing cultural and historical specificity in the name of theoretical consistency" (López and Marzec 2010, 678). McLeod too reminds us of the problems which arise if words such as "postcolonialism" or "colonialism" are attached to "any and every example of international or intercultural conflict at the expense of an attention to the specifics of each case" (2010, 284). I would like to add that this terminological persistence should be rethought even on the "colonial side" – i.e. the side which frames otherness as otherness. If such concepts as "European", "Western", "Us", "The European novel", "Western Art Forms" – which are meant to define, or to contrast with, what is alien, strange, or indigenous – remain stereotypical constructions, how diverse can the differentiated, defined otherness be? Is there such a

thing as “the European novel”? I argue that while we need to deconstruct the generalizing tendencies of the postcolonial critical practice, we should also avoid arguments of a unified “Westernness”, as though it could not include multiple “normalcies”.

Writers such as Neil Lazarus (2005 and 2011), Benita Parry (2004), Timothy Brennan (1997), and David Scott (2005) have all presented more recent criticism of postcolonial theory. They have all been suspicious of the heavy poststructuralist imprint inherent in postcoloniality. Scott, for one, has contested the “anti-essentialist dogma” which this kind of constructivist postcolonial critique ends up repeating: for him, the constructivist paradigm is no more successful than the essentialist one. On the contrary, he argues that postcolonial studies have taken an excessively paradigmatic standpoint on scholarship. For Scott (2005, 395), a particularly problematic paradigm is that “Europe”, and I might also add “West”, is construed as unitary and unchanging. Europe has become the norm against which the other, in need of emancipation, is defined, read and interpreted. In such thinking, both “the metropolitan” and “the margin” are stabilized constructs, even though they both remain inherently multifaceted and ambivalent. Scott goes on to note that the idea of Europe – required of the opponent of any critical discussion of colonialism – is stable, known in advance (2005, 395). While postcolonial criticism insists that colonial discourses and identities have to be deconstructed and revealed as social constructs, the same requirement does not apply to projections of Europe.

Of course, postcolonial studies also faces new challenges. I will map some of these challenges below. Globalization, economy, and the process of transculturaltion provided by media technology are certainly burning issues of the 21st century, and I agree with Simon Gikandi, who argues that while “the intellectual power of the ‘narrative of decolonization’ has collapsed”, postcolonial scholars must redirect their criticism in a myriad and virtual directions instead of merely “wishing away Eurocentrism” (qtd in Loomba et al. 2005, 8). The empires have changed in the global world: the study of the US economical Empire, its constitutive discourses and the ideological rhetorics of multinational corporations, absorbing models of imperialism, could benefit from postcolonial criticism (Loomba et al. 2005, 10–11). Terrorism studies, religion, social media and new media environment, and postcolonial ecocritical literary scholarship, for example, should be added to the list of challenges (Ilmonen 2016). Moreover, it remains to be seen whether there will be something like “Materialist” postcolonial studies, in the footsteps of pioneers such as Aijaz Ahmed, for

example, after the heavy narrative and textual turn of the field. At least Michelle Cliff's novels would be a fertile field for many kinds of interpretations in their multifaceted textuality.

Caribbean and Feminist Contestations on Postcolonial Studies

Gendered identities are sensitive to issues concerning geopolitical locations, diasporas, transnationality, and several types of colonial hegemonies. Postcolonial feminism has acknowledged the differences within ethnic groups, as well as theorizing the socially constructed nature of femininity. Postcolonial feminism has strongly criticized the tendency to produce stereotypical images concerning the "third world woman" within dominant discourse.[16] The work of Gayatri Spivak has been groundbreaking regarding historiography and postcoloniality. From the 1980s onwards her deconstructive work has been concerned with the imperial epistemologies of Western historiography and the ways of representing the "subaltern woman". Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", originally published in 1988, problematized the categories of hegemonic language and their ability to operate as the medium of self-expression for subaltern women. According to her argument, the third world woman is constituted as a subaltern subject within the hegemonic language and as such is unable to gain agency using the very language which already categorizes her as "speechless" (see Spivak 1988).

Speechlessness is also widely studied by Caribbean authors and feminists. I will follow Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert, who advises Western scholars not to reduce particular Caribbean gendered experiences to US or European theories of feminism and gender relations (1997, 7). According to Paravisi-Gebert, one of the special features of Caribbean feminism is the leading role of female authors in political discussions, in creating a historiography, and in describing the female agency of resistance. Paravisini-Gebert mentions Michelle Cliff as one such author (1997, 14). Rhoda Reddock, a Trinidadian feminist scholar, has also noted some particularities in Caribbean feminist thought. One of them is a multiplicity of differences that needs to be acknowledged. Caribbean feminism is not only a Black feminist movement: a variety of experiences for women of color must be recognized, including those of white Creole women whose

[16] See e.g. Spivak 1987; Davies 1994; hooks 1997; Alexander and Talpade Mohanty 1997; Loomba 1998, 163–6; Singh & Schimidt 2000, 32–4.