

**NARRATIVES OF BECOMING: HYBRID IDENTITY AND THE COMING
OF AGE GENRE IN CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE**

by

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ABSTRACT

The coming of age genre is a popular and longstanding one within the Caribbean, particularly with reference to female writers. This thesis considers how women writers from across the Caribbean have reconceptualised and altered the coming of age genre to narrate their female hybrid Caribbean identities. I focus on a close textual analysis of four main novels - Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* - as well as considering several other secondary coming of age texts from across the Caribbean, all of which emerge from various distinct linguistic and cultural contexts. In doing so this work looks at the links between texts from across the region in order to discuss how the female genre differs from the masculine tradition, how it presents a gendered identity formation and how that process of becoming is marked by the hybrid identities of the authors and their protagonists.

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INTRODUCTION: FORMATIONS OF BECOMING

The coming of age novel provides a vehicle for the discussion of identity and its surrounding issues. Through the movement from childhood to adulthood this genre allows a discussion of personal identity and selfhood and works as an allegory, or parallel imagining, of nationhood and national identity. As such, it is particularly useful as a trope for newly independent countries or areas with complex identities. In the Caribbean, the issue of identity has always been of particular importance and so it is this area of the world - and how they choose this genre to express those anxieties and issues - that is of interest to me. In this thesis I will be comparing a number of coming of age narratives from across the Caribbean, which are written by women writers and which feature female protagonists, in order to discuss issues of identity formation, with a particular emphasis on hybrid identity.

The coming of age novel as a genre emerges out of the tradition of the bildungsroman. It has sometimes been called the novel of formation or the novel of development but the bildungsroman specifically refers to a particular set of texts that emerged from Germany and were read in an Enlightenment context. It appeared as a term in 1819 and was retrospectively attached to a certain kind of narrative, such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795). It is often defined as 'a novel recounting the early emotional development and moral education of its protagonist' (Millard, 2). Consequently, the bildungsroman values certain notions of linear progression and coherent identity. It relies heavily on Enlightenment ideas of human perfectibility and Romantic views of childhood as a discrete season of youth, out of which emerges a creative and coherent individual. As the term has evolved however, the genre has been variously defined and there is some debate, particularly among German scholars,

as to its precise meaning and translation. It has since been adopted to refer to any novel of youthful development but critics, such as James Hardin, have argued that ‘there is no consensus on the meaning of the term bildungsroman’ (x) and that literary critics have ‘tended to use the term ahistorically’ in ways which change its meaning particularly outside of the specifically Enlightenment context of ‘bildung’ (Hardin, xi). As a genre term then, the bildungsroman seems problematic for use in a contemporary context. It provides a useful foundation for thinking about novels of childhood and of development into adulthood but it is also mired in its particular European and Enlightenment context. As such, although this study will remain aware of the structure of the bildungsroman and how it informs the texts discussed, it will also remain aware of the corresponding limitations.

Thus, I will be using an overlapping term, one which contains the same idea of a narrative that follows a character’s progression from childhood to adulthood but which is less rooted in a European, Enlightenment tradition. The alternative term ‘coming of age’ is defined as ‘to reach maturity’ or ‘to reach full legal adult status’¹. The term coming of age obviously produces its own set of semantic difficulties. To come of age is to become an adult, to reach a certain status where one has the rights and responsibilities of a mature individual but all of these defining terms are of course, imprecise and culturally relative. Coming of age is therefore an unstable definition and, as a corollary, is a more flexible genre term. This terminology has been much used in anthropological research, such as Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* however, it has also been used in its literary form in the discussion of texts, for example Marjorie Garber’s *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* or Ken Millard’s *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction*. The question of course becomes:

¹ Several dictionaries use either one or both of these definitions.

when do characters come of age? Formative experiences or the reaching of that illusive term maturity can, after all, occur at any age. Merle Collins' *Angel* for example, could be termed the coming of age narrative of Angel's mother Doodsie as much as it is for the title character, even though Doodsie is already legally an adult woman and a mother at the start of the text. Barbara White, an influential critic of the genre, chooses to narrow the definition of coming of age to a very specific age: 'I have as a general rule restricted my discussion to fiction with major characters between twelve and nineteen' (xii). Thus, her discussion of the female coming of age novel centres on adolescence as the time of change and she defines her texts and the genre accordingly. This narrow view of the genre seems to be, to some extent, arbitrary and restrictive. In contrast, Susan Fraiman's discussion of the bildungsroman or, as she prefers to call it, the novel of development expands the concept of coming of age rather than limiting it. She sees the period of becoming as 'a lifelong act continuing well past any discrete season of youth' (Fraiman, x). This broader view of the genre seems more fitting and useful. My choice of the term coming of age is informed particularly by its imprecision, its ability to include texts which the term bildungsroman would exclude because its structural definitions are more severe. The coming of age novel refers to any novel where a process of becoming occurs and as such, as a genre, while it may be imprecisely defined, it allows a discussion of what coming of age can actually mean; of what a coming into selfhood, into an adult interaction with the world, would look like. The texts studied here follow their characters from childhood beyond what would normally be considered the period of adolescence and young adulthood and in doing so, extend outwards the confines of what can be considered a coming of age narrative or coming of age experiences. All genre definitions are fluid and are remade with every text as they fit into or reshape

the genres we give them. The collection of texts addressed here aims to further expand the definition of the coming of age novel by depicting the process of coming into oneself as a continual and often unresolved process, one in which becoming is actually a series of becomings, out of which emerge ever changing and fluid identities. Thus the coming of age genre, as I will be discussing it, denies the structural rigidity and historical fixity of the bildungsroman and the self-imposed limits of the novel of adolescence that Barbara White refers to. Terms such as coming of age and becoming seem particularly apt when discussing the Caribbean given Stuart Hall's pronouncements on identity. A foundational Caribbean cultural theorist, Hall maintains that 'we should think, instead, of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation' (222). Hall's influential work moves the discussion of identity away from the rigidity implicit in the traditional bildungsroman to a discussion of on-going production and so the notion of narratives of becoming encapsulates more of the discussions surrounding Caribbean literature than other attendant terms.

Another reason to be aware but wary of the bildungsroman is its particularly masculine context. E.K Labovitz discusses the female bildungsroman in her critical study *The Myth of the Heroine* and her aim is to uncover a set of texts that may be called female bildungsroman. Despite her efforts, however, the texts she identifies are few and some of them directly emulate their masculine forbearers, whether ironically or not. Most other critics who discuss female development from childhood to adulthood use alternative genre terms such as the novel of development, the novel of adolescence or the initiation novel. Female coming of age it seems is inimical to the bildungsroman's particular trajectory of apprenticeship, moral development and entrance into the wider social world. This is perhaps because there is a significant

difference in the ways in which women come of age. Fraiman argues that the 'aggressive trajectory' mapped by the bildungsroman, which necessitates a 'progressive development' towards a 'coherent identity' has excluded women and as such 'women may be less apt to see them as natural or inevitable, may be more apt to treat them ironically' (x). She sees female becoming as significantly different to the masculine progression which fiction expounds, so that we must 'imagine the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as an endless negotiation of a crossroads' (Fraiman, x). Feminist critics have long considered gender, and the process by which one becomes gendered, along similar lines: not as an essential fact of nature but as a process that occurs throughout a lifetime. Simone de Beauvoir famously stated that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (301). Judith Butler in her work on the performativity of gender also argues that one learns how to become a woman, how to be feminine, through socialisation. In her critical work *Gender Trouble*, she draws the distinction between sex (male/female) and gender (masculinity/femininity) and she argues that whilst sex might be essential and biological, gender is performative and relies on the learning and performing of certain gestures and acts which mark us as either masculine or feminine. Becoming, then, is a complex and continuous process of identity formation, rather than any pre-existing identity which begins to emerge with maturity. There is no essential woman-ness but rather a process of acculturation. This is not to say that masculinity could not be theorised, as Judith Butler does, as a series of acts which one performs and therefore, as just as continuous and fluid as the female becoming discussed above. In discussing gender in this thesis I will be focusing on female texts and female protagonists but the underlying implications are of femininity and its social categorisation. To be female is not to be essentially distinct from male other than the biological realities of sex. There

is no essentialist attempt in this work to argue that to be born female is to be already inherently defined. Rather, as Butler discusses, our belief in stable identities and gender differences is, in fact, compelled ‘by social sanction and taboo’ (‘Performative’, 271) and is the result of both subtle and blatant social frameworks that are placed onto the subject. To live as female however, is to be embroiled in these social constructions of femininity and is, I would argue in line with Butler and other social constructionist theorists, to encounter the world differently. If, as Butler argues, ‘gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed’ (‘Performative’, 278) then gender is not tied to the materiality of the body but to the social fictions and processes of femininity and masculinity. As such, there is ‘neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes’ because ‘gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis’ (Butler, ‘Performative’, 273). Such social construction theories of gender heavily influenced this thesis. As this work discusses female, femaleness, women’s creative acts and the different ways in which female identity is worked through in various texts, there is always the underlying foundation that gender is a construction rather than essential. Thus the process of becoming is the process of becoming gendered and of negotiating these social constructions. Butler also discusses how being a subject within the social process of gendering in turn resituates our understanding of biological sex, of the male/female dichotomy. Butler argues that our ‘gender acts’ affect us in such material ways that even our perception of biological sexual differences are affected by social conventions ‘which govern the materialization of bodies’ (*Bodies*, 3). Rather than the natural or essential creating the social instead the social creates our understanding of

the natural. This concept is particularly useful when considering the process of becoming as linked to female identity as it allows for an engagement with the unspoken and often unquestioned social norms of being female and becoming a woman, which the coming of age protagonists negotiate. The frameworks I am employing to discuss gender involve how the process of being gendered creates the division between male and female, maps femininity and masculinity onto biology and that therefore the female experience of identity formation is distinct from the male experience. This construction of gender as a social process is also one with a temporal dimension. As this thesis will discuss, coming of age is a process without a fixed end point, it is a series of becomings and likewise gender construction which is part of this process is also a 'a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time' (Butler, 'Performative', 274). The coming of age narrative, as a vehicle for discussing gendered identity, is conceptualized in this thesis as mapping the social conventions and norms that constitute the processes of gendering rather than an essentialist ideology of gender difference.

In the study of European and American literature there are few texts which discuss female coming of age novels. Within the area Millard addresses, older works such as, Barbara White's *Growing up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction* do focus on gender and the coming of age novel but this same diligence has not been applied to Caribbean literature. Susan Fraiman and E.K Labovitz, mentioned previously, have particularly interesting studies of the genre that focus on European literature, although they imagine the boundaries of the genre in different ways. In addition, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland discuss female coming of age in their study *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* which deals primarily with twentieth-century American texts. With regards to a comparative

study of several coming of age novels there are few examples outside of these two arenas. The exceptions being Anne Eysturoy's *Daughters of Self-Creation* which focuses solely on Chicana literature and Geta LeSeur's collection *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman*, which concentrates on the African diaspora and investigates both male and female 'initiation novels', never solely Caribbean literature or female narratives. Within the Caribbean tradition certain novels, particularly Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, have been read within their genre structure as coming of age novels. Several critics, including Louis Caton in the article 'Romantic Struggles: The Bildungsroman and Mother-Daughter Bonding in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*' and Maria Karafilis in 'Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the Bildungsroman in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*' have considered Kincaid's novel of Caribbean girlhood as part of a larger genre tradition. Despite an awareness of specific texts as coming of age novels and their importance as part of a genre there is no Caribbean equivalent of Millard's study of a group of texts within the genre. This thesis attempts to address this gap in the criticism by undertaking a comparative study of several Caribbean female coming of age novels, with the aim of examining their differences and similarities to discuss what they can tell us about Caribbean concerns with regards to identity and selfhood.

In the Caribbean literature of the last sixty years, female writers have been particularly prolific and continue to write in this genre into the current decade. This continuous re-engagement with the same story amongst women writers from across the Caribbean suggests the usefulness of this particular narrative. Why this genre should be so apt, how these writers use it and what they use it to say are all questions this thesis attempts to answer. The female coming of age novels I have identified,

particularly within the Caribbean, seem less indebted to the masculine, bildungsroman traditions and therefore, as Susan Fraiman argues are ‘less apt to see them as natural’ (x) and consequently, are less apt to feel confined within them. Rather than struggling towards and, in the case of more contemporary novels, failing to find a moment of definitive and coherent selfhood, female coming of age novels are precisely novels of becoming. I would argue that the texts discussed in this thesis emphasise the potential of a fluid, hybrid identity, which is becoming but never becomes. They depict an acceptance of becoming and of multiple and continuous becomings that are never complete or finite in the way that traditional bildungsroman texts imply.

By taking a comparative approach, I wish to explore how the process of becoming negotiates the varying identities that the protagonists face. I investigate four main texts which span the Caribbean as a geographical and cultural space: Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*. All these texts were published within a relatively short time-span (in the space of eight years from 1987 to 1994) and so reflect the concerns of a particular generation of Caribbean women writers who all grew up between the Caribbean and North America. The 1970s and 80s saw a significant rise in the work of female writers from the Caribbean and this outpouring of literature continued on into the 90s. By choosing texts from the later period of this prolific time in Caribbean women’s writing, I hope to explore the concerns which still seemed significant or un-addressed by this later wave of literature. The boom of women’s writing in the Caribbean began in the 1970s and early 1980s with authors like Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé and Rosario Ferré. Of course, there had been women writers prior to this - Jean Rhys, Phyllis Shand Allfrey and Una Marson particularly spring to mind - but in this time

period Caribbean women writers seemed to proliferate and enter into the international literary scene in a startling and emphatic way. They were trying to establish women's narratives and voices in the Caribbean. This first generation of women writers were making a statement about the legitimacy of writing as a Caribbean woman, of expressing female consciousness. They were resisting the male dominance of literature at that time and making a space for a female voice. The second wave of women writers which began in the late 80s and 90s, and which Alvarez, Cliff, Danticat and García are part of, follow in the footsteps of their female antecedents but expand upon the concept of gender in the Caribbean in interesting ways. This second wave of more contemporary writers, having in a way already inherited the literary legitimacy to write as women, are now trying to complicate what that assertion of identity might entail. Using these four main texts as a starting point, and including several other secondary texts within this genre, I will examine the structural and thematic similarities which bind these novels together and how they create new formations of coming of age and formulate a map for negotiating hybrid identities.

The texts that I have chosen also focus on more contemporary rather than historical settings for their coming of age narratives. The more contemporary settings will bring to light real and very relevant concerns to the contemporary Caribbean, such as: their relationship with North America and Europe, their continuing concerns with race and their complex relationship with history. In placing these texts side by side I am taking a pan-Caribbean approach, taking texts from countries as varied as Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. By looking at texts that span the Caribbean as a geographical and cultural space, I hope to avoid the limiting and labelling approach of some critical thought. Although these writers have been researched as individuals or as part of their distinct national literatures they are not

usually studied together. Julia Alvarez and Cristina García are the exception. These two authors have been analysed together but they are usually studied within Latin American scholarship, appropriating them for that particular discourse and seldom, if ever, acknowledging them as Caribbean writers. In placing them alongside Cliff and Danticat, I aim to view all these authors within the Caribbean as a literary space, which is vast and distinct but also interconnected by its concerns and struggles and thus, of value to study as a whole. I would argue that despite their differences all these texts speak to each other in ways they have not yet been allowed to, and that these very differences work in their favour to highlight the multiplicity of the Caribbean.

Each of these texts have been engaged with individually in terms of their critical reception and have been read within specific contexts. Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* for example has been considered in light of the acculturation process, the immigrant experience and bilingualism. For example, William Luis' 'A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*' and Joan Hoffman's 'She Wants to be Called Yolanda Now: Identity Language and the Third Sister in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*' both consider the major theme of migrant experience and migrant identity. Along with various other critical works, these examples display that the text has also been received as part of Latino/a literature. Alvarez's text has become widely read as part of what is sometimes called the ethnic American canon, often being part of educational courses on Latin America and the interplay between English and Spanish and the linguistic struggles of the characters, in relation to their movement into the American Anglophone world, has been the focus of much critical thought. Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* has in turn been received into the canon of Latino/a literature and particularly the Cuban-American body of texts. García's text, like

Alvarez's became part of study courses and was included in several broad anthologies, for example *The Latino Reader* and *Little Havana Blues: A Cuban-American Literature Anthology* which mark its acceptance into that particular context within only a few years of its publication. In scholarly criticism the text has often been discussed in terms of the complex US and Latino relationships and in the context of Cuban politics. The multiple perspectives of the characters on the experience, and mental conceptions, of living within and outside Cuba, the US and travelling between the two, as well as their varying relationships to the Revolution, have allowed critics to discuss this text with those themes at the forefront. For example, David Mitchell's 'National Families and Familial Nations: Communista Americans in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*' focuses on the experience of nationalism and Mary Vasquez's 'Cuba as Text and Context in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*' explores the idea of Cuban-ness, both of which place the text within a body of criticism centred around national identity, migrant identity and political identity. Both Alvarez and García published their works at a time when the field of US Latina literature was beginning to emerge and so are considered foundational to that movement. As the field has expanded both authors have received considerable critical attention in this particular context and it is my aim to shift that focus into regarding these texts as rooted within a pan-Caribbean context. Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was equally well received from publication. Only two years after the publication of this, her first novel, Danticat was listed as one of the top twenty 'Best Young American Novelists' by *Granta* and the text itself gained even greater popular acclaim when selected as part of Oprah's Book Club Selection in 1998. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is often included in discussions of black American literature, African diaspora literature and, as with Alvarez and García, into the overarching and vague category of ethnic American

literature. Scholarly discussion has primarily focused on the experience of trauma and particularly on sexual violence. Several of Danticat's novels convey this theme of trauma, violence and the recovery from trauma, both on a national and personal scale, but this particular text has received critical attention in relation to its depictions of sexual violence from within and outwith the family. Jennifer Rossi, Sharrón Eve Sarthou and Donette Francis for example, all consider the text as an exploration of the repercussions of violence and strategies for overcoming trauma despite approaching the text in various ways. Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* has also received substantial critical attention. As with Danticat's work, Cliff's novels can often be found in studies of the African diaspora and black American literature. The scholarly material surrounding this text is heavily weighted towards discussions of race, racism and mixed race identity. Sally O'Driscoll and Belinda Edmondson for example, have both examined Cliff and her work in light of the representations of race constructed by the author and the texts. Other critics, like Sika Alain Dagbovie and Suzanne Bost for example, have placed Cliff's text within a wider body of work discussing textual representations of mixed race identity. Antonia Macdonald-Smythe examines Cliff's and Jamaica Kincaid's ideas of subjectivity and identity more fully in her work *Making Homes in the West/Indies*. The theme of rewriting history is also prevalent in the criticism surrounding this text with critics such as Noraida Agosto, among others, examining how Cliff pieces together, plays with and re/writes history. Another major aspect of the critical response to *No Telephone to Heaven*, particularly when taken with its prequel *Abeng*, is the examination of queer and transsexual identity, with critics such as Nada Elia and Judith Raiskin examining the figure of the transsexual and representations of queer identity. Each of the texts discussed emerges from a robust critical context, each inflected with individual focuses and trends of thought.

This thesis will consider many of the same issues, however, in attempting to discuss the texts together and through the lens of their genre I hope to bring to light the similarities between the texts and make them speak to each other rather than reading them in their isolated contexts as existing scholarship has tended towards. In taking these texts, not entirely outside of their existing contexts, but resituating them with the issue of genre, hybridity and identity at the centre of their discussion, this thesis attempts to provide a different approach. While each text is undeniably a product of its own specific context they can still be read and engaged with together as speaking to a particular genre and as this thesis argues, to make a claim for a gendered formation of identity which is bound up in notions of the hybrid Caribbean subject.

These texts come from Hispanophone, Francophone and Anglophone areas of the Caribbean, spanning a multitude of cultures and languages. In this way I am attempting to include the linguistic diversity of the Caribbean, however, all my main texts are written in English. This is partly because Anglophone texts are more common within this genre, although there are several fascinating Francophone women writers who have written coming of age texts, some of which will be mentioned throughout the thesis as secondary texts in translation. It is also partly because having texts from such varied linguistic influences, whose authors all choose to write in English allows for an interesting discussion of language and identity and how this is influenced by the Caribbean diaspora. Finally, my own bilingual understanding of Spanish and English texts grants me an appreciation for the linguistic nuances of translation. For example, having read Rosario Ferré's work in both English and Spanish I view the different versions as separate texts, even though Ferré wrote both translations. Ferré and Maryse Condé have both spoken extensively on the translation of their works, Condé in particular having stated that she considers the translated text

a different entity, belonging to the translator. The French and Dutch works mentioned as secondary texts throughout this work were read in translation but centring my study on translated texts would have added another layer to the identity formations presented since translation is already an act of interpretation and mediation. The English texts provide a unique opportunity to discuss the linguistic complexity of the Caribbean whilst guarding against the difficulties the region's many languages present to an individual researcher.

There are several lineages and traditions into which the texts I intend to discuss fall. As coming of age novels they are subject to literary traditions which reach back to Europe and the bildungsroman. As Caribbean texts they emerge from a specific history of colonisation, migration and literature. As women writers they connect with a particular lineage of female voices from the Caribbean reaching back into literature and into the oral tradition as far as the slave songs which expressed female consciousness. This complex web of traditions is where the texts studied here emerge from, and which they either accept or resist, and in discussing them side by side I hope to highlight these various interwoven strands. It is these varying pressures and lineages which the protagonists also negotiate - as women, as Caribbean women, as Caribbean women living in the diaspora - and it is these multiple pressures which inform their identity and which I wish to examine.

This thesis will discuss, in relation to the coming of age genre, the development of identity and more specifically hybrid identities: how these narratives of becoming express the concept of becoming, how identity is formed and the multiple permutations it undergoes. The issue of identity, particularly coupled with themes of hybridity and pluralism, has long been a concern in the scholarship surrounding Caribbean literature. In particular, the concepts of hybrid identity (most

famously theorised by Stuart Hall) and complex postcolonial identity (posited by Homi Bhabha) have brought critical attention to this area of study and have encouraged much critical application. I believe that an analysis of coming of age narratives by Caribbean women writers provides a new approach to the issue of hybrid identity. Hall most famously conceptualised ‘hybridity’ in his work ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ when discussing Caribbean identity as part of an African diaspora and formulating that ‘cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being”’, a ‘production’ that is marked by a particular history as well as undergoing ‘constant transformation’ (225). In Hall’s construction of a diasporic identity he maintains that it is ‘defined, not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity...*hybridity*’ (235). This conception of hybrid identity as a necessary part of a cultural identity, which creates continuity through difference and so denies ‘simple binary oppositions’ (228), is one I use here. Although Hall’s arguments pertain primarily to the Afro-Caribbean and the postcolonial context, his conception of hybridity is useful across the Caribbean. As a region heavily defined by its cultural mixings, hybridity is a particularly useful concept in relation to the various nations of the Caribbean but the authors and protagonists discussed here also move between the Caribbean and North America or Europe. They are part of the Caribbean diaspora and consequently are hybrid subjects. I find the term hybridity useful for its more essential meaning of mixing between two or more cultures but also for the links Hall makes between both the hybrid self and the production of identity as dynamic rather than static or essential. The processes of becoming, both an adult and a woman, are also ways of becoming Caribbean, of exploring potential identities and of settling into its inherent multiplicity either through acceptance or rejection. By looking at the process of becoming in four main

texts and several other narratives, I wish to explore how this process negotiates the varying identities that the protagonists face and how the protagonists begin to narrate themselves. In these narratives of becoming the protagonists become not only adults but also women and specifically Caribbean women, with all the diversity and complexity that this entails.

The wider field of scholarship on Caribbean women's writing is a particularly fruitful area. Evelyn O'Callaghan and Carole Boyce-Davis for example have created major theoretical works that consider Caribbean women writers and their work in deeply thought provoking ways. O'Callaghan's concept of 'dub versions' in her work *Woman Version*, to name but one example, was particularly influential on my own thinking. O'Callaghan uses the practice of 'dub' or re-mastered versions of reggae songs to discuss women's writing in the Caribbean. Through these dub versions she interrogates 'the whole notion of a hierarchical distinction between "original substantive creation" and the "version", a new form that has grown out of a process of altering, supplementing, breaking, echoing, mocking and playing with the original' (10). The idea of being able to take a single concept and rework it into something new and the notion that this playing with an original can be both a means of breaking from it and also acknowledging it, allowed me to consider the variations of the coming of age genre not as simply following in the tradition of a bildungsroman genre but as revising and re-visioning the genre over and over in as many variations as needed. The bildungsroman as original and every coming of age text as versions does not, as O'Callaghan determines, undermine the validity of the coming of age text but produces a fruitful discussion of that playful reimagining. While O'Callaghan's work is not directly mentioned in this thesis, as there is already significant scholarship surrounding her discussions, it has influenced the underlying framework of the thesis.

Carole Boyce-Davies work, particularly *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, has similarly been hugely influential on Caribbean scholarship and underpins the work in this thesis without being expressly referenced. Boyce-Davies' concept of the 'visitor theory' for example, allows that established theories can and have been used electively by black women, based on the idea of following a visitor 'a piece of the way' home, with the quality of the relationship determining the distance travelled together (46). This idea of accepting a theory only insofar as it is useful rather than solely or wholly aligning oneself with one theoretical approach allowed me to consider multiple theoretical approaches simultaneously while not defining the paradigms of the thesis too rigidly. Hall's theory of hybridity for example, as discussed above, is useful up to a point when discussing these female texts but does not need to be used in exclusion of other theories. Similarly, I have chosen to use Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the borderland and the mestiza in relation to the Caribbean texts discussed here despite its direct link to another body of scholarship, as will shortly be discussed more fully.

Several other theorists from this field have influenced the thinking and basis of this thesis. Critics such as Isabel Hoving in her work *In Praise of New Travelers: Reading Caribbean Migrant Women's Writing*, Denise DeCaires Narain's 'Writing "Home": mediating between "the local" and "the literary" in a selection of postcolonial women's texts', Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity* and Antonia Macdonald-Smythe's *Making Homes in the West/Indies*, to name but a few, contribute to the body of scholarship surrounding Caribbean women writers and to my own consideration of the themes of migrant literature, hybridity, home and identity. Carolyn Cooper's *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' body of Jamaican Popular*

Culture was foundational in discussing the gendered voice which is a running theme throughout the texts and will be particularly discussed in Chapter One. Sandra Pouchet-Paquet's discussion of cultural identity and self-representation in her work *Caribbean Autobiography* was conceptually useful when considering the semi-autobiographical nature of many of the texts. Several of the themes covered in this thesis, for example language, voice, home, are already part of the wider discussion of Caribbean women's writing. There is a well-established body of work and foundation of thought in Caribbean criticism, which has engaged with ideas of gendered identity, with the moving subject, the issue of location and so on. All these themes are relevant to the discussions in this thesis and formed a background from which my own research developed. Ideas of gendered and migrant identity have been widely discussed and contribute to the theoretical background in Caribbean scholarship from which this thesis emerges. While the critics and ideas mentioned above were of significant impact in the construction of this thesis, this body of Caribbean scholarship will not be explicitly mentioned throughout the thesis in an effort to avoid re-treading already well-thought-out ground. I hope that in founding the thesis in such Caribbean scholarship but bringing the texts into direct conversation with a distinct theoretical framework that a productive and interesting discussion might emerge.

In her seminal work *Borderlands / La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldúa theorises the mestiza; a powerful hybrid figure living in the borderlands between cultures and who never fully assimilates into either. In the face of a vast body of Caribbean criticism I have chosen to borrow a theoretical concept from Latin American criticism in the hopes that this change of perspective will shed a different light onto the subject of Caribbean, female hybrid identity. For Anzaldúa, to be a mestiza, to live on the borders, is not simply a question of geography; it is also symbolic, spiritual and

psychological. The mestiza consciousness is an identity marked by a straddling of borders, by being ‘in all cultures at the same time’ (99). The self then, for the mestiza, is never singular but always plural, sustaining contradictions, a self where ‘nothing [is] rejected, nothing abandoned’ (101). Hybridity becomes a powerful space to occupy, a creative and productive selfhood which has access to several cultures and therefore exists outside of a binary system or the constricting claims of any one culture. While hybridity has been considered in both its traumatic and celebratory aspects by other theorists this thesis chooses to focus on Anzaldúa’s more positive construction to investigate how such a positive and productive perspective might alter our reading of the texts. Anzaldúa here refers specifically to the Chicana - Mexican-American - identity but her theories have been extrapolated and used in other areas to discuss hybridity more generally. In applying her concepts to the Caribbean and to these texts I intend to discuss how a notion of creative and productive fluidity can be a powerful force behind the negotiation of multiple identities. While many Caribbean nations may not physically share borders with other countries – unless we theorise the sea as a connecting force rather than a separating element – in the way that Mexico and the United States do, each Caribbean country is a hub of diverse cultures. Each nation rubs up against its Caribbean and South or Central American neighbours in terms of culture due to the migration and movement of people and each Caribbean culture is influenced by Europe and North America, either through colonial or neo-colonial activities. There is also the mixing of cultures that forced or labour migration created. The Caribbean therefore, as a psychological space, is as much a mass of interweaving cultures and identities as Anzaldúa’s Chicana mestiza. In discussing Anzaldúa’s critical approach to hybridity I hope to engage with Caribbean women’s writing in a different context. While, as discussed above, there are a plethora of

theorists who focus on the Caribbean, and who are theorising that geographical space and that identity, in choosing the mestiza as a conception of hybridity I intend to bring a new variation on this theme into discussion. Much as discussing several texts in concert is meant to shed new light on their combined critical thought so too is bringing the mestiza and the Caribbean hybrid into dialogue meant to evoke a new approach to the subject matter. In considering the notion of the gendered identity formation and the gendered subject which Caribbean scholars are already engaging with, this thesis attempts to provide a distinct approach to the current discussion by bringing texts from several areas of the Caribbean into discussion, by considering these texts as a distinct genre and by undertaking a close critical reading of the texts themselves. These texts seem to be exploring how hybrid, complex identities are formed and how the protagonists resolve or do not resolve these issues. I intend to explore how the protagonists discuss and negotiate their own multiple identities, how Caribbean female coming of age narratives explore the formation of hybrid, gendered identity and whether it is expressed as powerful and full of potential or as fractured and chaotic.

In order to discuss identity and gender I will be organising the following chapters against specific themes and each of these will serve as a locus from which to explore the ways the protagonists negotiate identity. The first chapter 'Language and Voice' will focus on the fundamental problem of language. In the process of finding their voices the protagonists and writers must first decide which language to speak in and this decision is already a fraught and political one. I will be examining how the writers and protagonists go about altering and infiltrating English to make it speak their Caribbean experiences. The process of moving from child to adult is also the process of finding one's own voice, of realising and accepting it and for a woman the

very act of writing and giving voice can be a transgression, a rebellion. In this chapter I will be looking at how the protagonists find their own voices, whether they ever do, the difficulties of finding a voice, as well as the expectation and pressure to be silent as females. I will also focus on the issue of accent, how accented voices are represented or how they are suppressed. The second chapter 'Narratives and Storytelling' will look at the issue of narratives both textually and meta-textually. On a structural level I will be discussing how the authors' narratives work, how they play with and alter the traditional coming of age text and why they might do so. Within these texts there is great importance and emphasis placed on the telling of stories and of creating your own narrative. I will discuss how the act of storytelling is significant and empowering by considering how the protagonists encounter their own selves through storytelling and how narratives might be imposed on them by authority figures. In the midst of this, I will be analysing how the characters create their own narratives. Chapter Three 'Mothers, Bodies and Sexuality' tackles these three themes as inter-related and mutually influential. Firstly, it deals with the complex representation of the mother and the mother-daughter relationship as central to the coming of age of the protagonists. Female relationships such as other or substitute mothers will also be discussed as well as the breaking or interrupting of these bonds. The protagonists have to come to understand their mothers or negotiate their relationships with them in order to come of age. I will be considering what this implies about female identity and how it places the mother as the arbiter of female behaviour and the guardian of female bodies and sexuality. In discussing the body this chapter will consider the female body as a site of conflicting identities, as a place upon which meaning is imposed. Within this section I will be discussing bodies as gendered - female bodies in particular as dangerous objects to be controlled and

guarded - and racialised as well as the body as a primary marker of identity and the embodied reality of the protagonists: how they lose or gain control of their bodies. I will ask how the characters negotiate their own skin and whether the process of coming of age includes becoming comfortable in their skin. Finally, this chapter will focus on the sexual awakening of the characters and the depiction of sexual relationships. Coming into their sexuality can be seen as part of their coming into an understanding of their identity and is therefore an important part of the becoming narrative, and this section investigates how the authors deal with sexuality and sexual identity in these novels and how centrally the writers place these experiences within the framework of becoming. The final chapter 'Homes and Histories' considers how writers and protagonists negotiate both the idea and the reality of home and how they engage with official and unofficial histories. Home is both a physical, real space that the protagonists leave or return to, and also a mental concept that is linked to, but not bounded by, the reality it represents. Home, in the text, is an idea as much as it is a reality and it is this idea that the protagonists are nostalgic for or reject, which they idealise and desire, or denigrate and need to escape from, and which consequently becomes part of how they define themselves, either in identification with or rejection of the homeland. The concept of homeland, of place, as a bearer of identity is used to explore the varied connections and relationships with home that are envisioned in these novels, as well as the act of leaving home and how this affects the protagonists. This chapter goes on to look at how the protagonists and writers deal with history, whether it is the familial or national past and with the silences or partial nature of those histories. I will discuss how the authors use historical narratives, how they play with time and how these texts might look backward in order to move forward. This

chapter will also highlight the multiple ways in which the characters and the novels themselves resist official or restraining historical and societal narratives.

This introduction has aimed to show the theoretical framework the following chapters will emerge from, as well as summarise the kinds of questions that this thesis will attempt to answer. Its intent is to provide an overview of the thinking behind this research topic, this choice of genre, area and subject matter and to give some idea of why these are of interest. The following chapters will attempt to answer several questions and to provide an in-depth textual analysis of the main novels as well as touching on several other texts within the genre as they become relevant. As a whole, however, this thesis will aim to provide a discussion of how female coming of age novels, as a genre within the Caribbean, imagine the process of identity formation. It aims to explore, in this wide and diverse range of texts, how the process of becoming is envisioned as multiple, continuous and infinite and whether hybrid identity can be seen as positive, powerful and creative or as chaotic, disruptive and destabilising.

CHAPTER ONE: LANGUAGE AND VOICE

The issues of language and identity have long been linked in the discussion of postcolonial literature² and Caribbean literature is no exception, with writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau and other members of the creolité movement arguing for the use of Creole in literature and an awareness of the oral language of the Caribbean. Similarly, with regards to the Anglophone tradition, writers such as Braithwaite and Derek Walcott have taken differing stances on what it is possible to say when writing in English. James Baldwin famously wrote that the English language reflected none of his experiences but that ‘it might be made to bear the burden of [that] experience’ if writers found ‘the stamina to challenge it’ (qtd. in Achebe, 349). Similarly, Niyi Osundare acknowledges that

English is a highly flexible and accommodating language. Everywhere in the world its syntax is being bent (not broken), its lexicon expanded with new, exciting entries, its semiotic range widened and deepened beyond the ken – and control – of its native speakers (26).

Since this thesis involves texts that are written in English despite the differing cultures and linguistic areas from which their authors originate, this continuing debate is of importance to this exploration. In this chapter I will firstly discuss the authorial choice to write in English and how they attempt to imbue English with the flavour of their own languages, to make it bear the burden of a female, Caribbean experience. Secondly, I will be investigating how the protagonists, in the process of coming of age, are faced with the problem of language and how the journey from child to adult is also a journey to find a voice and to give voice to their hybrid identity.

² For example, the debate surrounding African literature. Famous names such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o have discussed the pressures, problems and politics of writing in a language that is not your own, that belongs to a coloniser, as well as the issue of making that language speak another identity.

THE LANGUAGES OF THE TEXTS:

The Authorial Choice of Language:

As mentioned in the introduction I will be utilising Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the borderland and the mestiza consciousness. A central part of the struggle Anzaldúa describes, the straddling of borders, is language. Language and identity are intimately linked for both the authors and the characters. For, as Anzaldúa notes, 'I am my language' (*Borderlands*, 81): any expression of identity occurs through language. The authorial choice or lack of choice when it comes to language is therefore as significant as any of the characters' linguistic struggles. The four main authors discussed in this thesis all choose or are obliged to write in English, despite their disparate linguistic backgrounds. For all of these writers, whether from the Anglo, Hispano or Francophone Caribbean, the formal choice to write in English is not a simple or neutral choice; it is an 'oppositional act' (Cashman, 140), an act of resistance which they have come under criticism for. This is particularly true of García and Alvarez. García came under vociferous criticism within the Cuban and Cuban-American community (O'Reilly Herrera, 92-93) and in an interview with Bridget Kevane, she speaks of being told that she cannot be Cuban because she writes in English (75). García replies that while she feels she cannot write in Spanish – she lacks 'fluency' and 'subtlety' in that language – that does not make her work any less Cuban (Kevane, 78). Spanish is still part of who she is, the language of her family and her past, and this comes across in the novel. Julia Alvarez is similarly criticised for being a Dominican writer who writes in English. As with García, the accusations of inauthenticity stem from both critics and other writers. Most notoriously at a conference of the Caribbean Studies Association where Alvarez and Aída Cartagena Portalín were keynote speakers, the latter expressed her surprise that a Dominican

writer was writing in English and encouraged Alvarez to return to her language and remember who she is. The implication here of course is that in order to be Dominican in any real sense one must speak Spanish, and a particular Dominican Spanish at that. Language and identity, language and national belonging are inextricably linked in this formulation of what it means to be Dominican. In her passionate rebuttal to such claims ‘Doña Aída, with Your Permission’ Alvarez insists that her use of language is not a betrayal, not a choice. She states that she could not write in Spanish even though she speaks it because she has not studied it in the way she has learned English, she ‘can only admire what others do in Spanish. [She] cannot emulate their wonderful mastery of the language’ (*Something to Declare*, 172). Edwidge Danticat notes a similar phenomenon. In an interview with Bonnie Lyons she mentions that English was the first language she learned to both speak and write in (189). Having left Haiti at twelve, her education occurred mostly in English and she has lived in an Anglophone environment for most of her life. She mentions that she read ‘dead French writers’ in school in Haiti and that she still, when writing in French ‘takes immediately the voice of French Romanticists’ (Shea, 387), in English however she can sound like herself. She has described English as her ‘stepmother tongue’, not with the implications of the wicked, imposed stepmother, but ‘in the sense that you have a mother tongue and then an adopted language that you take on because your family circumstances have changed’ (Shea, 387). Consequently, for these writers English becomes the practical choice, based on their environment at the time of writing, their education and their adopted country and language.

The language of the texts is not only however, the result of circumstance but can also be a deliberate choice. In another interview Danticat says that she feels her writing is ‘a way to introduce people to Haiti in a way they might not regularly

encounter in their lives' (Mirabal, 33). With an external, diasporic and also non-diasporic audience in mind, her choice to write in English is a considered one, not solely a sign of inculcation into American society – though perhaps this too since Danticat states that 'the circumstances of her life' led to her writing in English (Shea, 388) – but of specific aims and deliberate choices. We could also read this choice as an acknowledgement of the realities of publication and readership; because of her choice to write in English Danticat is read widely and internationally not only by Haitian immigrants and Haitian-Americans but also by Americans and other English speakers³. By writing primarily in English she, along with García and Alvarez are able to reach a wider audience and thus the choice can be seen as practical on this level as well. This choice, as previously noted, is sometimes considered a capitulation to colonial or neo-colonial society, or a marker of an author's lack of authenticity. Danticat however, questions the idea of being able to call any writer authentic in the face of globalisation and cultural exchange and whether language can be the sole criteria for national identity or belonging:

global migration has certainly changed whatever criteria previously applied to national literature or whatever national culture means. For example, I think for a long time there's been a struggle with writers like myself. Are we Haitian writers? Are we American writers?... I think it is harder to pin down what makes a national literature. In our case, is it language? Is it geography? Is it where you live? I think all these notions are easily questioned. And so this idea of authenticity is much harder to pin down (Mirabal, 30).

This refusal to equate nationality, or belonging within a national literature with either language or geography, which parallels Alvarez's arguments, is borne out by her text, which concerns itself with Haitian people and culture while utilising English and

³ It is interesting to note that *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was selected by Oprah Winfrey for her Book Club in 1998 indicative of the mainstream recognition of Danticat's work and the appeal of the novel to audiences of various ethnic backgrounds.

moving between countries and languages. Danticat also denies the tension and even guilt that writing in another language seems to create particularly in Alvarez and García, by saying that in her childhood she was already bilingual, speaking Creole or French as the situation demanded but only reading and writing in French, since at that time no one wrote in Creole as there was no established transcription system (Lyons, 189). Because of this multilingual environment where she ‘wrote in a language [she] didn’t speak regularly and spoke a language [she] couldn’t write’ Danticat ‘never thought one wasn’t supposed to write in a language that was not one’s own’ (Lyons, 189). There is in Danticat’s statement a lack of anxiety concerning language or concerning shifting between languages, as if this were a natural and ordinary state of affairs and I would argue that this is evidenced in her text. The narrator mentions in certain passages when someone is speaking in Creole or English but only when those languages are not endemic to the country in which the narrative is occurring, elsewhere the reader assumes which language is being used based on the characters and their location. The tension between languages is present in the text, as we will discuss below, but it is not a site of such trauma or emotional pain as in for example, Alvarez’s work.

Writers from the Anglophone Caribbean such as Michelle Cliff, have a slightly different relationship with language than Hispano and Francophone writers, though it is equally interesting. Despite the critical attention paid to Michelle Cliff in general and to her first novel *Abeng* and its semi-sequel *No Telephone to Heaven* in particular, the language of both of these texts is generally only ever mentioned either in passing or superficially. The texts discussed above because of their more obvious intersections between languages, have been criticised for and analysed in relation to how they, as texts, and the characters deal with the problem of imposed languages and

of living in multiple languages. In contrast, Cliff, perhaps because of her place within the Anglophone Caribbean, is analysed less within these parameters. Most of the direct criticism relating to *No Telephone to Heaven* is interested in how it deals with identity, particularly through the three main protagonists Clare, Christopher and Harry/Harriet⁴, with a great deal of the criticism also focusing on struggles with race, gender and class⁵ and how the text deals with history as well as its narrative structure⁶. All of these issues are compelling in their own right, and some will be discussed in the following chapters, but it seems an unfortunate oversight, especially when coming of age is so intimately linked to the ability to speak, to finding one's own voice, that the links between language and identity have not been more deeply engaged with.

Indeed when Cliff's use of Standard English and Jamaican Patois are mentioned it is often only to note that her use of vernacular should be more prominent or that her use of Standard English places her apart from other writers and marks her as less "authentic". For example, the critic Maria Helena Lima contrasts *No Telephone to Heaven* to Merle Collins's *Angel* and she constructs this distinction based primarily in terms of language. She juxtaposes Cliff's 'reliance' on standard English to Collins's 'constant use of Grenadian creole' (37) and argues that this disparity marks Cliff's text as written for a different audience and from a different class and historical perspective than Collins's work (52) ultimately implying that the class marker of language automatically makes Collins and her text more "authentic" or Caribbean than Cliff. It is clear from this criticism that, as with the previous

⁴ For example, work by Nada Elia, Sally O'Driscoll and Suzanne Bost focus on either one or all of the main characters and how their identities are fractured.

⁵ In particular, work by Belinda Edmondson, Sika Alaine Dagbovie, Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gilman.

⁶ For example, Fiona Barnes and Joanne Chassot both deal specifically in these themes.

bilingual texts, the language of the work is seen as a marker of the author's identity, primarily with Cliff in relation to her class but also in relation to some idea of authentic Caribbean-ness which can be expressed through language. The critic Sally O'Driscoll points out that 'national identity is equated with language identity' (64) which is made clear by some critics' unease with Cliff's use of Standard English. They appear to be taking Cliff's use of the English language to represent her inculcation in the coloniser's mindset, in a colonial rather than Jamaican framework and her position as part of an educated, middle class. However, O'Driscoll also notes that different critics position Cliff differently, with the effect of 'de-authoriz[ing] Cliff's authorial identity' (65). Whether we take this to mean that Cliff is not easily placed within a single context, because of her own hybridity, or take it as a warning that to conflate the text and the author – or indeed the protagonist and the author - is problematic, it seems clear that the issue of language is of more significance in Cliff's work than it might at first appear. If Cliff can be criticised for her use of Standard English then it stands to reason that the language of the text, the authorial choice made in structuring it, is a powerful statement of identity.

The choice to write in English may be a practical or a commercial decision, or a mix of all these but to feel as if there is no choice is also a political statement. On the one hand it can be read as highlighting an enforced assimilation into American culture but on the other hand it can be seen as extending the idea of Cuban/Dominican/Haitian/Jamaican identity to include hybrid Caribbean-Americans and removing linguistic capability as a signifier of belonging and national identity. Alvarez for example, still considers herself Dominican, in fact she splits her time between USA and the Dominican Republic, a rather literal and physical expression of her in-between-ness and hybridity. Instead of defending herself as a Dominican writer

Alvarez creates a new space, one where she is a Dominican-American writer and where her texts are ‘mapping a country that’s not on the map... a world formed of contradictions, clashes, cominglings’ (*Something to Declare*, 173). It is this ‘new consciousness’ (*Something to Declare*, 173) she wishes to map out; a multicultural perspective. Significantly she links this newly mapped out, synthesizing consciousness to being Caribbean. She claims that it is in her ‘island genes to be a pan-American, a gringa-dominicana’ and that as a Caribbean person ‘[i]t’s in our genes to be a world made of many worlds’ (*Something to Declare*, 175). This new consciousness is a hybrid one which demands an English voice to a certain extent. For example, Danticat notes that she writes for a specific audience, she writes for her younger self, for her brothers - ‘Haitian Americans who don’t read either Creole or French’ -, for their children and for ‘young Haitian-American women’ (Alexandre and Howard, 127). In other words, she writes for other hybrid subjects like herself, who move between languages, who might speak Creole at home as she did, who might speak French as she does but whose external lives are lived in an Anglophone environment. Danticat in several interviews mentions the phenomenon of different generations being unable to communicate because of a language barrier, in the case of her texts she seems to be speaking to that younger generation, exploring ideas of identity with them in mind. Her own story and that of her protagonist Sophie are not uncommon, living the first part of their lives in Haiti and then moving to join parents in the States (Shea, 382) and it is these children of two countries that she is speaking for and to and so the decision to write in English but with Creole and French phrases interspersed seems a natural choice, one which is predicated upon an understanding of the diasporic community. The linguistic forms of these coming of age novels

therefore reflect the circumstances of their authors as well as the audiences and identities they are writing from and towards.

Hybrid Linguistics:

The authorial choice of language is not a simplistic binary opposition in which English is chosen in place of Spanish/French/Creole/Patois. Rather these texts meld languages, bending English, making it bear the burden of a Caribbean experience and creating a hybrid language to match their hybrid identities. As Anzaldúa states the mestiza does not exist in one culture or another but ‘in all cultures at the same time’ (*Borderlands*, 99) and these texts destabilise any binary oppositions by rendering several linguistic registers enmeshed together on the page. In Edwidge Danticat’s novel for example, this either/or binary is destabilised because the text moves between three languages: English, French and Creole. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* while written mostly in English includes phrases in Creole and French, as well as references made to speakers using both languages even when the words are in English on the page. Danticat, like Alvarez and García uses snatches of other languages within the text and perhaps more significantly all the authors refract English through the prism of another language. Creole infiltrates the English of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; there are phrases in English which have the flavour of another language behind them, of another rhythm and grammar at use, for example, ‘You cleaned up real good’ (27), ‘She is rather in the morgue’ (223) or ‘I needed to go somewhere and empty out my head’ (184). None of these phrases are incorrect or non-English but their phrasing is not Standard English either, they have the echo of another sound-world rumbling through them. The language of *Dreaming in Cuban* although primarily English is infiltrated by phrases in Spanish as well as snatches of poetry and music, left un-

translated on the page. While Gustavo Perez Firmat argues that such italicised splashes of Spanish ‘produces instant xenity even as it reinforces the English-language norm’ (141) it also seems possible to see these un-translated phrases as denoting the, perhaps nostalgic, co-existence of the two languages in the author’s emotional landscape. Beyond a simple placing of Spanish and English together on the page there is also a ‘strong undercurrent of Spanish in García’s English’ (Ruta, 12). A sense of the rhythm and feel of Spanish imbues the English of the text. For example, phrases such as ‘with eyes collapsed of expectation’ (74) bring with them a sense of Latinate structure, of Spanish cadence and grammar, despite being written in another language. There are numerous such examples of what Suzanne Ruta calls García’s ‘crossover diction’ (12) and García herself admits that she was ‘trying to rework English to sound more like Spanish’, to bring in the ‘musicality and cadence’ of one language into the other (Kevane, 78). The sound and cadence of the linguistic choices García makes are important here; while the physical words may be English, Spanish infiltrates the text in the sound of the words. By creating a specific structure García can capture the rhythm of her Spanish, a language with a different cadence, and lay it under the English of the text. This is evident throughout *Dreaming in Cuban* in phrases such as ‘[t]he continents strain to unloose themselves’ (17), where the structure more closely mimics the Spanish by using the English ‘unloose’ enacting the form of *desatarse* or *desenredarse*, with the ‘un’ in place of the ‘des’, and with the referent ‘themselves’ following the verb ‘unloose’, to mimic the ‘se’ of the Spanish construction. The rhythm of the sentences follows a more Hispanic than Anglophone structure but also specific word choices embed a different significance within the text. García’s use of the word ‘cicatrix’ for example (8), could be seen simply as a more musical English word used in place of the harsher sounding ‘scar’ but it also carries

the echo of the Spanish translation *cicatriz*. Such deliberate word choices lend a specific rhythm and cadence to the text and allow for the echoes of another language to filter through to the reader; a cadence of Spanish flowing behind and between the English words on the page. It is, significantly, not a standardised form of Spanish that is brought into the text but the particular flavour of Cuban Spanish which is ‘very Caribbean’ instead of ‘castellano’ (Kevane, 79). By inflecting English with Spanish, García’s authorial voice creates a space within English for Cuban and Caribbean expression. Likewise, in the case of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* there is a sense of another language that runs between and behind the words on the page. Elsewhere, Alvarez has highlighted that she does not ‘hear the same rhythms in English as a native speaker’ that sometimes she hears Spanish in English and vice versa (*Something to Declare*, 173) and I would argue that this is clear in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. In this text, as with *Dreaming in Cuban*, the English language is moulded by a different sense of rhythm and of internal structure, which marks the writer and the text as expressing a distinct identity. Alvarez herself recognises the subconscious melding of English and Spanish:

what most surprises me – especially since I am now working in another language – is to discover how much of my verbal rhythm, my word choices, my attention to the sound of prose comes from my native language (*Something to Declare*, 126).

In an interview with Melissa Chessher, Alvarez also notes that ‘the place, the language, the Spanish language, which is ...also the rhythm...of those palm trees and the waves coming in and the sounds and smells, get into my English and the way I write’ (58). Dominican words and snatches of songs pepper the text but the sense of another language permeates it. There are no glossaries to explain these terms or the various intertextual references, the words are italicised but left for the reader to

understand from their context, from their placement within the narrative. This belies the exoticising impulse much early Caribbean writing, or writing about the Caribbean from external sources, displays where glossaries and copious footnotes served to explain the Caribbean to outsiders. Such formats merely served to create a sense of difference, of the exotic and of foreignness, making the texts more like anthropological studies than works of fiction. By removing these additional explanations *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Dreaming in Cuban* both refuse to cater to this mode of writing and instead of acting as guides to Caribbean culture the focus is on the characters and the journey of their lives. By embedding Cuban and Dominican words and texts within the novels, without explanatory notes, the authors are naturalising their hybrid voices, which flow easily between languages. The italicising of certain words, which Firmat argues creates a demarcation between different languages, does in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* set certain words apart but the fact that they are left to the reader to decipher belies the accusation that they are added merely for exotic effect. Especially since at times English words are italicised within the text purely for rhetorical impact or to display their newness or importance to the characters, such as when Yolanda is attempting to regain her voice after a mental breakdown and is testing words aloud: the synonyms ‘love’ and ‘amor’ are both italicised to denote their sudden strangeness and lack of meaning to her (85). Words or phrases in Spanish are not made foreign by the text, they are embedded and thus flow naturally for the reader to decipher. It is an expression of a mestiza consciousness, one which lives in two or many languages at once and in these authors’ mingling of English and Spanish on the page becomes a seamless flow or movement between the two rather than a harsh juxtaposition. If as Alvarez claims ‘language [is her] homeland’ (‘An Unlikely Beginning for a Writer’,

197) then she has endeavoured to make that language speak a hybrid identity, one for which there might be no physical home. In doing so the language of the text, even before examining the language of the characters makes a statement about identity and about expressing a particularly Caribbean experience.

This same slippage between languages also occurs in Cliff's text. Despite criticism of her use of Standard English *No Telephone to Heaven* actually contains much movement between English and Patois, a slipping between the two, where the lines between languages become blurred. A clear example of this can be seen in section I, although it permeates the text. Here the narrative voice slips between Standard English and an accented or patois language without the distinction being made between speech and narration, as in for example: 'They might hate us if they knew. Might think the shadow catcher get us. Or Old Hige slip from her skin and suck our souls' (10) or 'the caretaker was happy to be relieved of watering and feeding a mule he no longer drove, which was never fe him anyway' (11). This blending of languages works to highlight the hybridity and straddling of borders that both the author and the central character Clare negotiate. Although Clare can speak both Standard English and Jamaican Patois and shift between the two⁷ with what Smilowitz calls 'unselfconscious ease' (14) Clare is ever caught in that shift, in that place in-between and must choose essentially a side to lean towards, as she is caught between her mother and her father, between white and black and between the legacies of both. Where Clare feels she has to choose - be either 'Jane. Small and Pale. English' or 'Bertha...Ragôut. Mixture. Confused' (116) - and is further assured by her friend Harry/Harriet that 'the time will come for both of us to choose.... Cyaan live split' (131), the text provides another option. By blending languages together,

⁷ This is most evident in her conversations with Harry/Harriet, for example on page 200.

rather than choosing one or the other, the text is exemplifying a mode of resistance to Clare's predicament: a breaking down of boundaries to slide easily into the in-between spaces with access to both sides rather than forever pulled into one or the other. Unlike Clare who must ultimately choose a side in this binary opposition and for whom there is no resolution to her struggle except in death – which Cliff imagines in her essay 'Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character' as a moment of 'complete identification with her homeland' (265) – the text posits another possible model of wholeness by combining various voices and moving between them with ease to create a harmonious whole. The language of *No Telephone to Heaven* is not jarring or sharply contrasted. While the Standard English voices and the Jamaican or accented voices juxtapose each other, they work together within the text to form a tapestry of sound, to create the sound-world of Clare's life and in doing so they sing together. They form a linguistic metaphor for Clare's own struggle to unite the disparate elements of her identity. The use of Jamaican Patois and English, of various voices and accents, highlights that language issues are endemic to the text's concern with identity. Cliff obviously has the capacity to write vernacular voices but she chooses to write in English and this choice is not an unthinking one.

Unlike García and Alvarez however, Cliff and Danticat provide glossaries and explanations to the non-English aspects of their texts. In Cliff's text Jamaican words and concepts sit on the page without any effort made to make them strange or unfamiliar through for example, the use of italics. However there is a glossary provided, indicating that the text is aimed at those outside of the Caribbean; a common enough occurrence considering the publishing industry and international readership. The glossary is not comprehensive but its existence is meant to clarify the strangeness of some terms to a foreign reader. While this is a practical and perhaps

financially motivated choice it does serve to exoticise the text. I would argue however, that by having the Creole words sit quietly on the page, integrated into the English without any marker of distinction, the overall effect of the text on the reader is one of synthesis, of flow and integration rather than dissonance and unfamiliarity. In contrast Danticat's novel includes translation within the text, an explanatory feature. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* the characters move between Creole, English and to a lesser extent French. The existence of Creole in the text alongside English and French can be seen as a statement about inclusion. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in their manifesto of creolité state that: 'We conceived our cultural character as a function of acceptance and denial, therefore permanently questioning, always familiar with the most complex ambiguities, outside all forms of reduction' (892). This statement of Creole identity is also a statement of hybridity and having English sit alongside Creole and French on the page is a visual representation of this hybridity, a visible testament to this ideal of expansive and complex inclusion. However, the text is mostly in English with Creole and French phrases included in italics. This italicising of the Creole and French words instead of functioning as an inclusionary device serves to set them apart. Although there are some English words italicised for emphasis and to show how foreign they are at first to Sophie as she begins to learn a new language (66), the effect of italicising is to create strangeness, a sense of the foreign. The words on the page are distanced from the surrounding English, standing out from the rest of the narration and are therefore not as integrated as for example, in Cliff's work. The result is that even when the reader is aware that a conversation occurs in Creole the few words left in Creole on the page stand out from the rest of the text. These scattered words and phrases may serve to flavour the text with the Creole which is being spoken, providing non-Creole speakers with at least an

idea of how it looks and sounds. This impulse to flavour the text however, serves to highlight its foreignness and make that other language strange to the non-Creole speaking reader instead of integrating it. It belies an impulse to exoticise the Caribbean, to make it strange and therefore more attractive to outsiders. There is no glossary included which may at first imply that the reader must immerse themselves in the Creole and French to understand it from context, or let it flow over the reader un-translated, but this is not the case since Danticat often translates the phrases within the text. For example, conversations between Creole speakers are often filled with repetition – such as, “*Ki niméro* today?” he asked “What numbers are you playing?” (5) – and even early on in the text, it becomes clear that the narrator is addressing an English-speaking audience who would not know what ‘*tantes*’ are without the addition of ‘-aunties-’ which follows it (11). This takes the reader outside the text since there would be no need to translate for the other characters and in combination, the act of italicisation and internal translation, highlight that the audience of the text is distinct from the characters. Danticat is writing for a non-Haitian audience. In interviews she has stated this intent, as already mentioned, but the text seems to go even further than her desire to write for other Haitian-Americans to an implication of an audience entirely unaccustomed to Haitian culture or language. The language of the text implies instead Danticat’s intent to ‘introduce’ Haiti to others, to look beyond the ‘generalities’ which make up most people’s understanding of Haiti (Mirabal, 33). The repetition of phrases in several languages, so that it is clearly understood by the reader, - for example: ‘*Ou libéré?* Are you free?’ (234) - certainly introduces the idea of a distinct linguistic culture in an easy and obvious way to readers. This can be read either as an acceptance of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*’s main readership, non-Haitians, and a way of bridging the gap between cultures or as a way of packaging Haitian identity

for tourist/external consumption. It sets up a power dynamic between Creole and English; where English is given more weight and standing, while Creole only exists in relation to the English translations which surround it. This is offset by the phrases which are left untranslated within the text but which are obvious from the context. Despite their varied approaches to blending languages all the authors mentioned set out to highlight the multiple linguistic possibilities open to their characters and to make visible the meeting points between languages.

The authorial choice of language not only allows for a hybrid linguistics, which incorporates multiple languages but infiltrates that primary language, in this case English with the sound-world and cultural markers of their specific places of origin. The choice to write in English can therefore be read as a rebellious one, rather than a capitulation to the language of the coloniser or has been implied in Cliff's case as an unthinking allegiance to "white" society. To use English and then make it speak a hybrid Caribbean identity is a powerful political statement. To colonise English in reverse is a deliberate act, it imposes the various Caribbean nations into English in return and also reclaims English for its own use. The code-switching and melding of English, Spanish and Nahuatl languages Anzaldúa uses in her *Borderlands* is, she admits, 'a political as well as an aesthetic choice' (Betancor, 246) one which is meant to be true to mestiza experience and a form of resisting assimilation into the dominant culture. Anzaldúa figures her bilingualism, or indeed multilingualism, as essentially transgressive and against a neo-colonial dominating society which centres on homogeneity, rather than difference and on singularity, rather than multiplicity. The texts discussed here parallel that transgressive, rebellious linguistics, combining Spanish and English or Creole, French and English or Patois and English in a deliberate and political choice: one which privileges the mestiza, the hybrid and

which consequently denies homogeneity. English is Cliff's language, the official language of her home and to use it in this way makes a clear statement about identity. A Jamaican voice can speak in English, just as a Jamaican black identity can be harboured in white skin, the assumption that 'you have a white outlook just because you look white' is one that Cliff has struggled with herself (Schwartz, 607), and there is a parallel here between Clare's refusal to pass as white and her desire to be Jamaican despite her colour and the novel's use of English to speak a Jamaican identity or identities. It proves that there is no one Jamaican identity and no one way of speaking it. That it is just as possible to write about the Caribbean in English as it is to write it in Patois or Creole, that this choice of language does not make either the novel, Cliff or Clare any less authentic. In the cases of Alvarez, Danticat and García English is the language of their adopted homelands and to write in English does not mean for these authors that one cannot speak of the Hispanic or French Caribbean. The centrality of language to both the criticism of these novels and their own structures seem indicative of its importance in the formation of identity and in expressing a female Caribbean identity. In the process of finding a voice, an essential part of the coming of age narrative, the protagonists and writers must first decide which language to speak in. There is an obvious burden of history associated with English, as a colonial and imposed language⁸, however, all four authors have taken English on as their own and found ways of making it speak Caribbean experiences. They have made English speak their experiences and the linguistic complexity of all four texts makes clear that there are hybrid identities being expressed. Only multiple linguistic worlds can capture the multiplicity of the identities of the authors and characters. It seems significant that Cliff does not call herself a Jamaican writer - she

⁸ Spanish is likewise an originally colonial language but the criticism does not seem to reflect the same sense of imposition or tension as experienced with English.

grew up partly there and partly in the United States as well as being educated in London and so states that she 'can't limit [herself] to just one place' (597) - just as Alvarez, Danticat and García prefer Cuban/Dominican/Haitian-American over purely Cuban, Dominican or Haitian. The way these authors use English can therefore be seen as a marker of their current hybrid identity, a way of claiming all of their identity. By bending English and expanding it to speak their hybrid identities these authors refuse to set up a binary opposition, instead allowing languages to merge and flow into one another without distinction, thus complicating ideas of singular identity and modes of being. As a result, the English text reflects a hybrid identity, a linguistic voice that is indelibly marked by Spanish/French/Creole/Patois but which cannot reject English and instead combines both languages into a new and vibrant voice. Whilst the choice to write in English may at first appear to be an acceptance of, and assimilation into, dominant American culture, by evoking within their novels the rhythm and feel of Caribbean languages the texts in fact resist the dominant culture, make space within English for a Caribbean experience and lay claim to a multilingual voice and a hybrid identity in all its 'tension and richness' of hybridity (Alvarez, *Something to Declare*, 173).

THE LANGUAGES OF THE CHARACTERS:

It is not only the language of the texts that makes a case for the link between language and identity and all the complexities that might entail. The characters, the young women who are coming of age within the texts, also struggle with language. As the journey from childhood to adulthood unfolds the characters also face the search for their own voices. This quest to find a voice - a female, Caribbean, hybrid voice - which can speak their own experiences is a necessary part of the coming of

age process. As we have seen above, the authors make choices about the language of the text, the language in which they choose to give voice to the stories they wish to tell, but within the novels the protagonists struggle with language in order to come to an understanding of how they can speak their identity. As female authors and characters this is heightened by the ways in which the act of speaking breaks the taboo of female silence. The very act of writing and giving voice is a transgressive act: ‘when she transforms silence into language, a woman transgresses’ (Anzaldúa, *Haciendo Caras*, xxii). ‘True speaking’ is not merely an expression of ‘creative power’, though that too is in evidence here, ‘it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render [women] nameless and voiceless’ (hooks, ‘Talking Back’, 210). To speak out, as Anzaldúa argues in *Borderlands*, has been denied to women: it is ‘*una falta de respeto*⁹ to talk back’ (76) and being ‘*[h]ocicona, repelona, chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*¹⁰...all words that are derogatory if applied to women – I’ve never heard them applied to men’ (76). Women have ‘remained faceless and voiceless’ (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 45), taught to be silent and servile, to be ‘*burras*’¹¹, finding their worth through serving men (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 43). As women therefore, having a voice and writing that voice is a transgression against ‘the inherent restrictions imposed on women by Anglo American...culture’ (Quintana, 80) and I would add by colonial and racial prejudices. In an interview, Anzaldúa claims that *Borderlands* legitimated young Chicanas, telling them their experiences were worth being written about (Ikas, 6) and in *Borderlands* she states that ‘[her] soul makes itself through the creative act’ of writing (95). To speak,

⁹ A lack of respect [my translation]

¹⁰ Badly brought up [my translation]

¹¹ Donkeys [my translation]

therefore, and to write as women, as coloured and ethnic women, are acts of defiance to the dominant cultures which mediate a hybrid diasporic identity.

When Gloria Anzaldúa writes: 'I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue – my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence' (*Borderlands*, 81) she is advocating not only giving voice to a hybrid, plural identity – an inherently forked tongue – but also a voice that is by its very nature resistant to dominant tradition, the tradition of silence surrounding female voices, voices of colour and the voice of the immigrant. This is a powerful statement about the issue of the language and voice of a hybrid subject, and how that voice, through its hybridity, resists the dominant ideology's claims of unified, singular selfhood. It is all too easy to be subsumed into the language of dominant culture:

Untied, our tongues run away from themselves. When we come into possession of a voice, we sometimes have to choose with which voice...or in which language...to speak and write in... a danger arises that we may look through the master's gaze, speak through his tongue... (Anzaldúa, *Haciendo caras*, xxiii).

To speak then, is an act of deliberate decision and the voice or language of that speaking is never neutral. In the coming of age novels discussed this same powerful statement is being made. These are texts written by women and about women. Instead of relegating the bildungsroman genre to a purely male model, these texts are legitimising women's experiences, saying that they too are worth writing about and deserve to be spoken. In giving voice to their characters these authors are resisting the notion of female silence and reclaiming women's voices, making a masculine, European genre speak female, Caribbean experiences. The characters enact the same motion of defiance by struggling with language and I would argue only truly coming to an understanding of themselves, when they find their voices, in their various

individual ways. In reclaiming their own forked tongues, their own hybrid, Caribbean, female voices the protagonists come to an understanding of their own identities.

Linguistic Tension and Potential:

The coming of age novel by Caribbean women writers is consistently interested in language, in the struggle for language in several ways. Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* for example is consistently preoccupied with the idea of speech and silence. Merle Collins' *Angel* is interspersed with the struggle between public and private speech. In Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* the protagonist associates learning a new language with changing identity, being 'disloyal' (230) to her Puerto Rican self. While throughout Maryse Condé's *Tales From the Heart* there is recognition of the tension between Creole and French precisely because of the identities associated with them in terms of nationality and class. In *Exile According to Julia* by Gisèle Pineau characters are similarly struggling between Creole and 'French French' (53). The main texts discussed here also place language as a major theme. While the authors' language choices and choice of subject explode the silences surrounding women's narratives and hybrid identities, within the novels too, their characters also deal with how language choice and plurilingualism affects identity. Rocío Davis insightfully notes that '[l]anguage functions in *Dreaming in Cuban* as a measuring device for gauging both connection and separation, loyalty and abandonment, between families and land' (64). For the characters within the novel language is not merely a mode of expression but is emotionally and politically charged: the languages that each character learns, speaks and passes on 'illustrate diverse attachments' and the lack of communication highlights 'the severance of a bond' (Davis, 64). Language carries with it the weight of familial, cultural and

political ideologies. This is perhaps most obvious in the character of Pilar, the central protagonist who is coming of age in García's novel, who, having left Cuba as a child for the United States, is torn between two cultures and two languages. Pilar envies her mother's Spanish which makes her own English 'collapse in a heap' (59) and for her 'English seems an impossible language for intimacy' (180) yet English is the language of her journal and her life in New York and it is to New York that she returns at the end of the novel because she belongs there, 'not *instead* of [Cuba] but *more* than' Cuba (236). The tension between English and Spanish is clear within the novel. In Pilar's decision to return to the United States and her assertion that 'Cuba is a peculiar exile.... We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all' (219), coupled with her new found ability to dream in Spanish (235) we see that this tension cannot be resolved. There is no going back, there is no possibility of choosing one or the other; Pilar's voice will always be found in the space between both languages, encompassing them both and rejecting neither. Linguistically, geographically and in terms of her identity Pilar crosses borders and engages with the diaspora, accepting both sides of herself. She is the embodiment of the mestiza and it is only in her acceptance of her place in both cultures and both languages, rather than in either one that she emerges as a coherent self, as becoming a woman in her own right.

Language and subsequently communication define and form identities, even for less hybrid characters than Pilar. Her aunt Felicia's twin daughters, Milagro and Luz, for example create their own language (86) as a way of separating themselves from their mother and brother; as a way of denying communication. The language these characters choose, and the limits they find in it, display the novel's concern with questioning the neutrality of language and of giving voice to the self. Pilar's mother

Lourdes too feels the significance of language choice. Spanish is the language of passion in her life – it is in Spanish that she scolds Pilar (59) – and yet, when they move to America, she gives herself over to English, ‘she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention’ (73). This choice is predicated, not by anything inherent in the language, but by her personal past. It is her way of rejecting Cuba – ‘[s]he wants no part of Cuba... no part of Cuba at all’ (73) – and ultimately, as a way of distancing herself from the trauma of her rape and miscarriage. In a literal display of this distance when Lourdes and Pilar return to Cuba in the final section of the novel, aptly entitled ‘Languages Lost’, no one can understand Lourdes: ‘The language she speaks is lost to them. It’s another idiom entirely’ (221). As Davis notes, it is language loss and language choice that serve as a metaphor for alienation and separation (64). The tensions between languages and the choices the characters make with regard to which languages they choose display the link between voice and identity. The problem of language expresses underlying problems of displacement, belonging, home, identity and hybridity.

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* we see this same unease and impulse to struggle with language. As we have discussed previously Alvarez has made her home in language, she has found a way of melding her hybrid language in writing the text and in doing so to express her multiple identity. Her characters however, are still mired in this struggle, are still attempting to find their voices and in this we can see the centrality of language and finding one’s voice to the journey involved in coming of age. The title of the novel is significant here: *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*. The girls in particular are the focus of the language struggle and it is evident when they are in New York as well as when they are on ‘the Island’: in America they work to minimise their accents to avoid derogatory remarks and

prejudices and to fit into this new society but when they return to the Dominican Republic they find they cannot communicate easily, their language is infantile and they are again out of place. Also, as the title suggests it is their assimilation into language which encapsulates their movement into a new culture, and as the text foregrounds language is linked to both identity and belonging. The phrase ‘lost their accents’ is one imbued with a sense of nostalgia and obviously loss, the García girls did not alter or change their accents but lost them, lost something fundamental it feels and so, Alvarez from the beginning is highlighting the importance of language.

Although the critic Ilan Stavans argues that despite the title Alvarez’s text ‘isn’t about language’ (24) I would disagree; language is a metaphor for cultural understanding and abandonment, a site upon which the problems of home, belonging and identity are played out. Many characters within the text express the confusion and tensions that occur when moving from one language to another. For example Laura, the girls’ mother, argues with her children in English, chides them and comforts them in Spanish and she often misconstrues English idioms or rephrases them to humorous effect. Her ‘scrambled English’ (138) and her ‘mish-mash of mixed-up idioms and sayings’ in both languages (135) display both her acceptance and enthusiasm for English and that she simultaneously never abandons her Dominican Spanish. Laura’s muddle of languages also highlights that in the melding of the two there is the potential not only for humour but also, for a new understanding. For example, when Carlos, the girls’ father, complains that she should be speaking to their children in Spanish she replies ‘when in Rome, do unto the Romans’ (135). This mistranslated phrase is not just an amusing mistake, it brings to light how Laura’s multilingual perspective allows for new understanding rather than unthinking repetition. This phrase implies to the reader that not only since they are living in the US should they

endeavour to speak like Americans but also that they can inflict themselves on to the language, not just have it imposed onto them. English is being done unto not just accepted placidly; there is a sense of active revolt in a phrase which originally counselled acceptance and passivity. The change in meaning may be humorous but its underlying implications are significant. As Julie Barak highlights, the ‘play in between languages foregrounds the absurdity of some accepted conventions’ (167) and makes the unthinking rhetoric of everyday life new and strange. In the mish-mash of languages Laura can make old idioms say new things and this is implicitly an expression of the entire novel which makes English say what is new, hybrid and Caribbean. For Laura, the move to America brings a new sense of freedom and possibility expressed in her delight for English idioms. For other characters however, the negotiation between languages is not necessarily as positive or liberating.

The central figure in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is arguably Yolanda, the third of the four daughters and the writer of the family. In fact Stavans goes so far as to call the text ‘Yoyo’s product’ and pronounces her the ‘soul inside the text’ (24). While this statement is perhaps hyperbolic it is true that though each chapter is narrated by a distinct voice, either one of the girls or a third person narrator, the novel begins and ends with Yolanda and it is her journey from childhood to adulthood and her loss of accent which seems most essential to the text. Indeed, as a writer Yolanda’s encounters and struggles with language are the most explosive and unlike Laura they are often torturous and painful. Although we might ultimately conclude it is also positive, or at the very least a necessary process for her coming into a sense of her self. It seems significant that she is a writer, that she comes to love words and language but that for her bilingualism is not a comfortable position to inhabit. Perhaps it is because, like Alvarez herself, Yolanda makes her home in

language, rather than in any physical space - when they move to New York ‘since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in language’ (141) – and so language is vital to her sense of belonging and identity. Yolanda it seems is caught in the tension between English and Spanish, but instead of finding this alternate in-between space productive and creatively liberating, she instead never feels completely comfortable in English and yet is unable to return to Spanish entirely. This is evident in the episode at the beginning of the novel when she returns to the Dominican Republic, to her home and finds herself out of place. She undertakes actions, such as travelling alone into the country, which are not acceptable in that society for a wealthy woman. There she uses English when she is frightened of the campesinos as a way of declaring her foreign-ness and status and they are ‘rendered docile by her gibberish’ (21). Equally however, she is mortified by her ‘halting Spanish’ (7) in which she cannot express herself as a mature adult but when standing in the foothills of her homeland she believes that she ‘has never felt at home in the States, never’ that this is what she has been missing (12). These dual impulses of belonging and not belonging, of wanting to speak but not feeling able to speak, except in English, are present in the first chapter of the novel, which is in actual fact – because of the reverse chronology of the text – a later point in Yolanda’s life. There is, in the way the text is structured, a sense that the journey, the struggle, is never completed, that Yolanda has not yet resolved these issues. There is no neat resolution or point of becoming when Yolanda acknowledges her hybrid selfhood. As Heather Rosario-Sievert argues, it is Yolanda who ‘fights Alvarez’s language battles’ and ‘whose quest is identity and whose vehicle is language’ (‘Anxiety’, 132). This quest, driven by language, is not easily completed but as Joan Hoffman points out ‘the struggle with language’ is a necessary step in finding ‘the strength and self-assurance

to forge an assimilated dual identity' (22). The tension expressed here at the beginning of the novel becomes therefore not a struggle to be resolved but a state of being which Yolanda begins to accept. We are given the sense that her intention to remain in the Dominican Republic will not come to fruition but that the act of returning, of acknowledging that place as also hers is significant for her coming into an acceptance of herself as a hybrid being; a being in tension who is neither one nor the other. When we compare the tension between languages in this first chapter to a chronologically earlier moment from her childhood, where Yolanda is afraid to speak in public in her accented English (141), we can see that despite the lack of resolution and the remaining existence of this tension it no longer cripples her as it once did.

The clearest example of Yolanda's struggle with language is in the issue of naming. Her dissatisfaction with the anglicised or altered versions of her name is mentioned several times (47, 81, 90, 166). As an expression of her identity Yolanda's name is altered in various ways by a number of people, in ways that reinscribe who she is: 'Yolanda, nicknamed Yo in Spanish, misunderstood Joe in English, doubled and pronounced like a toy, YoYo – or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains Joey' (68). The fact that Yolanda is forced into the shape of these other names is symptomatic of her identity being moulded into other shapes. Yolanda is a sonorous, elegant name, shortened to YoYo it becomes a juvenile, playful name. By shortening it further to Yo it becomes the Spanish word for 'I', a statement of selfhood and individuality. While with her American husband she becomes Joe, a bastardisation of her selfhood, a reinscribing of her femininity into a masculine moniker and an attempt to rename her in English, to constrain her within those terms. In the section aptly entitled 'Joe' we can see how much this impulse disturbs and repulses her. This chapter, dealing with the break up of her marriage and

her mental breakdown, constructs the entire episode in terms of language. She feels when her husband is kissing her that he is 'pushing her words back in her throat' (75), she escapes from him into 'the safety of her first tongue, where the proudly monolingual John could not catch her, even if he tried' (72) and by the end they are entirely unable to communicate: John speaks 'kindly, but in a language she had never heard before' and all Yolanda hears is 'Babble, babble' (77-78). Later she explains their destroyed relationship as a failure of communication: 'We just didn't speak the same language' (81). In this pivotal episode in the novel what is expressed is the centrality of language to identity and the problems this can cause when, like Yolanda, that language is not necessarily shared or becomes circumscribed by others. In forcing Yolanda to be Joe, her husband is attempting to limit her to English and as a result she feels both imprisoned and silenced. She has literally lost her voice by trying to live entirely in his terms, in English, instead of acknowledging all the parts of her self, both Spanish and English. It seems significant too that her subsequent breakdown also occurs in the medium of words. Yolanda becomes incapable of communicating except in quotes; she talks constantly but only in mimicry, a parroting of other people's words (79-80). She has lost herself entirely to a flood of words which are not her own and only recovers when she regains her own voice, speaking out loud so that 'words tumble out, making a sound like the rumble of distant thunder, taking shape, depth and substance' (85). She speaks and she 'gains faith as she says each word and dares further' (85) to make the words her own again. She regains her voice and in doing so re-centres herself, she is no longer a conglomerate of other people's quotations. She has her own words, she is herself again and she takes that word 'Yolanda' and folds it inside herself (85) so that she is a coherent whole who does not have to 'divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo' (78). This scene displays most clearly how

language and identity are linked in this novel and illustrates, as Joan Hoffman determines in her critical study of language and identity in *The García Girls*, that '[w]ords are inseparable from Yolanda's identity' (23). The crisis of identity which Yolanda suffers is expressed in linguistic terms and is only resolved through rediscovering her own voice and in owning the English language as hers by giving the words 'shape, depth and substance' through her, infusing them with her ideas, thoughts, her self; it is only then that they become able to describe the world.

Though this episode is the most powerful engagement with language in the text there are several other instances where the issue of language acquisition and of moving into a new language are present. As a result of her mental breakdown Yo rediscovered the power of language, she reclaims it as her own and recognises its potential - 'there is no end to what can be said about the world' (85) – but she first encounters the tension between languages which being a mestiza/hybrid self creates when she is a child. As mentioned above, she takes root in language but growing up and gaining her voice in English is not an easy process. All the girls show aspects of this struggle; several of the girls are mocked for being immigrants and this schoolyard harassment takes the form of linguistic taunts. They are made fun of in school for their accents and taunted with the mimicry of their pronunciations - 'eh-stop!' (153). It is Carla who expresses how closely language is linked to belonging and acceptance when she recalls that she 'hated having to admit' how little English she spoke 'since such an admission proved, no doubt, the boy gang's point that she didn't belong here' (156). It is Carla too who is shamed into silence when trying to report an exhibitionist to the police by her limited command of English - as well as by the masculine authority the policeman represents – an English which 'was still just classroom English, a foreign language' in which she cannot express herself (156). Likewise, Yo

is separated by her 'immigrant literalism' when speaking to school friends (89). It is a great moment of triumph for Yo when she writes a speech, inspired by Walt Whitman's poetry, and finally 'sound[s] like herself in English!' (143). In fact Rosario-Sievert argues that this moment of writing is Yolanda's attempt to 'create herself' through language ('The Dominican-American Bildungsroman', 117) and after her father's subsequent destruction of the speech it is through language that she exacts her revenge, choosing her words as weapons in order to call him 'Chapita!' (147), Trujillo's hated nickname. Language then becomes the field of power in its ability to destroy as well as create. Here, as in the novel as a whole, Alvarez shows that the successful acquisition of English comes at a cost. As the girls become accustomed to speaking in English other problems arise: they begin to forget 'a lot of their Spanish and their father's formal, florid diction' becomes difficult for them to understand (142). It changes their family dynamic and in a reverse from their lives in the Dominican Republic their mother becomes the family representative because she went to school in the States and has a better command of English than their father: 'Mami was the leader now that they lived in the States.... *She* spoke English without a heavy accent' (176). In analysing these early interactions with language it seems clear that the acquisition of English is a major part of their coming into themselves as Americans, as members of this new culture. However, this language acquisition is never displayed as wholly positive, something is always lost. Also it is never entirely complete, their birth language is never entirely rejected: the girls still speak some Spanish with their parents and still use some Spanish phrases and terms of endearment such as 'Cuquita' (149) and 'pobrecita' (81). Instead, each member of the family negotiates a different balance with English and Spanish. William Luis argues that the García girls are 'caught in the midst; that is, between the *tick* and the

tock...past and future, or between North American and Hispanic cultures' (842). However, while he sees this in-between existence as a sign that the girls have 'neglected their Dominican traditions and accepted North American culture' (842), I would argue that the characters live in the tension between these two cultures. This is evident at both the beginning and end of the novel – whether taken chronologically or physically – where the image of the gaping mouth, calling and wailing repeats itself. In the first section this is the mouth of the Palmolive woman on an advertisement 'calling someone over a great distance' (23) which Yolanda sees when she is in the Dominican Republic and which seems to call her back to the States. In the last chapter it is the open mouth of the bereft mother cat from which Yolanda stole a kitten 'wailing over some violation that lies at the centre of [Yolanda's] art' (290). An image from childhood which still haunts Yolanda as an adult in the United States calling her back to the Dominican Republic and her own past. By framing the text with these two opposing pulls or calls Alvarez is indicating that the entire text, as well as the characters themselves live in the space in-between, in the movement between cultures, places, languages and national identities and it is in the tension between the two not in a rejection of either that the girls lives unfold and they come of age.

The loss or transition Alvarez evokes in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* finds its parallel in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. When Sophie moves from Haiti to New York she must become an English speaker and this transition, whilst not described negatively or painfully in the text, is not entirely positive either. The descriptions of her move from Creole to English, as well as other people's descriptions of English, are less than flattering. Sophie describes the process of going from understanding only a few common words '*TV, building, feeling*' and words that looked the same in French but are pronounced differently '*nationality, alien, race*' to

the moment when she ‘became an English speaker’ (66-67). There is a sense of a process occurring, of competency gained but her descriptions of English ‘sound[ing] like rocks falling in a stream’ (66) and her grandmother’s description of it as ‘that *cling-clang* talk...It sounds like glass breaking’ (162) give a sense of its dissonance. English is not described as a comfortable or beautiful language but rather as something heavy and piercing. Learning English is not done for pleasure but for necessity. Through Martine’s insistence that Sophie learn English and Sophie’s resentment of the other students who call them ‘the Frenchies’ and ‘stinking Haitians’ (66) we get a sense that language is a means of inclusion. Martine is certain that learning the language of America will allow her daughter to go further, to continue into the prestigious career she wants for Sophie. This hints at the class distinctions and power relationships involved in language choice and acquisition. This can also be seen within Haitian society, not merely in the interaction between Haitians and Americans. Sophie describes Martine’s voicemail message:

“*S’il vous plait, laissez-moi un message. Please leave me a message.*”

Impeccable French and English, both painfully mastered, so that her voice would never betray the fact that she grew up without a father, that her mother was merely a peasant, that she was *from the hills*. (223).

Martine has practiced both languages to hide her class background, to gain a different identity through her use of language. The implication of both English and French as high-class languages and Creole as lower-class is clear, as is the link between language and identity, in this case a class identity, which has associations of status, wealth and power. Unlike Pilar and Yolanda however the intersection and play between languages is more seamless and less emotionally fraught for Sophie. She is steeped in Haitian culture and language. She not only lived in Haiti until she was twelve but when she moves to join her mother in Brooklyn she becomes part of the

Haitian community there; going to a French school with other immigrants, going to Haitian restaurants and beauty salons. The people she is surrounded by and interacts with ‘walked and talked and argued in Creole’ (52). Even while immersed in an Anglophone culture she has this community in which Creole is the central language and so even outside of Haiti she moves between English and Creole in her everyday life. She also holds on to Haiti and to her family there, refusing to forget. When a bus driver comments on her ‘flawless’ Creole (95) on her first visit back to Haiti she connects her use of the language to remembrance. She, unlike other immigrants, does not ‘need to forget’, she ‘need[s] to remember’ (95) and part of this remembering is remaining in touch with her childhood language. This exchange, as well as her conversations with her husband Joseph, show that Sophie is a fluent speaker of English, Creole and French. Her facility with each is part of her identity, rather than her knowledge of English limiting her use and understanding of Creole. She speaks English with her mother ‘without realizing it’ (162) and slips into ‘flawless’ Creole with ease, displaying her facility with both. Instead of feeling that one language is taking over the other, Sophie exists in a balance between languages and she seems, unlike Alvarez’s Yolanda or García’s Pilar to exist comfortably in this intersection. Language, for the characters of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is still central to identity, but it is not the emotionally fraught battleground for identity that appears in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* or *Dreaming in Cuban*.

The issue of language is not however just a question of bilingualism and choice but of voice and accent as well. The accented voice is mentioned in several novels, for example Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* where Aunt Beatrice polices her niece’s and her maid’s voices until they ‘speak properly’ (38). As mentioned previously, the García girls are mocked for their immigrant accents while

in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie comments: ‘After seven years in this country, I was tired of having people detect my accent’ (69). Although this conversation about accent, which occurs with her future husband Joseph, is brief it implies a multitude of similar conversations about her accent and consequently her foreignness as well as highlighting Sophie’s resentment of it. In *No Telephone to Heaven* we see more overtly the silencing effects of an accented voice. Clare’s mother Kitty is bound up in the struggle with language and in particular the issue of accented voices. When she and Boy move their children to America Kitty encounters not only the racism of America, but also the Anglocentrism of it. Kitty cannot find a job, not only because of her skin colour, but because, despite her education and skills, her accent disqualifies her from a customer-facing role: ‘There was also the problem of their accents... Their accents unsettled most employers’ (74). Kitty is a native English speaker but her English is marked by her Caribbean identity and so her voice is unacceptable. During an interview for the position of receptionist at a bank the white male interviewer comments on her ‘musical voice’ in the same breath as he mentions ‘the duty of a receptionist to create a positive impression on the public’ (76). There is a clear link being made between Kitty’s voice, her accented English and her appropriateness for interaction with clients. The tension here is not between languages as much as it is between voices, between acceptable and non-acceptable accents. English is Kitty’s mother tongue and yet she is treated as a foreign speaker because of her accent, in fact she is faced with ‘assumptions that because she spoke in accented language she was illiterate’ (80). Also there is the understanding that ‘an education in colonial schools’ is not as important as her ‘musical voice, her golden skin’ (77-78). Eventually Kitty finds employment at a laundry, where the owner Mr B, ‘whose accent was very much with him’, explains that the problem with her accent is that it

marks her as foreign, 'it is strange...unfamiliar...to most Americans...it confuses them' (74). This clearly portrays the link between language and identity; Kitty is identified by how she speaks, by how accented her language is and thus she is labelled as 'exotic' (74) with its additional significations of strange, unfamiliar and foreign. The language and voice in which Kitty expresses her identity are deemed unacceptable or confusing in America and thus she ends up in a job where she does not have to speak to anyone and her voice is lost.

Silenced Voices and Finding Voices:

Kitty's loss of voice highlights how, in addition to concerns with multiple languages and accents, there is also a consistent preoccupation in coming of age novels with the issue of voice and silence. *No Telephone to Heaven*, for example, whilst it superficially might appear less engaged with the linguistic debate than its Hispano and Francophone counterparts is in fact heavily invested in the struggle with speaking. During her youth the main protagonist Clare is essentially a silenced being, trapped between the white world her father grooms her for and her desire for her mother's black world. For example, in *Abeng*, the first of Cliff's novels about the Savage family, which follows Clare's early childhood, she is denied access to her maternal grandmother and sent to a white woman to learn 'proper' ways. There is also a scene in which Clare is censored by her parents when they search for and discover her diary, using her own words to humiliate and essentially silence her. Cliff discusses in an interview how this episode is actually based on a similar circumstance which happened in her own childhood and she describes it as a traumatic and 'silencing event'; she makes clear that this moment silenced her writer's voice 'for almost twenty years' (Schwartz, 603). A similar reaction can be seen in Clare, this abrupt

invasion of privacy and appropriation of her voice is a terrible moment that truncates her growing selfhood, her emerging voice. This is the Clare whom we meet in *No Telephone to Heaven*, one who is already caught between identities and silenced by her parents' expectations and this aspect of silencing is continued during their move to America. When the Savages move to America, Clare's father Boy, as the lightest skinned member of the family can pass as white whilst 'his slightly darker wife and mango and guava daughters' (55) cannot. Clare however, 'favours backra and fe you Daddy' (105) and so when her mother Kitty and her darker sister Jennie leave New York Boy teaches her to pass. In doing so he imposes silence on her by teaching her the importance of 'invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage' (100). During this time Clare imagines herself as 'an albino gorilla' who 'cowers in the bush fearing capture.... Not speaking for years' (91). The deceit and self-denial that are necessitated by a life of passing as something other than what she is, of denying her mother and parts of her self, are figured as acts of silence, of not speaking. Boy reinforces this silencing even within the home, as when he tells her to ignore the Sunday school bombings which have deeply affected her (102) or admonishes her not to ask questions about her mother and not to 'ask about things which didn't concern you' (152). Throughout her time in America with Boy, Clare's identity is repressed by his desire to pass, to blend in, by his use of camouflage as a survival mechanism. In doing so he, and the culture in which they live, succeed in suppressing Clare's selfhood partly through language, by denying her a voice in which to speak, by keeping her silent. Later on Clare remarks: 'I can agree, I can be agreeable, in five languages, you know ... I was raised by my father that way. To be the soft-spoken little sambo, creole, invisible neger' (152). This statement clearly encapsulates how her voice has been taken from her and her resentment of it. She

speaks 'her father's adopted tongue' (104) and she has learned to speak as others wish her to, to bend her own voice to her father's, and white society's, will. To be invisible, to blend in, is to be 'soft-spoken' and 'agreeable' with the attendant ideas of being silent on controversial issues, of not speaking out, of not arguing, of being good and therefore obedient to male authority and to white authority. Boy has suppressed her identity by suppressing her voice and it is only when Clare recovers both that her journey towards selfhood can continue. There is a particularly telling scene when Clare states for the first time baldly in the face of Boy's anger: 'My mother was a nigger.... And so am I' (104). Clare is described as 'speaking the word [nigger] at him' as if it were a weapon to be used against him (104) and it seems effective because as far as the narrative allows this is the last conversation between Boy and Clare, it is the severing of their relationship. Clare claims her voice and her identity, separating herself from her father, leaving both him and America. It is a significant moment in Clare's development and it is figured through the use of language. This entire sequence of her life in New York highlights the importance of voice and demonstrates how Clare begins to struggle through language, to come into her own voice. This declaration of selfhood is an important part of her claiming her identity and of her coming of age.

It is only after many years of wandering, however, and after leaving and returning to Jamaica that Clare fully recuperates her voice. There is a pivotal moment within the novel, when Clare first joins the guerrilla group where she has to stand and answer pointed questions about who she is and what she believes, in essence she has to profess herself: 'I have African, English, Carib in me' (189). The scene is presented without narration or intermediaries, there are no quotation marks or, for most the sequence, any immersion into Clare's mind, it is simply Clare's words and her

interlocutor's on the page. It is in stark contrast to the previous and following sections, thus highlighting even further both the importance of this moment and the emphasis on voices. It is her words that are necessary; she is finding the strength to give voice to herself and to make that decision towards action as part of the rebel group. In this series of questions and answers Clare accepts her own identity, the fragmentary and united aspects of herself by, for the first time, acknowledging the African, English and Carib parts of herself. She is also vocally accepting the suppressed parts of her identity, her Jamaican identity, her black identity: 'I returned to this island because there was nowhere else.... I could no longer live in borrowed countries' (192-193). She is accepting her own history, her mother's and grandmother's legacy which is part of her own selfhood by giving voice to these statements and using her grandmother's land to aid the guerrilla group: 'My history brought me to this room' (195); 'My grandmother believed in using the land to feed people' (189); 'My mother told me to help my people' (196). The hidden or suppressed parts of her self are now spoken out loud, acknowledged and in this pivotal act of speaking we see Clare's journey of becoming. Finding her self, her identity, allows her to take definitive action, to take resistance to an active level. Whether we see her eventual demise as tragic or heroic it remains part of an act of resistance, however successful. Both this acceptance into the movement, her decision to act and her demise are all figured through language, through an acceptance and use of her voice. Even her death is figured as sound, as a voicing. The novel ends with Clare being shot while they wait to overrun an American film set which is appropriating Caribbean history for its own tourist and consumerist ends. The description of her death however is couched in words and sounds. As Clare dies '[s]he remembered language. Then it was gone' (208), a particularly poignant ending

and one which highlights how the struggle for language is over now, Clare's struggle is over now. After this there is a description of various natural sounds 'kut ktu ktu kut ktu ktu/ cwa cwa cwa cwaah cwaah cwaah/ Day broke.' (208). It is as if in these final moments the sounds of the Caribbean envelop Clare and it is these voices of her homeland, as well as her last remembrance of language, that end the text. It is these voices which echo out from the final pages, once again highlighting the importance of language and voice to the text and emphasising that Clare's journey is essentially a movement from silence into voice, even if in the end she is silenced by death. Cliff discusses this ending in an interview, indicating that she sees it as an ambiguous ending, both 'tragic' and triumphant (Schwartz, 602). In her essay 'Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character' Cliff expands on this to say that

Though essentially tragic, for her life has been so, I see it, and envisioned it, as an ending that completes the circle... In her death she has complete identification with her home-land; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestor's bones. (625).

It seems then, that although in death Clare's language is gone, that she is silenced once more, this ending is peaceful and uplifting rather than despairing. Clare is melding into the natural landscape, surrounded by natural sounds and finding an end to her struggles there.

Clare is not the only character in the novel that moves from silence into speech. Her mother Kitty enacts a similar journey implying the significance of voice to identity and the necessity of a continuous coming of age even into adulthood. Kitty is essentially silenced by her work; as mentioned previously her voice is deemed unsuitable and therefore she is trapped in a job that does not allow for communication. Her voice is shut up in the back room of the laundry, pinning "helpful hints" (72) to the dry cleaned clothes in between two black American

women who also ignore her: 'All was accomplished in quiet' (72). These hints are part laundry advice and part advertisement with Mr B using the white, female figure of Mrs White, 'the imaginary wife of an imaginary man, conceived by Mr B', to promote 'her philosophy of laundry and thus her philosophy of wifehood' (73). Kitty slips this advice into the laundry items and thus she finds herself 'using her voice only as Mrs White, or as the office's quiet girl' (74). This silencing aspect of her work is frustrating for Kitty. Her accented voice separates her from the business arena, as visible from her unsuccessful job hunt but it also separates her from other black people and other immigrants and all these isolations are figured as linguistic problems. For example, Kitty cannot speak to the Italian immigrant women who live nearby, because 'their accents clashed and they said they could not understand each other' (64) so that there is no sense of community between them. Similarly, Kitty cannot speak with the other black women who work at the laundry because they keep her at a distance, they 'fell silent on her entry' and she is '[u]nable to speak to them' (77). Kitty is isolated and silenced by those around her because of her voice. The only place Kitty feels at home is in the Caribbean shops of Bedford-Stuyvesant. It is in these shops that 'she broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice' (65). It is essentially the only place she feels able to speak and she is 'saving her twang' her true voice 'for the shopkeepers of Bedford-Stuyvesant' (75) until Boy curtails her trips there, stating that it is too dangerous. Without this outlet Kitty's frustration grows. After another failed interview and confronted with her co-workers' silence once more Kitty asks herself: 'Why hadn't she said something to the man?... Why didn't these women talk to her?... Why had she maintained silence, calling it dignity...?' (77-78). It is this loss of voice, a build up of frustrated silence that leads to a particularly significant act of speaking within the text. Kitty can no

longer maintain her silence and so she uses Mrs White's 'helpful hints' to give voice to her frustrations. She adds her own advice to Mrs White's 'quaint sweet language' (73) hijacking that white, female, 'American image' (73) to speak her own indictment against racism: 'EVER TRY CLEANSING YOUR MIND OF HATRED?' (78).

These pieces of advice and advertising have previously been Mr B's act of ventriloquism, a way of adopting a white, female voice to provide appropriately motherly advice for his customers. The male shop owner is therefore appropriating and using a white, female voice for his own ends while simultaneously silencing Kitty's voice. This male usurpation is undone when Kitty rebels and begins to speak through Mrs White. The vocality of the act seems clear, even as an act of writing this is still an act of speech. The capitalising of the text makes this not only a speech act but also a shout, a violent voicing of Kitty's discontent. It seems significant that this act of speaking, of speaking through a white figure in order to subvert it, occurs in the text since it could be argued that this mimics Cliff's own appropriation of English to subvert it or at least alter it to speak a Jamaican identity. Kitty eventually not only appropriates the white woman's fictional voice to make herself heard but also does away with Mrs White entirely. In her last message she 'coloured in the pink face of Mrs White. She drew a balloon next to each dark face. HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER' (83). The decisive and rebellious act of giving voice allows her to feel 'free, released' (83). Not only does Kitty give voice to her own frustrations but to an anti-racist ideology. She is resisting white American society's oppression by speaking out and whilst this may seem a small rebellion it is one that eventually leads to Kitty leaving Boy and America entirely to return home. This sequence of ventriloquism, from Mr B to Mrs White, to Kitty to Mrs White to Mrs Black highlights the importance of voice, of giving voice

to oneself. Kitty's speech-act parallels Clare's own moment of rebellious, decisive speaking mentioned above; each of these suppressed female characters had to struggle with language in their own way to reach a moment of speech in order to voice themselves. It is in these acts of silence, whether imposed by others or self imposed, and in these acts of speech that *No Telephone to Heaven* explores the links between language and identity and displays the movement from silence into speech that accompanies the protagonists coming of age.

As with Cliff's text, Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is deeply concerned with voice and silence. This is not to say that language is not a concern in the text. Sophie's move from Creole and French speaker to English speaker is a significant moment in her coming of age, especially since it allows her to form relationships outside the closed community of her mother Martine, her mother's lover Marc and the Haitian community they inhabit. In this respect Joseph, her husband, is an important figure since their relationship marks the first non-Haitian character we encounter in the novel. Her relationship with Joseph, which is founded on their ability to communicate, is her means of escaping her mother's oppression, her stifling silencing. There is a particularly poignant scene where Martine gives Sophie the life-size doll she has been caring for as a companion before her daughter's arrival but when she tucks them both in '[t]here was not enough room for both [Sophie] and the doll on the bed' (46). This is emblematic of the space Sophie can occupy in her mother's life; she is squeezed in and fitted around what her mother needs. In addition, there is a later scene where Sophie parrots her mother's words and dreams of her future as a doctor while admitting internally: '[t]hat was the problem...I had never really dared to dream on my own' (72). These two scenes display the circumscribed life Sophie lives with her mother, fitting into the mould her mother prepares for her

and keeping silent about her own desires. Her relationship with Joseph not only provides a physical escape from this maternal oppression but also a verbal one. Sophie falls in love with Joseph's music as well as with him and it is a way they communicate through the walls of the house that separate them. The music serves as a form of indirect speech with him playing lullabies to her at night from the house next door (71), breaking the silence between them imposed by Martine. Sophie's infatuation is also described in terms of speech, of breaking silence: 'I wasn't thinking straight. It was nice ... knowing I had someone to talk to' (72). She finally has someone who hears her, who listens and understands her: 'He even understood my silences' (72). Their relationship is based on communication; it is an area where Sophie can speak and be heard and this is important in her continuing coming of age.

It is not only in language then but also in the tension between voice and silence that the primary concerns of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* appear. The entire text can be described as an act of giving voice, a rebellious speech act. The whole novel is a first-person account; it is Sophie's story and she is telling it. Sophie's life is filled with silences: with the absence of her mother to begin with, with the silence surrounding her father and her birth, with the unspoken history of her aunt Atie's loves and losses and with the testing of virginity that has been perpetuated throughout the generations but never spoken of. The past is only pieced together as the narrative unfolds and in the midst of all these silences Sophie speaks, she speaks to us the reader and she tells her tale: her past, her traumas, her mother's rape, mental illness and suicide, her own sexual phobia, bulimia and nightmares. The text is in essence a breaking of silence. Danticat claims in an interview that she sees 'Sophie telling her story as an act of triumph' (Lyons, 197) and this is evident in the text. It is through Sophie that we learn her family's past and present and it is she who breaks the

silences surrounding them culminating in her final speech act. After Martine's funeral Sophie beats the cane at the spot where her mother was raped, confronting the past and as she does she tells us her mother's story, her bravery and that 'Yes, my mother was like me' (234). When her grandmother arrives she concludes this scene of confrontation and catharsis by saying:

“There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: ‘*Ou libéré?* Are you free my daughter?’” My grandmother quickly pressed her fingers over my lips. “Now,” she said, “you will know how to answer.” (234).

It is with this question and Sophie's ability to respond that the novel ends. The importance of telling stories, of being able to tell your own story, will be discussed in the following section but even with this one instance it is clear that the speech act is essential to the triumph and catharsis of the text. The act of giving voice, to the silences of the past and to the self, which Sophie manages through the first-person narrative and this final moment of speech, are essential to her coming of age, to her ability to become, to her sense of wholeness as a hybrid self.

This search for a voice is a motif across coming of age novels. Each protagonist's struggle is distinct but they all share in the journey for a voice of their own, a means of overcoming silence and negotiating their multiple languages. Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* is unique in that she seems to reject language as a form of expression in order to find her voice, noting that it wraps us up in clichés and miscommunication whereas '[p]ainting is its own language.... Translations just confuse it, dilute it' (59). For Pilar, art eclipses language and renders it unnecessary: 'who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language? That's what I want to do with my paintings, find a unique language, obliterate the clichés' (139). Art, because it escapes from cliché and translation, because it is more visceral, can

therefore communicate more truth than language can. Later on in the novel Pilar moves from art to music – she learns to play bass (181) – an even more abstract form of self-expression. While it is possible to read this rejection of language as denoting the impossibility of finding one’s hybrid voice I believe it in fact maps out strategies for negotiating that hybridity positively. Pilar’s art communicates what she cannot say and this privileging of abstract forms of expression over the linguistic highlights García’s concerns with voice, with self expression and the difficulties inherent in finding a voice for a hybrid subject. As a Cuban-American, Pilar’s voice is necessarily hybrid but as her rejection of language shows, language choice is never easy or neutral; it is never just a choice between two languages but also between the emotional, political and cultural ideologies which form and attach themselves to specific languages. In depicting Pilar’s struggles with language and in her move towards non-linguistic forms of expression, García is highlighting the difficulties of being a hybrid subject and that there are ways of resisting an unquestioning incorporation into dominant forms. While Pilar may appropriate the forms of the dominant culture she never does so without subverting them. While painting the iconic image of the Statue of Liberty for example, Pilar cannot ‘paint it straight’ (143), she must subvert it and instead paint her in ‘her full punk glory’ (144). The refiguring of this particular icon displays how the hybrid, displaced subject can both appropriate and resist dominant forms and ideologies, paralleling the novel’s linguistic appropriation and subsequent subversion of the dominant linguistic form of Standard English.

Language and voice are therefore two intertwined and overarching themes that reach across the coming of age genre. While each author and text expresses the

struggle and negotiation with language and the search for a voice in unique ways the centrality of the theme across the genre indicates the intimate links between language, voice and identity. To speak and the method of that speaking play important roles in the process of coming of age. Judith Butler reminds her readers that ‘speaking is a bodily act...a stylized assertion of presence’ (*Undoing Gender*, 172). Struggles with speaking and the languages of that speech are ultimately struggles with the self, with creating and managing identity. These coming of age texts provide a gendered voicing of that identity, a plethora of female voices. In the ways in which these texts use language and voice, both the authors and the characters manifest an investment in multiplicity. It is not solely a gendered coming of age but also a hybrid identity that is being explored. The language of the texts and the language of the characters are marked by fluidity, by movement and by a rejection of binaries. Their hybrid in-between-ness allows them, like the mestiza, to ‘operate in a pluralistic mode’ (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 101) to access and accept multiple languages and so create new ways of speaking their selves. These texts and these women coming of age are creating new languages to speak their hybrid identities: blending and melding multiple languages, moving between languages, inflecting and bending English, finding their voices amidst the tumult.

CHAPTER TWO: NARRATIVES AND STORYTELLING

To continue on from the previous chapter's discussion of language and voice this chapter deals with storytelling. As established, ways of speaking, the choice to speak in specific languages and the way those languages become altered are closely linked to the formation of identity, as is the search for a voice of one's own. Related to these concepts are the ways in which speech acts become stories, the ways in which narratives are told. This becomes relevant in numerous ways firstly, the telling of stories by the authors, how the narrative structure of these coming of age texts offers new ways of telling in contrast to their predecessors. Secondly, the importance of telling stories within the text, the narratives the protagonists search for or are enveloped in as they come of age, the stories they tell about themselves and others tell for them. Storytelling, the ability to tell your story or to find the stories that make you, are important aspects of the main characters' journeys of coming of age.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE:

Edward Said writes that 'exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can...provide us with new narratives...with other ways of telling' (225). The main texts discussed in this thesis exemplify this statement. As novels of migration, of journeys, and novels that deal with protagonists who cross borders in numerous ways, the four main texts portray their experiences and do so in part by offering the reader new narratives and new ways of telling. Part of these new narratives is the use of language but it also extends beyond that to the structure of the texts. The authorial forms of storytelling, of providing new ways of telling the coming of age narratives, serve to differentiate them from their forbearers. The techniques

discussed also show the influence of postmodernism and magic-realism on these authors since they stem from the same time period, but the choice to use them to this purpose seems significant. If the coming of age story is told differently then it is experienced differently by the reader and perhaps exposes how it is felt differently from the male bildungsroman novels that preceded them. The four main texts discussed here all express a new way of forming the coming of age novel, creating an alternative narrative to the traditional male bildungsroman. One way in which they differentiate themselves is by confounding the linear progression narrative of the male tradition. They undermine the linear account of movement from childhood to adulthood through various structural techniques: complex chronological structure, a lack of resolution and by fragmenting the texts and providing multiple perspectives. These authors play with the structure of the novel and this sense of play in the narratives, of testing boundaries, is a part of the process of becoming for the authors as well, mirroring their protagonists fluid, hybrid identities.

Complex Chronology and Lack of Resolution:

The most obvious way in which these coming of age novels diverge from previous narratives is that they play with time. The traditional bildungsroman trajectory and structure privileges the individual story of a male protagonist, mapping that self from childhood to adulthood, from confusion and malleability to certainty and stability. There is usually a thematic concern with education and a movement from the private, familial space into a wider, public sphere. The progress of the subject is therefore linear and straightforward. In contrast, the authors discussed here do not offer the staid journey from child to adult - a movement always pushing forward to the next step, the next evolution, until the journey is done - instead time is

fluid. There is very rarely a straight, linear progression of the protagonists, instead the texts move backwards and forwards through time. Rather than moving from crisis to resolution, from child to adult, these writers complicate that pattern so that at any point in the text the narrative structure might move us between early childhood, young adulthood, teenage years, and back to childhood without hindrance. Such a flow of life exposes the characters as always in various states of flux, they do not leave behind the childhood years or simply move through them but inhabit all stages at the same time and carry them all with them at once. Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* is a prime example of this fluidity. The narrative follows the protagonist Clare Savage from childhood to adulthood but begins with her as an adult in Jamaica, moves backwards to her teenage visits to Jamaica from New York moves further back to her childhood in America, then jumps forward to Clare in graduate school in England and so the novel continues, moving in and out of Clare's life at various points. Such fluidity not only destabilises a structurally simple narrative of forward momentum it also negates any idea of moving away completely. Clare's childhood is not something she leaves behind it is something she lives with. When the narrative returns the reader to Clare's childhood in America it demonstrates how that childhood resonates into the future. Rather than a metamorphosis, or shedding of one skin for the adult self, Cliff rejects that masculine pattern and uses the narrative structure of the text to express a different experience of coming of age, one in which the past is always present, where change occurs but where the old self is incorporated into the new, not cast off. Not only does the author return us to that time but she also creates a circular novelistic structure. Clare's narrative ends where it begins with a guerrilla protest at an American film set in Jamaica. By structuring Clare's narrative like this Cliff is denying the traditional linearity of a coming of age narrative and speaking a

Caribbean female coming of age differently. Zee Edgell in her novel *Beka Lamb* incorporates a similar circular structure and, much like Cliff's text, begins with a significant moment in the protagonist Beka's life only to take us back into that life in order to understand her journey. *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez also employs a similar circularity, beginning with the sole surviving Mirabal sister Dedé as an old woman and within the frame of her narration exploring the earlier lives of all four sisters. In these narratives the experience of the text is different from a linear narrative because of its formal structure. In deciding to tell the story differently Cliff and the other authors are making a claim that the female Caribbean coming of age is experienced differently. This is not to say that this is the only reason to provide a complex chronology but it seems significant that so many of these texts which can be labelled coming of age challenge traditional novelistic structures in this way.

It is also not true that all authors always complicate linearity in the same way. Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* is a narrative that takes a different approach to complicating linear progression. The novel follows four sisters as they move from the Dominican Republic to the United States as children and back to the Dominican Republic as teenagers and adults for visits. But in fact the entire novel is a movement backwards, beginning with the sisters as adults still struggling with their hybrid selves and taking us back through their adulthood, teenage years and finally ending with their childhoods. This deliberate inversion rejects the entire premise of the male bildungsroman as the linear movement from malleable childhood to coherent stable adult self. Firstly, the characters we meet at the start of the novel, the adult Yolanda in particular, are still very much involved in the process of becoming, they are changing with their life experiences and they are only just beginning to accept their hybrid nature, their identity as both Dominican and

American. The last chronological section of the novel deals with Yolanda as an adult in the Dominican Republic wishing to make it her home (11) but the action of the section - her confusion and awkwardness with the language and the locals - indicate that she is marked by her otherness, the American half of her Dominican-American identity. The last the novel tells us of Yolanda she is still questioning what language she loves in (13) and even while wishing to belong in the Dominican Republic she is caught by the very American image of the Palmolive woman 'her mouth still opened as if she is calling someone over a great distance' (23). The duality of her identity, her place as living in the movement between two places denies the resolving impulse of the masculine trajectories and the idea that there is a moment of resolution, that the protagonists can become and there is the end. Instead, *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* is reversing the process, going back to the roots of the characters' hybridity and tracking it. There is no coherent self to move towards only an understanding of the fragmentary nature of hybrid identity. Even if we were to read the García girls' narratives chronologically they are not resolved, they are still mired in a sense of in-between-ness as evidenced by Yolanda's continued search for a home and unsatisfied wish for belonging, which occurs at the chronological end of the novel. The reverse chronology Alvarez utilises merely highlights this lack further. Julie Barak actually identifies Alvarez's structure as a spiral instead of a straight movement backwards, she argues that Alvarez's characters are spiralling 'from the outside in, whirling backward' a movement which highlights 'the centripetal and centrifugal forces which pull them toward and away from their island home, toward and away from the U.S., toward and away from an integrated adulthood' (160). This spiralling motif and Barak's analysis highlight the way in which the form of the novel mirrors its message, how the complexities and fluidities of a hybrid identity infiltrate

the structure of the text so that the stories must be told differently because they are experienced differently. The simultaneous pull toward and away are central to the characters and the text mimics this by pulling the reader both towards and away from the present lives of the characters, towards understanding and temporally away from it. Barak also highlights the ‘uncertainty and instability’ (163) this structure creates for the reader mimicking the confusion and instability of the characters. Meanwhile, Stephanie Lovelady argues that the reverse chronology of Alvarez’s work aims to ‘stress the backward-looking nature of immigration and coming of age’ (29) in other words the need to look to the past in order to understand the present whether because of nostalgia, a natural effect of divided self or as a coping strategy. However the formal structure of the novel is read it denies a clear resolution to the narratives.

This lack of resolution is mirrored in all of the texts discussed. Yolanda’s unresolved in-between-ness finds parallels in Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*. While Clare dies at the end of the novel the conflicts that dogged her life are not resolved prior to her death, nor does death resolve them; she may be sinking into the earth and the noise but this suggests oblivion and annihilation rather than resolution. Even if we could read death as the great leveller, this implies that the process of becoming is never complete until death or that stasis is equated to death. However we choose to read Clare’s end it is very dramatically an ending of the self not a resolution or wholeness of self. Similarly, Sophie’s moment of catharsis in the sugar cane field at the end of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is perhaps a resolution of her relationship with her mother, and it is certainly a hopeful end but it does not resolve who Sophie is. She is not a complete and coherent self; she is grieving, a mother in her own right but one who is still conflicted and hybrid. As mentioned previously, complex chronologies also lend themselves to this lack of resolution. Alvarez’s inverse chronology spirals

backwards away from a sense of having become, while circular narratives like Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* or Jacqueline Bishop's *The River's Song* – in ending where they begin and so looping continuously – also reject the idea of resolution. Even in texts whose chronological structures do not employ inversion or circularity, but which instead stretch and compress time or work on multiple planes, there is a denial of definitive resolutions. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* for example, plays with linear time. Chronologically in some chapters the titular protagonist is dated as ten, twelve, fifteen but often the chapters convey a sense of other time periods or of larger expanses of time. 'I always slammed the gate to our yard behind me when I was up to something' (54) for example, signifies a continuing state of affairs not a particular event that only occurred at one point in the protagonist's life and so Annie is describing not just one incident but also an entire childhood in each section. In other sections one incident leads to a recollection of an earlier time period and then moves backwards and forwards through similarly connected but non-linear events, as in Annie's final walk to the jetty where she remembers and recounts jumbled events from her life as the walk sparks her memory (139-143). In addition, the narrator is clearly an older woman narrating her past, which sets up an interesting temporal phenomena in that the actions of the child are filtered through the adult consciousness, the story is therefore occurring simultaneously in two temporal planes - the past and the present - so that the whole text is an exercise in complex chronology. This works similarly to García's *Dreaming in Cuban* where the stories of three generations occur simultaneously so that the narrative works on several temporalities. Within Kincaid's fluid chronology *Annie John* leaves the text at the moment of leaving the island but neither her relationships nor her sense of self are resolved. The reader is left with a sense of potential, of a new journey, but not of a

resolution of the struggles of the protagonist with identity. This is also clearly exemplified in Merle Hodges's *Crick Crack, Monkey* where the reader has the sense of being left at the beginning of a journey not only physically but emotionally. Much as we leave Annie John about to embark on a further stage in her self discovery so too do we leave Tee in the midst of her change, not at the end of it, not settled into her identity but still struggling with it: '[e]verything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be... but it was painful' (122). Tee is left at the end of the narrative in precisely the same web of confusion as earlier in the novel.

Whether mirrored by their complex chronologies (as in Alvarez's, Cliff's, Edgell's or Bishop's novels) or more structurally linear (as in Danticat's, García's, Kincaid's or Hodge's texts) these coming of age novels all share a sense of continuation, leaving the protagonists in the midst of becoming. None of the protagonists of these coming of age novels are left at the end of the texts as fully formed, coherent, stable selves, completely comfortable with their identity, their struggle over. Instead they are left in the midst of still defining themselves, in a state of fluidity and irresolution, with a sense of the process of coming of age as a continuous, infinite motion. Thus it seems that resolution is not the end objective of female identity formation but rather it is the process of acceptance of hybridity, a coming to terms with the fragmentation of self that is significant. Yolanda's tentative acknowledgment of her unsettledness and Sophie's claim - 'now...[I] will know how to answer' (234) - are an acceptance of hybridity, of a divided self rather than a resolution of that divide. Both the playful disruption of linearity and its attendant refusal of a simple resolution serve to narrate female coming of age differently, deconstructing the linear progression from childhood to adulthood and the establishment of a coherent identity prevalent in the traditional male bildungsroman.

If form follows content then the female identity formation as described by these authors is fluid, unstable and not a finite process.

Multiple, Shifting Perspectives and Fragmentation:

Other ways in which the structures of these coming of age narratives are distinct is in their use of multiple voices, their emphasis on multiple, shifting narrative perspectives and the corollary, their use of fragmentation. In general, female coming of age narratives seem to emphasise the multiple over the singular. There are always multiple voices, multiple perspectives. In Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, we get narratives from each of the four girls rather than following a single sibling. In Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* the protagonist Clare's life is paralleled by Christopher's, a boy her age who comes from a poor background and whose life touches hers distantly without interacting with it directly until the end of the novel. His competing narrative as well as the narrative of Clare's transgender friend Harry/Harriet interrupt and often undercut Clare's narrative, offering multiple perspectives. Even when the text is a first person narrative, as with Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, we do not receive only the protagonist Sophie's voice but her mother's, her grandmother's and her aunt's as well: the text is littered with stories that they tell or are told about them. Sophie cannot come to terms with herself until she understands all their lives as well. Her search for identity is not a singular one. I would argue that this is symptomatic of many of the female Caribbean coming of age novels, that they emphasise community, family and its relation to the self rather than seeing identity formation as an individual effort, a singular enterprise. These texts move backwards and forwards not only through one life but through several and in doing so cut through different historical eras. Thus they deconstruct the traditional

bildungsroman idea of an individual journey, of a singular self moving from childhood to adulthood primarily in isolation or in contact only with a mentor figure. By placing their protagonists within a more complex framework - within the patterns of other narratives, which evolve alongside and infiltrate their own narratives - the authors express a coming of age which is dependant on external influences, on community and on family. The protagonists never tell their stories in isolation but always in relation to other people, usually other women. This communal and relational aspect to coming of age might fit into certain stereotypes about female development i.e. the idea that women come of age in community and men come of age through separation. However true or false this conception might be the literature of the bildungsroman and the coming of age novel in general seem to have accepted it. Male texts stress isolation, difference, and the power of telling one story as distinct from other stories, as in Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets*, where the narrating I remains isolated from other voices and characters. In contrast, female coming of age novels stress the interdependence of coming of age. Pilar's narrative in *Dreaming in Cuban* for example, cannot stand in isolation it must be buffered, surrounded, contextualised and infiltrated by her mother's, aunt's, cousins' and grandmother's narratives. Clare's story in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* is not narrated in linear isolation but is bracketed and interspersed with Christopher's, Harry/Harriet's and Nanny Maroon's life. Yolanda does not come of age alone but it is all the García girls together who move towards adulthood. By playing with the narrative structure of the texts these authors express a coming of age that is not only fluid instead of a simple movement onwards but also a coming of age that is interpenetrated, existing in relation to several narratives.

These texts value plurality over singularity which I would argue not only portrays a female experience but also displays their investment in the hybrid experience of identity formation, in being of two worlds at the same time, of being multiple, hybrid and hyphenated rather than singular, stable and fixed. In *Dreaming in Cuban* García's and Pilar's various appropriations and struggles with language, as discussed in the previous chapter, display a concern with accepting the contradictory elements of a hybrid self. The formal structure of the novel expresses this same concern. The novel is structured as fragments of third-person and first-person accounts interspersed with grandmother Celia's letters and ranging over a number of characters in both Cuba and America. As such, the novel interweaves a plethora of voices, creating a sense of a polyphonic chorus that combines to express what it means to be Cuban. As García herself notes, 'there is no one Cuban exile' (Kevane, 75) and so an expression of Cuban identity must be complex. By presenting the reader with this multivocal text García emphasises this point: that these contrasting and often contradictory accounts are all Cuba in a sense, all different aspects of that identity. This contradictory nature is essential to an expression of hybrid identity. Not only must the hybrid subject develop 'a tolerance for contradictions' and 'ambiguity' but she must also have 'a plural personality' in which 'nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned' (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 101). Within the novel, no aspect of identity is rejected, from Lourdes' staunch anti-communism to Celia's passion for El Líder, from Felicia's faith to Luz's practicality. As García states: 'I think many believe that complications dilute clarity, but I couldn't disagree more.... The more you can encompass the complexity of a situation, the closer to the truth you get' (Kevane, 76). This acceptance of complexity can be seen in *Dreaming in Cuban* where it expresses both García's investment in hybrid identity

and her resistance to dominant narratives and their single ways of telling. As Jacqueline Stefanko highlights, the idea of a ‘unitary synthesising’ narrator ‘is always already a posture of domination’ (51). To counteract this dominant construction of identity and narration García invests in ‘polyphonic narration’ as a way of ‘breaking down constructed, pure boundaries’ (Stefanko, 51). The multiple narrators and varying voices within the text perform ‘external and internal diasporic dialogues’ (Stefanko, 52), they perform hybridity and convey both García’s denial of a definitive Cuban or Caribbean identity and her resistance to the dominant narratives which would attempt to delineate such an identity. Although these critiques and arguments relate specifically to García’s work it is easy to see how they can be extrapolated to fit the other texts discussed and how this multivocality and its representation of relationality and complex hybrid identity is mirrored in Alvarez’s quartet of voices, in Cliff’s parallel narratives and in Danticat’s flurry of female voices. Even in other Caribbean coming of age texts, such as Merle Collins’s *Angel* with its colloquial voices and multiple narrative strands or Grace Nichol’s *Whole of a Morning Sky* with its constantly shifting perspectives, it is possible to see how the emphasis on the multiple creates a narrative structure that is significantly different. By offering several narratives, these texts offer fluidity instead of certainty, multiplicity and hybridity instead of singularity, and identity formation as a process that is complex and relational. The repetition inherent in such polyvocality - for example the four García sisters’ lives repeating similar ideas yet different and individual or Martine repeating her own mother’s life and Sophie following a similar pattern - brings to mind Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s concept in *The Repeating Island*, of the Caribbean islands as a series of repetitions, sounding over and over the same but different patterns – ‘a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one’

(9) – repetitions which evoke each other but are not identical. Hence the structure of the text becomes reflective not only of the gender of the coming of age expressed but also of the geography and cultural identity in which it is formed; a particularly Caribbean structure as well as uniquely female in its execution. Female identity is portrayed as forming in a web of relationships all of which impact upon each other, rather than in the individual relation between child and mentor as is the case in the traditional bildungsroman, effectively mirroring the female experience of coming of age and in its insistence on multiplicity reflecting a hybrid identity and its experience of the world.

The texts' rejection of stability and coherence in favour of fluidity and multiplicity is also achieved by the fragmentation of the narratives. The narratives are piecemeal, moving backwards and forwards in time, making them immediately fragments, sections that attach to each other less tangibly. They offer shifting perspectives and multiple narrative threads, which interrupt and intercut each other severing the various episodes into individual fragments that must be threaded together. The sections and pieces of text within the novels are very much fragments rather than traditional chapters, almost short stories in themselves, which the reader pieces together to form a whole. Not a coherent or definitive whole but rather a shifting, changeable text and so a shifting, changeable identity. In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* for example, each chapter is a fragment, a moment in time, a snapshot of the girls prefaced by the name of the protagonist and a date. Strung together they form the coming of age of each girl and their combined narrative but taken individually they are fragments and the reader is asked to jump between them, not flow from one idea to the next but abruptly to shift from one narrator to another and one fragment to another. In fact one anonymous reviewer refused to give

Alvarez's work the title of novel calling it instead 'a series of short stories' without a 'clearly delineated thread or plot' and calling the jumps between sections 'jarring' ('Notes on Current Books', 22). Likewise, Ilan Stavans advises that the text 'ought to be read as a collection of interrelated stories', arguing that each chapter is 'self-contained' (23). While I would disagree with the idea that the episodes are not plotted together and I would argue that there is much to be gained from threading them together into a complex whole, these attitudes do encapsulate how fragmented the text appears and the debt it owes to the short-story genre. Similarly, García's readers in *Dreaming in Cuban* move between chapters to a different narrator, a different narrative, even as they all bleed into each other and intertwine around each other. It is the reader who ultimately threads it all together, who is responsible for knitting the fragments into a cohesive whole thereby mirroring the action of the protagonists piecing together their selves from fragments of stories and histories, from past and present, investing the reader in not only this particular coming of age but in the process of coming of age. Even in older narratives like *Annie John* the impulse towards fragmentation is obvious. Each section is a story complete in itself strung together by the character but capable of being seen as individual fragments. Several of the coming of age novels read more like short story collections, some linked in a more or less chronological order but without definitive temporal markers. As in Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*, a first person narrative more in keeping with its male predecessors in its emphasis on the singular for example, but quite distinct from those precursors in its fragmentary structure. Each chapter deals with a section of the narrator's life in vaguely chronological terms but the episodes are capsules of events threaded together only by the voice speaking them. Likewise, Maryse Condé's *Tales From the Heart* contains snapshots of a childhood not a linear exploration of one.

Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* is even more fragmented; a complex mix of voices, characters and snapshots which intertwine to express a complex coming of age. It is perhaps not even advisable to consider this text as a novel in the classical sense since Brodber designed it as a learning tool, not as a publishable manuscript. Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Merle Collins' *Angel* share a clearer linearity but complicate their structures by creating a sense of fragmentation. *Angel* is consistently interrupting itself with folk sayings and aphorisms while *Crick Crack, Monkey* has text breaks not only around chapters (which are themselves often quite short) but also within chapters so that no section is allowed to run on before it is fragmented and another episode begins. Andrea Levy's more adult coming of age tale *Fruit of the Lemon* actually portrays the movement from straightforward clarity to complex understanding. Her structure begins quite simply and straightforwardly with Faith's first person narration of childhood, which like the ever growing and increasingly complex family trees Levy intersperses the text with, becomes ever complicated as Faith journeys towards becoming, towards understanding her identity. As the novel progresses we encounter competing narratives told by other family members until the clear singular 'I' of the first chapter becomes a multifaceted metaphorical 'we', an amalgamation of multiple voices, characters and stories which feed into Faith's idea of herself. The formal structures of the novels mirror the threading together and fragmentation of the hybrid identities experienced by the protagonists and in doing so exceed or unsettle traditional definitions of the novelistic structure to rewrite the Caribbean novel and tell these Caribbean stories in new ways.

The fragmentation of the texts and their attendant threading together also reflect the gender concerns of the writing. By necessitating a weaving together of

multiple threads the texts are reclaiming a typically domestic and female chore, that of weaving or sewing, and making it worthy of literary production, much as the texts are reclaiming female voices and experiences as worthy of being narrated. When Danticat describes her writing as ‘like braiding your hair’ (*Krik?Kraak!* 220), or Olive Senior interrogates the idea of ‘the thread of poetry’ (94) in her ‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’, these are female metaphors. Senior, like Danticat, is reclaiming the domestic sphere in her work as worthy of literature and reclaiming that literary space from a solely masculine authority. This concern with reclaiming the female space is a theme throughout the coming of age texts and is evidenced structurally by the fragmentation of the texts. This fragmentation, with its attendant idea of threading together a narrative, not only works to involve the reader in the coming of age expressed, to implicate them and create sympathy or resonance with the protagonist but also to place the structure of the work within a traditionally female framework.

This impulse towards fragmentation may have been influenced by wider international literary movements as may also be true of other structural elements. The reverse chronology of Alvarez’s work for example mirrors Alejo Carpentier’s ‘viaje al la semilla’, a short story from 1970, as well as several other Spanish and English texts. Other aspects of the work show the influence of magic realism more generally – supernatural elements in *Dreaming in Cuban* for example, such as communication via dreams - which is interesting in that the use of magic realism is considered a particularly Latin American form while the bildungsroman, or indeed the novel, is arguably a very European form. Their combination here, particularly in Alvarez’s and García’s work, structurally mirrors the thematic concerns of resolving hybridity; of bringing disparate elements into communion with one another and of merging conflicting aspects into one hybrid self. The structural use of fragmentation might also

stem from an investment in postmodernism or be a product of the vast body of short story writing by women in the Caribbean. Lucy Evans and Emma Smith in their introduction and foreword to *The Caribbean Short Story* clearly delineate reasons for the Caribbean's long history of short story writing, as well as aspects that characterise the genre. Evans highlights that the short story is often associated with fragmentation and ambiguity (13), a feature that echoes into the texts produced by those authors who tackle coming of age narratives. Whilst fragmentation can be seen as part of a postmodernist affectation it seems significant that the short story, with its inherent partialness and fragmentary nature, should be so popular in the Caribbean, particularly among Caribbean women writers. Elaine Campbell notes that '[s]hort fiction in the Caribbean seems to be written more by women than by men' (120) and many of the authors mentioned above have among their work short story or essay collections. In addition to *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Danticat also wrote *Krik? Krak!*, a short story collection in which the pieces are linked by the theme of female Haitian experiences. She also wrote *The Dew Breaker*, which straddles the line between the novel and the short story cycle. Its episodic nature and shifting perspectives mean that it could easily be seen as a cycle of individual stories which all engage with the idea of violence during the Duvalier reign or as a novel in which one figure – the torturer – links all the narratives. Several of Cliff's texts – most famously *Claiming an Identity* *They Taught Me to Despise* - also play with genre, moving from short story to essay to biography to poetry fluidly and without hesitation. Many other prominent Caribbean writers such as Jamaica Kincaid in *At the Bottom of the River*, Merle Collins with *Rain Darling* or Olive Senior in her numerous collections also make use of the short story structure. Kincaid's *Annie John*, which is often read as a novel, in fact began its life as a series of short stories for the *New Yorker* (Perry, 247).

Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw argues that there are practical reasons why a fragmented short story form might be more suitable to women's lives, for example time constraints due to family (112) as well as patriarchal ideas of writing as a masculine pursuit (111). Lucy Evans points out the publishing constraints which might privilege such a form (16) and how critics have often linked the short story form with traditional storytelling (17). As a closer form to traditional oral storytelling than the novel, the short story serves as a 'bridge' between these narrative styles (Ramchand, 2) and carries echoes of the oral tradition. It could therefore be argued that the fragmentary structure and emphasis on multiplicity, which characterise these coming of age novels, owe their lineage to a vast body of short story fiction within the Caribbean. Hackshaw also however acknowledges that this structure 'reflects separate, diverse narratives of a dispersed...population and at the same time allows these narratives to produce a ... tableau' (122). Thus the fragmentation and multiplicity that the short story form allows have been adopted into the coming of age genre because they reflect the thematic concerns of the texts and allow them to portray a diasporic, hybrid identity.

Whether the influence of these narrative styles is local – in the Caribbean short story form or a concern with oral storytelling - or international – in a Latin American or postmodernist ethos - it cannot be denied that it is in use. For the use of these narrative techniques – fragmentation, complex chronology, multiplicity, lack of resolution - to be so prevalent it must lend itself to the telling of these stories, to the experiences of coming of age. The complex chronology and lack of resolution reflect fluidity and instability. The emphasis on multiplicity and fragmentation allow for the contradictions and multiplicities of a hybrid self to be expressed as well as the act of

piecing such an identity together. The gaps and spaces in the narrative allow the reader room to implicate themselves in the text, to become part of the narrative through the active role of piecing together rather than as a passive recipient. These devices are available to all narratives but attaching it to this genre is revolutionary. It works against the traditional, male bildungsroman and undermines a certain literary formation of coming of age, rejecting that pattern. After the flurry of female texts in the 80s and 90s, a number of which are coming of age texts, some Caribbean male authors have adopted this fragmented, episodic pattern to write about male experiences - Junot Díaz's novel *Drown*, a loosely linked series of stories from multiple perspectives, being the most obvious example - but despite this, the coming of age novel structured in this style is still predominantly a form used by female authors. Other examples of Caribbean male coming of age authors - notably V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Piri Thomas - do not employ these structural devices to the same extent. These formal devices are used by writers across a spectrum of genre, geographic and gender categories but female authors using all these devices to express coming of age is significant in that it reflects how a shift of structure is necessary to describe a female Caribbean experience. Judith Kegan Gardiner writes that 'women writers recreate female experience in different forms. This would seem to be a direct result of their different developmental experience' (355). I would agree with Gardiner that female writers choose different forms in order to recreate a different experience of the world since the old models no longer suffice. Across the multitude of coming of age texts by Caribbean women writers there is a spectrum of structural devices followed but there is throughout an insistence on playing with form and genre, with stretching it in a variety of ways to see what is possible. The narrative structures of the texts, the authors' forms of

storytelling, could easily have been influenced by other literary movements and impulses but their choice to be used in this genre, the ways in which the authors destabilise traditional narratives and play with the genre, mirrors the unstable and fluid identities of their characters. Form follows function and certainly reflects content. These narratives make claims about the fluidity of identity by formally paralleling the fragmentary, paradoxical and shifting threads of a hybrid identity.

STORYTELLING:

While the narratives of the texts, their structure and formal composition - in other words the authors' form of storytelling - are interesting in the ways they express and mirror the protagonists' coming of age, also significant are the acts of storytelling which occur within the texts. Stories abound in these novels and they are central to the development of the protagonists. Secondary characters often tell stories to the protagonists in order to explain their lives and the lives of their families. Also significantly, the girls who are coming of age begin to narrate themselves and this is always a turning point in their journeys towards understanding themselves, a number of the protagonists are even writers themselves. Storytelling functions on multiple levels to create identities, to make sense of the self, to understand the world and, both on a personal and public scale, to support or disrupt the narratives in which the protagonists find themselves. Perhaps it is the bias of any writer that it is to narratives these authors and their characters turn in order to gain understanding but it is still significant that in the process of coming of age a major impetus is the act of storytelling. As discussed in the previous chapter finding one's voice is a central theme and moment in each of these texts, the ability to speak and to speak out is extremely important. A corollary to this theme is that of storytelling, in order to speak

the protagonists must find their own stories to sing, their own narratives. The quest for narratives that make sense of the world or of their own hybridity is an important part of the coming of age process in these texts.

The Need for Narrative:

In the epilogue to her short story collection *Krik? Krak!* Danticat writes: ‘You thought if you didn’t tell the stories, the sky would fall on your head’ (223). This need to write - not just a desire to do so but the visceral need for it - is mirrored in many of the protagonists of these coming of age stories and Sophie in Danticat’s own *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is no exception. The author’s anxious need to write something, to say something, is expressed through Sophie’s desire to be able to speak, to reach the triumphant moment of voicing discussed in the previous chapter. The novel as stemming from Sophie’s first person narration, her definitive and rebellious ‘I’ is a testament to this need to tell but it is specifically a need to tell stories. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is a first person narrative and so in essence the whole text is Sophie’s story, the one she needs to tell in order to come to terms with herself. She recounts the stories other people have told her, particularly those of her maternal figures; her mother, her aunt and her grandmother. And finally her moment of catharsis at the end of the text comes through storytelling. She says ‘I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one’ (234): a statement of selfhood and identity which formulates her for the first time as moving towards peace, finding the balance between all the things she is. In the same final passage her grandmother says: ‘if you listen closely in the night you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: “*Ou libéré?*” Are you free, my daughter?’ and she tells Sophie ‘Now... you will know how to answer’ (234). Another definitive

statement of identity and selfhood - now you know who you are- but significantly a pronouncement that is enmeshed in storytelling: you will know how to speak yourself, how to tell your story. Storytelling here becomes the vehicle for self-identification.

So too with Clare, the story she tells of herself in *No Telephone to Heaven*, her account of her affiliations during the questioning by the guerrilla group (189-196) is a moment of first person narration, of Clare telling herself, speaking up, and the story she tells of herself allows her to come to terms with the hybridity and multiplicity of her self. She is her mother's daughter following her wishes to 'help [her] people' (196) and coming to claim her history. In telling this story, instead of any other, she is making a powerful statement of identity and ultimately accepting her hybridity. She may be 'composed of fragments' (87) but in telling her own story she begins to come to terms with those fragments, to see the 'African, English, Carib' in herself (189) and see herself as having a place in her country's story – 'I'm not outside this history' (194) - despite the colour of her skin. This act of narrating her own story is fundamental to her coming of age process, to the sense of acceptance we see her moving towards.

This is equally visible in Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* where Yolanda in particular bases her identity formation in narrative. Yolanda finds herself in language, 't[aking] root' there (141) but when Yolanda is asked to write a speech to be read in front of her school she is originally unable to overcome the terror of speaking out publicly. With her mother's help she manages to write a Walt Whitman-inspired speech. It is his rebelliousness that she finds appealing, the reality of 'a flesh and blood man, belching and laughing and sweating in poems' instead of the 'appropriate sentiments, poems with a message' she encounters at school (143). Inspired by Whitman she writes her speech 'recklessly' and it is the first time she

‘sounded like herself in English’ (143), a significant moment of self-identification, of being able to speak her self. The sense of freedom and rebellion she finds in poetry she also expresses through writing. It is a revolution through narrative. Yolanda uses her storytelling to flesh out her sense of self, her identity as separate from her sisters: ‘This was Yoyo’s time to herself...in warm, soft uncreated darkness, she wrote her secret poems in her new language’ (136). The element of creation here is significant in that Yolanda is creating both the poem and herself. It is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s assertion: ‘[w]hen I write it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart’ (*Borderlands*, 95). Writing and storytelling become not only a space of rebellion because of what they can say about the world but also because of what it can say about the teller. The power of Yolanda’s writing is in this aspect of creation and the space it provides her to come of age through it. Storytelling becomes a tool of survival, a way of not becoming lost: Yolanda ‘needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly and the country inhospitable, she took root in language’ (141). On two separate occasions in the text invention (narrative) and survival are explicitly linked. Firstly in Laura’s humorous ‘[n]ecessity is the daughter of invention’ (142) and later more ominously in Chucha’s prophecy that the girls ‘will invent what they need to survive’ (223). It is clear throughout the text that Yolanda, as Julie Barak states, ‘tells stories, literally, to save her life’ (173). Yolanda the poet/writer/teacher of the text inhabits language and storytelling more completely than her sisters. Storytelling is not a passive or tangential act but a powerful and central one, an act of self-affirmation and survival.

Like Sophie, Clare and Yolanda, Pilar is growing up within and in-between the stories of her family but her identity formation necessitates her producing her own narratives. Most of *Dreaming in Cuban* is written as a third person omniscient

narrative with only Pilar, Herminia and Ivanito presented to us in the first person. Pilar's is the central voice of the text, given to us frequently and directly; an untempered dialogue, while most of the other characters are filtered through the third person narrator. Only Celia's letters - reproduced for us in chunks, several at a time and interspersing the novel - present the same immediacy. Herminia's narrative is one short ten-page section and even Ivanito's first person sections are short and limited to the last chapters of the novel. Pilar's first person voice however filters through from beginning to end, interrupting and intersecting with the other narratives as the novel progresses. Most of the other characters' stories are being told to us, whilst Pilar is telling us. This distinction and different levels of distance make Pilar the centre of the text and potentially make the other fragments stories she is telling us. The text could be the bits of family past and documentation which she has collected (like the letters Celia gives her) or which she has imagined and is reproducing. In fact, Isabel Alvarez-Borland emphatically states that Pilar's 'diary eventually becomes the reader's text' (46). While I do not believe that reading the text as entirely Pilar's writing is so clear-cut, given the other first-person voices, it is true that Pilar is given and recognises her role as the recorder of the family history. As the text progresses Pilar comes to know Celia's story and after her aunt Felicia's death she goes to her aunt's friend Herminia to uncover Felicia's story as well. On the last page of the novel, in the last letter Celia writes to her absent lover on the day of Pilar's birth, she says 'I will no longer write to you...She will remember everything' (245). Previously, towards the start of the novel, Pilar says she remembers everything that has ever happened to her since she was a baby (26). By the time we are given Celia's pronouncement we already know it was a true prophecy. Pilar remembers everything exactly and what is more she writes a diary and 'records everything' (7) even though

she knows Lourdes reads it (26). Her impulse is to remember, to record, to use narrative to create her sense of self. In the end Pilar foregoes the spoken word in favour of art and music because she desires a purer form of communication where ‘colors and lines conjure up their own... unique language’ that can ‘obliterate the clichés’ (139) but the impulse is still towards a narrative, albeit one which escapes the confines of linguistics. Her love of music is powered by the same impulse. She enjoys Lou Reed’s songs because they capture the lives of people no one else sings about (135). It is a similar impulse to tell stories simply in a different medium. Pilar’s art is about storytelling: ‘I try to translate what I hear into colors and volumes and lines that confront people, that say, “Hey we’re here too and what we think matters!”’ (135). I would argue that storytelling is primarily about communication and like Pilar’s art teacher who tells her students ‘not to worry about copying objects exactly’ just to bring strength to their art (29), Pilar’s love of art and music does not signal her despair with storytelling but simply a desire for a new medium in which to capture the stories she wishes to tell.

The protagonists of these texts therefore use narrative, in various ways, as a means of forming their identity. As Jay Clayton argues ‘narrative possesses a performative dimension; it enacts as well as means’ (382), thus it is capable of transforming the participant; ‘stories can change the person who becomes caught up in them’ (382). Though Clayton is here speaking specifically of the audience I believe the performative and transformative aspects of storytelling work both ways, the narrators are transforming themselves as well as their listeners. It is through narratives that Yolanda, Pilar, Sophie and Clare navigate the in-between-ness of their sense of self, their hybridity. As Anzaldúa declares ‘I want the freedom to carve and chisel my

own face' (44) and this is what the protagonists are doing, carving their own hybrid faces using storytelling as the chisel.

Storytelling as the necessary vehicle for self-identification is, I would argue, an essential part of the coming of age journey but this is not necessarily limited to the young women in these texts. Sophie's aunt Atie for example is also enmeshed in this process of self discovery and storytelling. Atie begins the novel as caring for her sister's daughter and entangled in her unspoken love for a married man. Throughout the progress of the novel however Atie begins a friendship with another woman and learns to read and write. Her poetry is precious to her, a sphere in which she can let loose, be free, in a way which her family obligations and disappointed love have previously prevented. Danticat, in an interview with Renee Shea, asserts that '[f]or Atie, I think learning to read was her chance to do something for herself' (385) but it is not just the learning, it is precisely the act of writing. Storytelling, in this case the private storytelling which her writing becomes, is a space which allows her to be herself outside of her mother's control or oversight. Clare's mother Kitty in *No Telephone to Heaven* can similarly be seen as growing into her sense of self throughout the text and she too is defined by others' stories of her until she creates her own narrative. She is not only constrained by her husband's narrative of white identity and how it limits her access to his employment and social circle but also by her employer Mr B's imposed narrative of herself as 'a nice girl' (84), not merely a compliment but a rewriting or retelling of who she is. It is only in speaking as Mrs White, as discussed in the previous chapter, that she begins to escape those other narratives and find herself. The need for a narrative of one's own extends beyond youth into adulthood supporting the argument that the process of becoming is not limited to childhood but is continuous.

The need to tell stories and the desire for one's own narrative link to the need to find one's own voice, as discussed in the previous chapter. The texts acknowledge the importance of speech, of storytelling as a speech act, by emphasising the orality of storytelling and its acknowledgment of the importance of who is speaking, of the teller as well as the tale. Who is speaking or narrating is always significant, as in the cases above where the very act of speaking/narrating for oneself becomes a declaration of selfhood. In fact, Sophie's grandmother acknowledges that '[t]he tale is not a tale unless I tell it' (123). Like the traditional oral storytelling call and response 'Crick?... Crack' referenced several times in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and in several other novels, 'the figure of the storyteller...establishes her authority while acknowledging that hers is just one voice in a chorus' (Alexandre and Howard, 113). It is the act of storytelling, of there being a teller and a told that is important. Walter Ong argues that the spoken word manifests human beings to each other as persons and forms them into close knit groups: the members of the audience become a unit, as an audience, and in union with the teller (74). While Ong goes on later to argue that the oral narrative resists writing, because it is 'an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word' (74) I would argue that these texts make manifest the oral in the written. Storytelling permeates *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and many of the other texts discussed and in presenting us with not only the story in its written form but also the manner of its telling – for example, the audience participation in the 'Crick?...Crack...' of Grandmé Ifé's story (123) - or the particular feel of the event as Sophie is told it - as in the specific night sounds and atmosphere involved in her grandmother telling the story of a girl walking home alone at night (152-154). Danticat ensures that the immediacy and fragility of the telling persists in the written account. The pervasiveness of stories

and the clarity of who is telling and who is told enables readers, as Sophie's audience, to engage in the original telling and Sophie's re-telling. The immediacy of the oral tale and its specificity are filtered through the written word but do not disappear. *Dreaming in Cuban* similarly emphasises the importance of the teller in the act of storytelling; in fact the teller changes the tale. We are presented with the same stories, the same instances, told from different perspectives and each shift in perspective changes our understanding of the event. An example of this is Felicia's delusional pill-swallowing episode. When told from Ivanito's perspective we see only how his mother's behaviour changes suddenly, how she made them a wonderful meal and crushed some pills into their dessert before lying down to sleep (87-89). When told from Celia's perspective we discover that Felicia's change in behaviour is caused by Celia's threat to take Ivanito away and Celia sees the subsequent events as a murder-suicide attempt (91). Felicia's account of the same event is one of blankness: 'she doesn't remember... only a white light burned' in place of the memory (107). In another episode Lourdes recounts how she used to miss her father on his work trips and how he used to call her every night while he was away (68). Told from Lourdes' perspective it is a sweet, innocent story full of her love for her father and his affection for her. When Celia tells the same story it is a sad, resigned tale (52) contrasting Lourdes' love for her father with her coldness to Celia and contrasting painfully with how her husband no longer calls her every night he is away (40). These instances not only highlight the importance of perspective, but also the importance of multiple perspectives, the significance of the narrator and subsequently the gaps and hidden silences of all narratives, how they conceal as much as they reveal. This oral quality to the novels serves to blur the boundaries between the spoken and the written, highlighting the act of storytelling in its many facets and placing storytelling at the

heart of the coming of age text. Storytelling, both oral and written, are still central to the text but work in tandem instead of being opposing binary poles, much like the hybrid identities enacted in the coming of age novels come to an understanding and negotiation between disparate identities rather than a binary opposition between distinct selves. The storytelling mode of the novels enacts hybrid identity in the same way that the structure of the novels do.

Female Storytelling:

The act of storytelling creates, as Ong identifies, a bond, a union between teller and told, perhaps this is one reason why there is an abundance of female tellers and familial tellers in all the texts. The act of storytelling creates links between teller and audience, it reinforces familial and generational links and when those tellers are women it creates a lineage of female storytelling. Thus it re-identifies storytelling as a female act and narrative as a province of female creativity. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* all the stories Sophie is told are by women and the stories she tells likewise revolve around women. At times, as with Martine telling Sophie the story of her rape or Grandmé Ifé telling stories of Martine and Atie's childhood to Sophie, this female storytelling serves to reinforce the maternal and matrilineal bonds. Similarly, Sophie feels 'the sudden urge' to tell her daughter a story as Atie had once done for her as a girl (110). This sense of lineage highlights the continuity and connection that storytelling evokes but also acknowledges the power of storytelling: 'There was magic in the images that she made out of the night' (110). Martine also sends back tapes instead of letters to her mother to tell her about her life in New York (132), a long distance oral storytelling which allows them to keep familial ties despite financial and geographical concerns. García's novel is likewise, a particularly female

tapestry of stories. There is only one male voice (Pilar's cousin Ivanito), among the plethora of female relatives and friends (Celia, Lourdes, Pilar, Felicia, Luz, Herminia) whose stories we inhabit. Significantly too, Pilar's desire to tell stories centres around female narratives: she wants to write about women in the Congo 'or the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay' (28). *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* also privileges female stories and female storytellers. There are some male voices in the text (Carlos, the girl's father; Victor, the American CIA agent; Pupo, the SIM officer) but they tend to claim short sections of the text and are invariably overwhelmed by the female narrators who inhabit the majority of the novel. In Alvarez's text we have four sisters whose experiences are told and we also have the experiences of their mother, their cousins, and their maids. We are given the stories of their rich, high-class Dominican aunts and cousins as well as poor servants, like Pila and Chucha. This conglomeration and patchwork of female stories emphasises the value of female experience, not just of Yolanda, the main protagonist, but of all the women she encounters regardless of class or colour. In another emphasis on female storytelling and its power the reader is told that one of Yolanda's first experiences with English books was the story of Scheherazade (231-232), a famous female storyteller and example of female power through stories. In the same chapter Yolanda, perhaps inspired by Scheherazade, invents the story of some *guardias* on the property to get out of being punished for being in a forbidden area (237). While her male cousin Mundín 'st[ands] silent' (238) in the face of accusation, Yolanda tells stories. Though in this instance Yolanda uses her talent for storytelling for selfish reasons it still encapsulates the power of stories and emphasises storytelling as an undeniably female domain.

It is clear from these texts that the authors are reclaiming storytelling as a female act, the province of female power. In the four main novels and across the

genre as a whole the female storyteller is most evident and many women in the texts tell stories about other women and to other women creating worlds of female narration. The passing down of stories from mother figure to daughter is rampant within the texts and gives women power over history; of recording it and seeing it passed on. Many metaphors about writing and speaking are also in terms of female associations. Danticat explicitly links writing and ‘braiding’ (*Krik? Krak!*, 220) and elsewhere labels herself as ‘a weaver of tales’ admitting that using such metaphors are a way to ‘impose these “female” metaphors and female-linked activities on what is often taken as male territory’ (Lyons, 192). As mentioned briefly in the first section of this chapter the idea of threading together, which the structure of the texts invite, is not only a useful metaphor but one embedded in ideas of traditionally female work: threading, stitching, weaving. This threading as applied to the coming of age novel makes a statement for the place of women’s lives and writing, for their place in literature in general and in Caribbean literature particularly. Danticat’s use of a ‘female’ or domestic metaphor for her writing reinforces this. Within the text, Sophie too is weaving the pattern of her existence from the stories that she is told, and the entire text, with its plethora of female stories that she recounts to the reader, enacts this threading together of her coming of age. Both author and character make storytelling a female act. Alvarez’s Yolanda similarly moves to reclaim storytelling as female work. When Yolanda is talking about how she started writing she says that she ‘began to write, the story of Pila, the story of [her] grandmother’ (289), female, marginalised lives. Not only is storytelling a female act but it also allows for a space to tell female stories, the stories that have been hidden or devalued. Pila is after all not only a woman but also a lower class woman, a domestic servant. She is further marginalised for being Haitian, ‘synonymous with voodoo’ (279) and physically

disfigured thus being set apart as an object of both fear and curiosity to the other maids and the girls. This mirrors Alvarez's own struggle with writing. In her collection of essays *Something to Declare* she describes how, when she started writing she felt the need to 'be writing about something Important and Deep' with a voice of 'authority and weight' (147) she had to 'master everything [she] could about tradition' (148) and that authority and tradition is a masculine one; the masculine literary tradition of Milton, Yeats and Homer (148). She only found her voice, she admits, when she stopped ignoring the female muses, not just literary women but the 'real-life ladies who traipsed into [her] imagination with broom and dusting-rag, cookbook and garden scissors...Of them, [she] sing[s]' (149). Like Yolanda, Alvarez turns to women for inspiration and she returns to the sounds and actions of the female domestic sphere in order to find her voice, as her poetry series 'The Housekeeping Poems' attests to: 'my voice would not be found up in a tower, in those upper reaches or important places, but down in the kitchen among the women who first taught me about service, about passion, about singing as if my life depended on it' (Alvarez, *Something to Declare*, 162). It is through this elided female space and these ignored female voices that Alvarez finds her own voice just as it is through similar female figures that Yolanda begins to write, as a testament to them, to their influence. The female domestic space and female stories become worthy of narratives, of literary space, and storytelling becomes the province of women. To return briefly to the thread metaphor in Olive Senior's 'Ode to Pablo Neruda' the female writer takes Neruda's words –'something [he] said/ about grasping poetry like a thread' (92) to a 'monstrous kite' (93) – and makes a weave of it for her own poetry. Storytelling becomes a new form of women's work:

I wanted more than woman's knotted portion so I refused
to learn the way of thread: sewing, embroidery, darning,

weaving, tapestry, knitting or crochet do not appear on my CV.

But look at this:

In the sky
a kite
still aloft
and the one
holding
the thread
is me (101-102).

Senior captures in her poem not only women's right and worth as poets and subjects of poetry but also the rebellious power of that task. The female, domestic sphere is no longer the quiet placidity of a tapestry or embroidery it is the freedom and control of the kite string and it is connected to the spider, the trickster (94), the knots that unravelled the hurricanes (101). The coming of age genre, by consistently privileging female storytellers and female stories, is enacting the same rebellion as Senior's poetry; they are recasting the domestic and the female as worthy of stories and in control of storytelling. Significantly Senior states that '[t]he thread of poetry to safely travel, the knot of yourself/ you must first unravel' (95) which implies not only that the threading of poetry/literature/storytelling is a dangerous path but also that it is closely linked to identity, to uncovering and understanding the self. The emphasis in all these texts is on female stories and female storytelling as central to the text and subsequently as rebellious and powerful.

Storytelling as the Means of Understanding the World:

One of the main significances of storytelling in the coming of age novel is, as discussed above, in the protagonists' need for a narrative of their own, to tell their

own stories. A companion to this is the process by which this narrative of self-identification is formed. The process the protagonists undergo as they become is deeply entangled with storytelling, it becomes the medium through which they understand the world, begin to come to terms with it and eventually go on to construct their own narratives in their own voices. As a way of negotiating identity, the protagonists understand their familial and personal lives through the stories they are told. It is a means of survival. In the case of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie uses stories to buttress her reality, to keep it coherent and to support her world view, even as that world view and understanding of herself changes. Some particularly significant stories are those of her birth. Her aunt Atie tells her a fantastical story - 'the story of a little girl who was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of sky' (47) - which Sophie knows is not factually true but which gives her a sense of self worth, love and value thereby allowing Sophie to come to terms with her mother's absence and her own difference. When Martine tells her a bare, factual version of her rape, attempted miscarriage and Sophie's birth Sophie does not entirely understand and '[m]ost of [her] did not want to' but she begins to attempt to 'piece together [her] mother's entire story' (61). However, it is important that Sophie is faced with multiple versions of the truth, multiple stories she can pick and choose and ultimately multiple versions of herself. It is only in understanding all versions, in uncovering not only her aunt's magical world but also her mother's brutal one that Sophie can understand herself, can come to make her own stories. As Sophie comes of age she moves from one story to another. Sophie as a child clings to the first story, uses it to flesh out her sense of self in her mother's absence and later she moves into the second story trying to come to terms with it and so herself. Once Martine tells her the story of her rape for example, Sophie understands her mother's decisions

differently, her decision to leave Sophie in Haiti particularly becomes not something to resent but something to sympathise with. The shared pain of the story encourages Sophie to help her mother, so much so that Sophie ‘would stay up all night just waiting for her to have a nightmare’ so that she can shake Martine awake, provoking her mother to respond: ‘Sophie you have saved my life’ (81). Mother and daughter become closer through this shared story and as Sophie begins to understand Martine so she too begins to understand herself. Sophie’s narrative incorporates these stories and uses them to gain a sense of self, she positions herself within these narratives, relating to them and they influence her sense of self, her idea of who she is.

Storytelling not only allows Martine and Sophie to understand the world but also to come to terms with aspects of their lives. To return to Olive Senior’s thread metaphor, the thread of storytelling ‘can serve for / binding up and for un-binding’ (103) and even ‘perhaps for the binding up of wounds’ (102). This image of healing through words, by binding up with the threads of stories, is very resonant with Danticat’s work. It is through stories that trauma is either assuaged or come to terms with and healing occurs. Sophie’s sexual phobia group write out their trauma in messages and set them on fire to try and symbolically let them go, they tell each other their stories to lance the wounds and remove their power (202-203). Grandmé Ifé and Martine both tell stories as they test their daughters’ virginity to distract them from the violation and to offer them stories of affection that counteract the reality of their situation. During this testing the stories serve to absent the girls from the traumatic experience. Sophie ‘learn[s] to *double* while being *tested*’ (155) to close her eyes and imagine somewhere else, she tells stories to herself of happy moments and so separates herself from what is happening. Storytelling here is an escape for both Sophie and Martine. Sophie uses it to escape, to allow painful experiences to happen

without touching her but Martine also uses the story to aid that separation, as a distraction for both of them and as an escape for herself from the re-enactment of one side of her own trauma, since as she says the testing and the rape are one and the same for her: ‘the two greatest pains of my life are very much related...I live both every day’ (170). Stories allow her to inflict a pain on Sophie that mirrors what she experienced by providing distance. When Danticat speaks of doubling in an interview with Renee Shea she acknowledges it as working in two directions: ‘Doubling acknowledges that people make separations within themselves to allow very painful experiences, but also the separation allows people to do very cruel things.’ (385) Storytelling here functions on several levels, as escape, as an attempt to heal but also as a means of surviving trauma. These acts of storytelling allow the protagonists to structure the world around them, or escape from it, as methods of coping with trauma.

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* we are faced with equally clear evidence of how stories shape and alter reality and subsequently, identity. The stories told by the women in the text exist in different versions (62). For example, Laura retells the story of Sofia meeting her husband Otto but with a very different emphasis and altering some details from Sofia’s own recounting. The retelling and the subsequent statement that ‘I’ve heard so many versions of that story... I don’t know which one is true anymore’ (62) implies that storytelling itself reorganises the world. The events occurred but their telling shapes the reality and remembrance of them. Rosario Ferré makes a similar point in *Sweet Diamond Dust* – ‘The novel is all gossip, lies, shameless slander- and yet the story remains true’ (x). Though not a coming of age narrative her text, like *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents*, with its multiple narrators and several versions of the family story, is giving the reader a different truth. A truth that is dependent on the telling. Being fictional does not make

them untrue because the truth is in the telling, in what that telling exposes. As Frank Kermode states '[f]ictions are for finding things out and they change as the needs of sense-making change' (39) and 'it is ourselves we are encountering whenever we invent fictions' (2). Laura's story version of Sofia and Otto's meeting tells more about her romanticism, religion and desire for familial harmony than it does about Sofia's experience of the event but it is still significant. Laura's retelling and Sandra's confusion over which version is true both highlight the power of storytelling, its ability to be both a vehicle for communicating reality and simultaneously shaping reality. Stories influence identity, impose their reality on the audience, reshaping the past and also the listeners. By including multiple narrators the author allows the reader access to different views on the same event. For example in two consecutive chapters of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, 'Trespass' narrated by Carla and 'Snow' by Yolanda the two narrators describe their experiences in the family's first year in America from the girl's differing perspectives. Yolanda's chapter concentrates on her increasing familiarity with English, Carla's focuses on her troubles with the language, how it is used to taunt and shame her. The novel as a whole, by presenting these various aspects of the García girls' experiences, highlights the potential of narratives for uncovering the complex truth rather than a simple singular experience and their centrality to understanding the world and becoming within it.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, we see the protagonist Pilar's need to collect other stories in order to understand herself. We receive several female voices in the text, each presenting their own story, with Pilar coming of age through and in-between these narratives. Rocío Davis argues that 'the concept of the isolated self is continually questioned' by the 'repeatedly mirrored, contrasting or complementing

stories' in the text (60). Pilar's story, like her life, does not exist in isolation but in conjunction with her family's and particularly with the female members of her family who she must try to understand. Pilar's relationship with her grandmother Celia is central to her changing understanding of the world. When she's conflicted or unhappy she has dream conversations with her grandmother where they tell each other stories. Celia responds to Pilar's restlessness and her desire to understand herself by providing narratives and thus a space for Pilar to find herself. Pilar is incredibly influenced by her grandmother's storytelling; stating at one point that 'most of what I've learned that's important I've learned on my own, or from my grandmother' (28). This shared narrative not only connects Pilar to her maternal lineage and to her Cuban identity it also changes Pilar's relationship with Lourdes, her sense of herself as her mother's daughter as well as her grandmother's granddaughter. Celia's stories about Lourdes, where she tells Pilar that her 'mother is sad inside and that her anger is more frustration' (63) change Pilar's attitude towards Lourdes – 'I might be afraid of her if it weren't for those talks I have with Abuela Celia' (63) – and allow Pilar to have some sympathy for her mother, to see her as more than just an antagonist. Storytelling alters the shape of reality, in multiple ways and thus alters the protagonists understanding of the world and how they come of age into that world.

Imposed Narratives:

If storytelling has the potential to change our relation to world and alter our realities, then the external narratives imposed on the protagonists become incredibly significant. In *Dreaming in Cuban* Pilar's identity is marked by several external narratives. Celia's influence on Pilar is extensive as is her 'legacy' to Pilar (176) and both occur through storytelling. It is important to Pilar's growing sense of self

because it is Celia who has given her ‘a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog and a disregard for boundaries’ (176). Towards the end of the novel Celia tells Pilar her story, how she fell in love, lost that love, got married, had her mother and so on (222) and gives her the letters she wrote to her lover Gustavo but never sent (235). It is an intense moment of revelation and of passing on. As Celia tells Pilar her story, Pilar feels her ‘grandmother’s life passing to [her]’ and it is Pilar’s role to save her by ‘guarding [her] knowledge like the first fire’ (222). Jacqueline Stefanko reads this textual inheritance of Pilar’s as ‘implicitly enabl[ing] her to construct the polyphonic narrative of the novel, continuing the cycle’ (66) but whether or not we see the text as Pilar’s writing, it is true that Celia’s imposed narrative deeply affects Pilar. She becomes audience, recorder and final narrator to her grandmother’s life. It is also at this time that Pilar begins to dream in Spanish (235) an indication that ‘Cuba will always be a part of her consciousness... a place she can continually renew and re-invent through narration’ (Stefanko, 67). Celia’s storytelling allows Pilar to move forward and create her own stories. The rebellious disregard for boundaries, freedom and passion that Celia has given Pilar are set up in direct contrast to how Lourdes ‘systematically rewrites history to suit her views’ (176). Where Celia’s stories are liberating, Lourdes’ rewriting of history is constraining, a ‘constant struggle’ for Pilar (176). Storytelling is a way of negotiating the world and the self and these dual, competing stories of rebellion and compliance are both essential to Pilar’s coming of age; she has to hear both before she can make any decision about who she is. The protagonists of the coming of age novel are continuously altered by the stories they are told not solely in taking on-board the stories told to them, as Pilar does with Celia, but also in rejection of the stories imposed on them. Lourdes’ ‘reshaping of events’

‘to suit her views of the world’ while not ‘a premeditated deception’ (176) threatens to subsume Pilar’s identity and to combat this she tells the reader her own version of events. For example, she refuses to accept Lourdes’ version of events as the truth with regards to her running away at the airport (176). Pilar is adamant that it was her mother who turned away, not herself who ran off and Pilar tells the reader her story. The episode where Lourdes asks her to paint a patriotic picture for her new bakery is also an example of this. Pilar agrees to paint something and she ‘tried to do it straight but [she] couldn’t’ (143) ending up creating a punk version of the Statue of Liberty proclaiming ‘I’m a mess’ (141). In her process of coming of age Pilar cannot submit her own identity to her mother’s patriotism, to her pro-American agenda or the state’s narrative of national pride, she has to choose her own narrative, one of rebellion, of mess, of not fitting in with either her mother’s or America’s idea of order, propriety or nationhood. She creates her own narrative, her own identity through her art. In this rejection of a particular narrative she is still obviously influenced by it, even if only in opposition to it. It is a ‘creative transformation’ (177) as she later terms it, one that produces a truth of her own by ‘chipping away’ at the existing narratives (177). Lourdes’ constricting narratives are therefore as significant as Celia’s liberating ones because both change the way the protagonist encounters the world and Pilar must react to both imposed narratives in order to come of age. Pilar’s story occurs in fragments in the midst of all her family’s other stories and though she says that ‘the family is hostile to the individual’ (134) it seems obvious that she is coming of age amongst all their stories, and in reaction to them. Tellingly, Pilar goes to Herminia to get Felicia’s story because Pilar ‘wants to learn the truth about [Felicia] to learn the truth about herself’ (231). Pilar is influenced and altered by the stories she encounters and by which stories she chooses. She describes herself as feeling ‘like a new me

sprouts and dies every day' (135) and this metaphor of organic growth and decay perfectly highlights the process of becoming. Pilar's identity is not only growing it is also changing as she accepts and rejects other people's narratives of her life and as she comes to her own story. Identities are formed through interaction with other people and with the world and a major form of this interaction is through stories – either positively or negatively, whether in acceptance or rejection. We see this in several other novels as well. For example, in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* the title character encounters the narrative of Christopher Columbus and the colonial story of her nation's past. She rejects it soundly, defacing an image of Columbus in chains with the words 'The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go' (78) an episode in which Donna Perry argues 'the revolutionary potential of language is dramatically illustrated' (249). This episode highlights how storytelling 'gives Annie a potential source of resistance' both against a European history of the Caribbean and against 'patriarchal privilege' (Perry, 249). Annie's act of textual aggression rejects colonial and patriarchal ideology and in doing so Annie comes into a better understanding of herself as being against these forces. It is a significant moment in her movement towards adulthood. Pilar's rejection of Lourdes and America serve a similar purpose, they allow her to understand herself, to see that she cannot take her mother's path, that she cannot 'do it straight' to please her mother. In rejecting these stories she, like Annie, rewrites the imposed narratives of her society and creates her own story.

Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, like the other novels discussed, emphasises the influence of external narratives on the identity formation of the protagonist. The clearest example of this is Boy's story of their family history - with its wealth, privilege and white forbearers – which elides the less palatable aspects of that past and ignores Clare's maternal lineage. Boy's stories are all grandiose, self-

aggrandising, but not necessarily based in reality. As in his retelling of their move to America not as coming from ‘a panic created by bad debts’ but as a move which shows their ‘intelligence and bespoke their privilege’ (54). This is made even clearer when they move to America and Boy not only passes as white but also invents a family story that is more palatable to his aspirations: ‘He told people he was descended from plantation owners – and this was true. Partly. With each fiction his new self became more complete’ (62). He even creates a fictional family crest and adds it to china plates: ‘the Savage family crest – mongoose and Moor rampant, *mihi solitudine futuri* – arched at the center in gilt. He displayed his creations...’ (62-63). This created history with its motto declaring ‘my solicitude is for the future’ exposes how Boy’s storytelling is both a deliberate and purposeful fiction designed not only to disguise the parts of the past which do not fit with his new whitened image but also to provide a better future for them in America. Whilst Clare ultimately rejects this imposed narrative, this version of herself which Boy creates and which excludes half of herself, it is an example of the power of storytelling, of how narratives effect reality. Boy’s carefully constructed narrative might be fictional but it allows him access to social spaces that would be beyond him, jobs that would have been closed to him by his ‘mestee/sambo/octoroon/quadroon/creole skin’ (75). His story and the confidence he has in it also demonstrate the fluidity of identity as well as its ties to storytelling. Boy can recreate himself and attempt to remake Clare, whilst Kitty ‘didn’t hold with metamorphosis and felt but homeless’ (54). Both Kitty and Clare ultimately reject this imposed narrative of their family but its existence alters their understanding of the world and their understanding of themselves. Boy’s storytelling forces Kitty to leave him, take her younger daughter and return to Jamaica. Clare’s reaction to Boy’s storytelling is to first attempt to alter herself to fit it and then

explosively reject it. Clare leaves her father, rejects his imposed narrative of whiteness and actively goes searching for her black roots. Thus her understanding of the world and herself are partly created through Boy's storytelling.

It is not only Clare who has narratives imposed on her in an effort to alter her identity. In Cliff's work it is the powerless and socially disadvantaged that suffer the weight of other's narratives. Both Harry/Harriet and Christopher are subject to the same storytelling as Clare, in equally negative ways. When Christopher kills Mas' Charles and his family he is enraged not just by the injustice of his poverty but by the way the family treat him, by the way they dismiss him: 'How the man can ridicule him so? The fat brown man in the big fat bed' (47). In their narrative of life he is inconsequential. In fact we are told that:

People he worked for spoke to him only when they wanted something done, when they complained... The bus conductors asked only for his fare. The shopkeepers only sought payment.... Like his labor, his connections to people were casual. If he had thought about it, he would realize that there was not one single smaddy in the world who cared if he lived or died (44).

The loneliness of his existence, the carelessness engendered in other people by his poverty and situation, all culminate in his act of violence against the family who employ him. He rebels against the confinements of society's narrative, at being inconsequential in the narrative of their lives, and he does so violently. In another example of the imposition of narratives, there is also the priest Brother Josephus who tells his flock stories about 'Lickle Jesus. Black as his mother was Black' (36) and who uses Christopher, pulls him into his own religious, racial narrative as a way of keeping his flock's interest: 'God sent this child to him. He would get the flock back' (37). Using him as a physical symbol of his teachings – 'See how him resemble

Lickle Jesus...Him is true bredda of Lickle Jesus' (39) – he influences Christopher's idea of his own identity and provides Christopher with a larger, mythological idea of himself. In both instances Christopher is trapped, subsumed in someone else's stories about his own life. Likewise Harry/Harriet is trapped between opposing narratives of gender and gendered expectations. He spends his life rebelling against these narratives, as in the episode in the bar when his immaculately masculine 'proper dinner jacket' (121) is offset by his heavily made up eyes much to the discomfort of the tourist who speaks to them 'barely concealing his shock at the man/woman's painted visage' (124-125). Later on in the text, this rebellion continues, albeit in a subtler way, when Harriet becomes a nurse wearing female attire and passing as female but remaining physically male. These instances of rebellion serve to undermine both sets of narratives, the feminine and the masculine. The stories we are told about gender, the rigid definitions applied to it and the societal expectations accompanying them are all subverted by Harry/Harriet in his refusal to be entirely constrained within one or the other. By choosing in the end to live his life as a woman without surgically altering himself to be female Harry/Harriet problematizes the idea of gender boundaries and of the imposed binaries it creates. In a telling moment in the text we are told that '[o]ne old woman, one who kened Harriet's history, called her Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors' (171). The binary narratives of either/or no longer trap Harriet, she is both and she is content with her life. This rebellion from imposed stories involves wider societal narratives rather than what appear to be the more personal familial narratives that entrap Clare. However, that personal storytelling Clare endeavours to escape from is also bound up in larger societal narratives, such as the expectations surrounding women, racist ideology and class distinctions. What at first appears to be the personal rebellion of a

daughter opposing her father's version of herself is actually a political statement that pursues self-determination against the controlling impulses of patriarchy, an Anglo-centric society and class-snobbery. In defying Boy, Clare is refusing to be defined not just by him but by the society he attempts to be part of, the American and Jamaican society that privileges lightness, wealth and masculinity. In this way Harry/Harriet's refusal to be defined is a mirror to Clare's. It is also possible to view Christopher's violence and rejection of society as a similar refusal to be defined by his poverty or class though in a more destructive way. Christopher's narrative can be read as depicting the harmful repercussions of such defining impulses, the consequences of societal narratives which impose themselves on self identity, leaving no room to come of age or grow within them. Across the text therefore, several characters define themselves through storytelling, both in acceptance and rejection of external stories.

Storytelling is therefore a powerful tool, one which shapes reality and identity, and has the potential to be used as a means of control and of rebellion against that control. This control works on an individual level, such as Boy's imposed narrative of Clare's identity as white, but it is also at work on a larger scale. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* for example, discusses the political power of stories. Those in authority use narratives in order to gain power over the populous, such as the stories about the secret police and their prisons designed to terrify the people into compliance (197-198). These stories may be factual or inflated but they are deliberately disseminated in order to instil fear and maintain control throughout the dictatorship. Alongside these stories to inspire passivity there are also stories designed to inspire confidence and trust, like the slogan 'God and Trujillo are taking care of you' (227) which is repeated before every television broadcast. This form of imposed political storytelling is laced with violence or the potential for it. In a telling simile Alvarez

describes a police officer's mouth 'stretching the word out' as he questions the family as 'like the barrel of the revolver he has emptied out and is passing around so the children can all hold it' (199). The association of the mouth and words with guns, bullets and violence all serve to highlight the dangerous potential and power the officer's words have over the García family. Later we are given the voice of one of these officers, Pupo, when faced with a powerful American who comes to aid the García family. His internal fear of retribution from his superiors is just as real as the García's fear of him and what he represents. Rather than demonising the dictator's police force Alvarez allows us in their heads, the reader might even feel some sympathy for his 'already scarred back' (213) and his own terror. The imposed political narratives of terror affect everyone. We see a parallel to this in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Felicia sees the political storytelling and imaginings of the Revolution as creating the reality of Cuba: it has become 'a country living on slogans and agitation' (107). The political narrative told to the public makes the shortages and rationing part of a worthy cause and makes the back-breaking labour in the sugarcane fields a glorious victory (44-45). The Revolution re-encodes people within this narrative so that weed pullers become 'The Mechanized Offensive Brigade' and teachers are 'Fighters for Learning' (108). Although Felicia finds the 'militant words' and grand renaming of the revolutionary narrative 'numbing' (108), we can see it at work in the country and in Celia for example, with her devotion to El Líder and her commitment to the cause. She has bought into his narrative, 'gives herself over to his revolution' (44) and 'devoted herself completely' (111), changing her identity to match the story she has been told.

Lourdes on the other hand detests the Revolution and wants to destroy it, her anti-revolutionary efforts however also occur through narrative. Her bakeries become

meeting places for Cuban extremists who discuss politics, send ‘scathing messages...to the National Palace, demanding El Líder’s resignation’ and one even calls in a bomb threat to delay a Cuban ballet (177). All these acts of aggression, however minor, occur in some way through narrative. The bomb threat is a story spun by the extremists, one that affects reality only in that it delays a performance, but it is an effect. Likewise, the messages to El Líder, while ineffectual, display the belief that if enough people send them, change will occur, eventually Castro would have to bow down to the weight of their textual pressure; if enough people repeat the same story it can become reality. When Lourdes returns to Cuba and is confronted directly by the Revolution her anger towards it also displays the power of narrative. Lourdes wants to paint over all the propaganda for the Revolution which reads ‘*Socialismo o muerte*’ (Socialism or death) to read ‘*Socialismo es muerte*’ (Socialism is death) and ‘she’d write over and over again until the people believed it, until they rose up and reclaimed their country from that tyrant’ (222-223). Lourdes believes that she can change people’s minds by changing the narrative they have been given, by providing them with a new story or truth and telling it to them until they believe. The dissemination of deliberate storytelling, the propaganda engaged in by the various dictatorships, exemplifies the prevalence of imposed narratives, the power of stories to shape reality and to give the government control but also the potential for alternative narratives to be used to rebel against that control.

Whether in oppression or in rebellion what is consistently acknowledged is the power of narrative, of words. Danticat humorously brings this to light when Sophie explains that ‘for some of us [Haitians], arguing is a sport’ (54) and that ‘people rarely hit each other. They didn’t need to. They could wound just as brutally by cursing your mother...’ (55). In Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* Selena,

despite her conflicting emotions towards her mother Silla, admires her way with words and recognises the power in them: ‘Selena listened. For always the mother’s voice was a net flung wide, ensnaring all within its reach’ (46). Similarly, the phrase ‘you got to take yuh mouth and make a gun’ (Marshall, 70) highlights the violent potential of words. Alvarez points to this power in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* when, in the midst of Trujillo’s political narratives of oppression, Yolanda’s penchant for storytelling becomes a dangerous activity. When she tells the fictional tale of her father owning a gun (198) she is not aware that it is the truth or that such a tale, whether truth or fiction, brings her father under suspicion by Trujillo’s police, having the potential to get him incarcerated or killed. Storytelling is seen as dangerous, everyone guards their words, in case the wrong person overhears them. Laura remarks that her girls are ‘picking up the national language of a police state: every word every gesture a possible mine field’ (211). Even later on in life this power of narrative remains evident. Especially in the episode where Yolanda and her father clash over a speech she writes for school. When her father hears Yolanda’s speech he is horrified and forbids her from using it, he silences her, literally ripping her words up. He is afraid of the rebellious, aggressive narrative she has created. Laura’s attitude is that while ‘[in] the old country, any whisper of a challenge to authority could bring the secret police...this was America. People could say what they want’ (145) but Carlos, with more lingering fear stemming from Trujillo’s dictatorship, understands the power of words, the need to be silent and the potential dangers of rebellion against authority. He wishes to quash what he sees as his daughter ‘rebellious’ (146) because Yolanda’s Whitman-inspired ‘I celebrate myself’ (145) seems to him improper and insolent. The strident self-identification of Yolanda’s speech is rebellious, revolutionary and therefore dangerous to his way of thinking. To Yolanda however it

is censorship, a refusal of the self she has just found in language and she reacts badly, attacking him verbally (147). In this episode both Yolanda and her father acknowledge the power of words, as attack, as rebellion, as capable of upsetting the status quo or those in power and in Yolanda's case of the possibility of self-identification through language. The dangerous potential of storytelling is also made clear in *Dreaming in Cuban*. In her duty as a judge Celia is faced with the case of a fifteen-year-old boy who has been writing 'antirevolutionary' stories where the characters 'refuse to harvest grapefruit' and 'escape Cuba on a raft' (158). When the boy's stories are discovered his family hand him over to the neighbourhood courts and he is told to 'put down his pen for six months and work' so as to 'reorient' his creativity towards the revolution (158). What this small episode shows is just how dangerous storytelling can be. The ideas transmitted through it must be censored, brought into line with the political ideology and not left to run rampant. He must put down his pen because the act of writing, the liberty it allows to imagine alternatives to the imposed state narrative is dangerous and could destabilise that grand narrative. Stories must be policed or they could run wild and change the world. The potential of storytelling is therefore not limited to altering the perspectives of the individual, as with the protagonists need to narrate themselves and to use narratives to understand the world around them but also on a larger scale storytelling creates the societies and ideologies the protagonists inhabit. In all four texts, and across the genre as a whole, storytelling functions as the medium through which personal and societal struggles are mediated and thus the coming of age process is marked by storytelling.

The role of storytelling is central to the coming of age process described in these texts and across the genre and ultimately that role is multifaceted. On the meta-

textual level storytelling and particular forms of narrative structure mirror the texts' investment in describing hybrid identity production. They allow these authors to escape the confines of the genre, to make a space for female experience and for telling that story differently. It allows for the rejection of traditional forms of narration and the associations of masculine and European privilege, which accompany them. Within the texts, narratives and storytelling function on multiple levels but remain central to the protagonists identity formation because they are shown to be a primary mode of interaction with the world. Narratives function as the medium for passing on knowledge, for creating reality and altering it, for discovering the world and rebelling against it but primarily as the way in which the protagonists negotiate their growing sense of themselves. In the process of becoming, of identity formation, that these protagonists undergo, the story is always paramount. To become is to be told stories, to be enmeshed in the narratives of society, to have stories passed down or imposed on you for good or ill, to decide which stories to believe in, which to leave behind and how to begin to tell stories for yourself.

CHAPTER THREE: MOTHERS, BODIES AND SEXUALITY

Wash white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap...cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil...on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming...this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child...this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up... (Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River*, 3-5)

Kincaid's satirical piece 'Girl' from *At the Bottom of the River* takes the motherly voice and all its instructions to a daughter and turns them into a litany, a list of practical and moral injunctions. The above quote is only a sample of the text but it clearly shows the mother-daughter relationship in all its complexity, from the passing on of purely practical advice to the acknowledgment of a moral code and the specific pattern of behaviour that is expected not only of this daughter but also of any woman. How to clean, cook, love and have children are essential components of these instructions on how to be a woman, but so are personal cleanliness and suitable behaviour. The daughter is cautioned against adopting masculine behaviour - 'do not squat to play marbles, you are not a boy you know' (4-5) - and admonished to avoid the appearance of sexual promiscuity. The girl must not only be proficient in traditional female duties but also maintain what has been deemed as appropriately female behaviour. The mother here is the arbiter of identity, not only the person who passes down stories and ways in which to navigate identity through them (as has been discussed in the previous chapter) but also the one who hands down specific knowledge of how to be a woman. The mother's instructions indicate that to be a woman includes knowing how to accomplish domestic chores - wash, cook, iron, sew,

set tables (3-4) - how to manage a woman's body - don't have too short a hem (4), this is how you get rid of a baby (5) - and how to negotiate female sexuality – 'this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming' (4), 'this is how to bully a man...this is how to love a man' (5). As we see from Kincaid's text the mother is the warden of female bodies and activities and of what is acceptably feminine. As such it is impractical to discuss the themes of mothers, bodies and sexuality, which feature heavily in female coming of age novels, as three completely separate topics. Instead I have chosen to deal with them together in this chapter as inter-related themes.

MOTHERS:

The mother figure and the mother-daughter relationship are incredibly important in female coming of age novels. It is central to the narratives and the identity formation they express. According to Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*, daughterhood and motherhood are two key concepts in identity formation and in the process of defining oneself as a woman.¹² With regards to coming of age novels in the Caribbean it is important to note that mothering is a theme throughout both male and female texts. However, in male coming of age novels the mother is often a shadowy figure, there to control the domestic space or negotiate the protagonist's relationship with his father. It is the father figure or mentor who is centre stage, the antagonist and

¹² In this work Rich maintains that the institution of mothering is founded by patriarchy and maintained by women. This is a much larger and broader discussion that Andrea O'Reilly has already deeply considered in her work *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*.

force of movement.¹³ In contrast to the primacy of male relationships in male coming of age, in these female coming of age novels it is the mother who takes centre stage. From Paule Marshall's Silla in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* who, while her husband Deighton is certainly significant to the narrative, is herself the driving force of contention and connection for her daughter Selina (1959), to Jacqueline Bishop's *The River's Song* (2007), where Mama's presence is contrasted first to the father's liminal presence and later to his conspicuous absence, the mother figure is central to the coming of age of these characters.¹⁴ In the main novels discussed in this thesis it is clear that none of the protagonists can become without negotiating maternal relationships, to greater and lesser extents. Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is the obvious example here. Sophie cannot be herself until she can say 'my mother was like me' (234) and significantly until she too is a mother. The maternal story is necessary, it is important to understand the maternal line and the mother's stories are essential to the daughter's sense of self, but beyond that the mother figure represents the first person with or against whom the girls identify. The mother is the first locus of interaction with the world and for female children the first identifier of what it means to be female, the arbiter of female behaviour and the marker against which the

¹³ In Junot Díaz's *Drown* for example, mothers are liminal figures without the complex tensions given to the fathers in the text, or for example Piri Thomas' father in *Down These Mean Streets*. There are exceptions to this, as with George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, with its absent father and present mother, but even in this case other male characters in the text, such as Pa, overshadow the maternal figure. In general the male relationships are privileged in male coming of age texts.

¹⁴ Across the genre there are many absent fathers or shadowy father figures (as in Kincaid's *Annie John* and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*), negative or controlling father figures (as in Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*) as well as positive father-daughter relationships (for example Lourdes and Jorge in García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, Merle Collin's *Angel* and Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*) but they are overshadowed by the centrality of the mother figure.

daughter measures herself.¹⁵ Ronnie Scharfman's work on mothering and mirroring notes that 'the mother figure represents the first external mirror, eventually internalized, into which a girl-child looks to discover her identity' (89). Michelle Wright in her discussion on motherhood connects this to the idea that 'consciousness is not linear, not a singular and defining moment but a continuing process of encountering others and realising one's (inter)subjectivity...this process begins with the mother, recognising her as both Other and conflated with oneself' (179). The complex process of individualisation begins with the mother. This first intersubjectivity, as Wright calls it, is the first encounter with sameness and difference and it is the conflation of identity and the simultaneous recognition of otherness that makes this initial bond so complex. Wright discusses how the 'mother and daughter dyad' becomes 'a dialogic structure in which the conflated subjectivities of mother and daughter are produced as both distinct and shared, where consciousness is achieved through encounter between thesis and antithesis albeit endlessly (re)produced and lost through each intersubjective encounter' (22). Mother and daughter are connected but separate, endlessly meeting and separating, with the daughter's identity formed in this continuous cycle.

Othermothers and Mothering:

Before beginning to discuss the various aspects or roles that the mother undertakes in these texts it is important to note that the figure of the mother and the role of mothering are often divorced. Maternal relationships in the texts are not

¹⁵ Child development theory has long discussed the mother-child bond and how it affects identity formation. Theorists such as Margaret Mahler suggest that the separation-individuation phase of a child's development occurs when the child recognises itself as not one with the mother. Prior to this the mother and the self are indistinguishable.

confined solely to biological mothers. Mothering is the significant act but it can be divorced from the biological role and even spread out amongst various individuals. Simone Alexander calls these ‘othermothers’, a figure who ‘equips the daughter with life teachings and subsequently passes this ‘torch,’ the ability to negotiate one’s identity, unto her daughter’ (48). These othermothers take over the role of mothering when the biological mother is absent or incapable of fulfilling her role to the daughter. According to Alexander ‘[t]he inability of biological mothers properly to initiate their daughters is a recurring theme in the writings of (Caribbean) women’ (67). This role of substitute or othermother is for example fulfilled by the two aunts in Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey*, and in the main texts by Sophie’s aunt and by Pilar’s and Clare’s grandmothers. In the case of Sophie, her aunt Atie substitutes for her mother Martine during her absence so that Sophie identifies herself as ‘my mother’s daughter and Tante Atie’s child’ (Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* 49). The othermother however, does not simply serve as a replacement. Their role is often to bridge the gap between mother and daughter: ‘the surrogate or othermother is not as emotionally intertwined with her surrogate daughter as the biological mother and this minimal distance seemingly gives her a better, wiser and less emotionally-driven perspective on the mother-daughter relationship’ (Alexander, 48-49). We see an example of this in *Dreaming in Cuban*. When Pilar and Lourdes are unable to connect it is the grandmother Celia who takes on the role of othermother, nurturing and guiding Pilar. Celia’s role is to provide the connection Pilar needs and which Lourdes cannot supply -‘I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom’ (176) – but it is also to interpret Lourdes to Pilar, to act as a bridge between them and to tell Pilar the things Lourdes cannot: ‘I might be afraid of [my mother] if it weren’t for those talks I have with Abuela Celia late at night. She tells me that my mother is sad

inside and that her anger is more frustration at what she can't change' (63). The necessity of the othermother within the mother-daughter bond is therefore exposed as twofold: to supplement the mother's failing, to take over the work of mothering in the mother's absence, and to work as a bridge between them.

Mothering, as we can see from the function of othermothers, is a social construct, a role within society which can be removed from its biological foundation. Michelle Wright notes that 'Western discourse...deliberately conflates biological imperative with the socially constructed imperative that mothers must be guided by a deep and abiding love for their natural offspring' (172). This statement not only highlights the falsity of the claim of mothering as a biological imperative - since the texts expose the shared nature of the maternal role and the possibility of its transference onto different female figures - but also that the abiding love expected of mothers is also a social construct, not a natural or essential quality. These texts display the mother in all her guises, all her complexities, not shirking from either the love or ambivalence of the maternal bond, which in these texts is often broken, stretched, marred or otherwise un-ideal yet still necessary for identity formation.

Absent Mothers:

The shifting of maternal duties on to othermothers, and the subsequent complication of the maternal bond, is usually prompted by some form of absence. The absent mother is a trope that occurs often in coming of age novels by Caribbean women. We see this for example, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* where Sophie spends the first part of her life without her mother Martine. According to Danticat the mother-daughter relationship is always complicated but for her it is one often marked by separation and absence:

It's a complicated relationship even in ordinary relationships. Add to that separation, which, for me, is as strong a theme as the mother-daughter relationship... For me, the most fascinating thing is the absence and then recovery from that absence... What interests me most is the separation and healing: recovering or not recovering: Becoming a woman and defining what that means in terms of a mother who may have been there in fragments, who was first a wonderful memory that represents absence (Shea, 382).¹⁶

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Martine's absence is temporary, based presumably on economic necessity and Martine's need to escape Haiti and the reminders of her personal trauma. This separation from her daughter and the recovery from it are central to the plot of the novel. Martine's absence is a temporary situation but the effects of that early absence are immense. At the start of the novel Sophie does not know her mother; she is a photograph (8), an unreal figure. Sophie has nightmares about her mother chasing her and trying to squeeze her into the frame with her, nightmares which wake her screaming. It is her substitute mother 'Tante Atie [who] would come and save [Sophie] from her grasp' (8). Martine's absence makes her unreal to an extent, a figure of uncertainty and fear instead of love. This physical absence is later compounded by Martine's emotional absence, her silence surrounding Sophie's origins and her own history, which distances them. In contrast, *Dreaming in Cuban* has a series of absent mothers, who are absent in a variety of ways, as if such absence were passed on along the generations. Celia is sent away by her mother after her parents divorce to Tia Alicia who becomes her surrogate maternal figure. In turn Celia is an absent mother to Lourdes as a result of her mental breakdown and

¹⁶ Danticat's concern with the separation and absence of the mother is borne out in her other texts. In *Krik? Krak!* for example, mothers play a central role in many of the narratives with 'Nineteen Thirty-Seven' and 'Missing Peace' revolving entirely around absent mothers. The main protagonist in *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle, is also a motherless child. Beyond Danticat's work, the mother's absence is also a theme in several texts across the coming of age genre in the Caribbean as in for example Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*.

institutionalisation at the time of her birth, leaving her unable to connect with Lourdes, who rejects Celia even after her return in favour of Jorge: ‘That girl is a stranger to me. When I approach her, she turns numb, as if she wanted to be dead in my presence. I see how different Lourdes is with her father, so alive and gay, and it hurts me, but I don’t know what to do. She still punishes me for the early years’ (163). Celia’s initial disconnection denies the early intimacy between mother and child and Lourdes suffers for this: ‘If it’s true that babies learn love from their mothers’ voices, then this is what Lourdes heard: “I will not remember her name.”’ (74). She inflicts suffering on Celia in turn with her obvious preference for her father. Lourdes even used to tell people ‘that her mother was dead’ as a child (219). Felicia is likewise an intermittently absent mother because of her mental illness, fugue states and institutionalisation. Early on her twin daughters begin to mistrust her and create a society of two, ‘a double helix, tight and impervious’ (120) which rejects her: ‘Milagro and I have had a pact to ignore Mama, to stay as far away from her as possible’ (121). They deny her overtures or attempts to connect with them, distancing themselves from her, even going so far as to ‘call [their] mother “not-Mama”’ (121) as if she were a possessed person, or something alien inhabiting their mother’s body. The lack of communication between them is emblematic of their lack of connection. As Luz notes ‘families are essentially political’ and they have chosen their side (86). They seek out their father as another rejection of Felicia and delight in going against her edicts.

In Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints* instead of a permanent absence or a limited absence that becomes presence we have a recurring absence. Graciela consistently leaves her daughter Mercedes and then returns throughout her childhood. Graciela flees the home space, not just her daughter, several times in the novel, a

product of her own restless and unsettled nature as well as her longing for more. These instances of departure however foster resentment and tension between them. Mercedes feels 'so unwanted by Graciela' (162) and she 'tried her best to love Graciela - wherever she might be. She prayed hard that the Lord...keep her from the razor-rage of the memory of her mother walking away, leaving her' (161) while Graciela's own guilt weighs heavy on her: 'It was easier for Graciela to feign anger at Mercedes...This way, guilt for her own absence...would not cave her in' (168). This maternal absence creates a complex mother-daughter bond where both love and hate co-exist simultaneously so that at Graciela's funeral Mercedes can be both sad - 'finally Mercedes could succumb to the tears she had fought' (175) - and angry - 'Mercedes howled, releasing the white-hot rage she had suppressed. She arched out her arm in an overdue fist on the corpse's chest, and pounded' (177) – all the time clutching the 'glass rosary beads' of her mother's rosary to feel connected to her (177). In *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare also experiences her mother as an absence but in this case more as an emotional absence. In *Abeng* we are told that Clare had been 'handed over to Boy the day she was born' and would never be admitted 'into that place deep in Kitty's soul which she kept guard over' (128). She describes how Kitty 'came alive only in the bush' (49) and how she 'held herself back from any contact which was intimate' (51) and with her children she was 'restrained in both anger and warmth' not believing in too much physical affection (52). This distance is something Kitty herself grew up with and which she 'never thought to change' (52) but it results in an emotional distance between mother and daughter. Later on, during Clare's teenage years in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Kitty is also physically absent and dies before Clare can speak to or see her again. One of the few moments of intimacy mother and daughter share is when they go into the bush

together but that intimacy ‘abruptly stopped there’ (*Abeng*, 53). Clare tells ‘herself that it was enough that they were alone’ (*Abeng*, 53) but her longing for a closer relationship with Kitty is clear. In *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare returns to Jamaica partly in search of that maternal connection. The mother is experienced at a distance, as a silence or absence to be filled. The overwhelming theme seems to be that the absence of the mother in whatever form requires a substitute, whether that be Lourdes giving all her affection to Jorge, Clare searching for connection by returning to the homeland Kitty loved or Sophie finding an othermother in Atie and that this absence deeply affects the coming of age of the protagonists. For Sophie and Clare in particular the mother is not only an absence but also a silence, a history they do not yet know and must recover and it is only in recovering that absent narrative that they can continue the process of becoming. In being an absence the mother becomes a space to be filled, a figure that is still powerful, or perhaps more powerful, in its absence than in its presence.

The Duality of the Mother Figure:

Having discussed the mother as an absence and the complexities that creates for the daughter’s identity formation we must also consider the paradoxes of the present mother or othermother. In their discussion of Caribbean literature Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson state that ‘in male writing the portrayal [of the mother] is almost always positive, where-as in female writing there are ambivalent and on occasion...negative portraits’ (xiv). The range of possible portrayals of the mother figure evident in Caribbean women’s literature establishes that the mother-daughter relationship is complex and often fraught. It is precisely the complexity of the bond, and the various aspects of the mother figure that it allows the reader to view, that are

central to the texts. The coming of age novels I discuss present neither the idealised nor demonised view of mothers in favour of the more complex reality. Simone Alexander argues that these more nuanced mother-daughter relationships reflect reality. Using the example of Jamaica Kincaid's work, Alexander distinguishes a pattern of changing attitudes from initial unity to subsequent disjunction that occur in mother-daughter relationships:

The mother-daughter relationship is classified equally by intense love and intense hatred. Noticeably, the daughter's childhood years are marked by innocence and great love and admiration for the kind understanding mother. Inexplicably, this love is transformed into hatred and exacerbated during puberty by the mother's need to control (45).

This pattern which moves from early childhood love, union and conflation of identity to a later hatred, rejection and separation is clearly applicable to Kincaid's *Annie John* which Alexander discusses – and which has garnered perhaps the greatest amount of critical attention amongst the coming of age novels by female Caribbean writers - but it is less useful in other texts as a general rule. It does however highlight several key aspects of the mother-daughter bond. Namely that love and hatred can sit side by side, the changing nature of that relationship over time, the issue of power and control which impacts such a relationship and finally, how the period of adolescence is the period of greatest anxiety and change.¹⁷

In *Annie John* the shift from an edenic union between mother and daughter – who mirror each other and are always together - to a postlapsarian wasteland of

¹⁷ This last may explain why alternative definitions of coming of age or bildungsroman novels restrict themselves to the adolescent period. Female adolescence, that shady ground between child and woman, is a period intensely fraught with change and the locus of a great deal of tension between mothers and daughters, though the process of becoming continues beyond this period. The awakening of sexuality and bodily changes that occur at this time also highlight the interlinked nature of these three topics.

resentment and rejection is clear and expresses the complexity of the mother figure.¹⁸ This pattern is less obvious in other texts where the extremes of both love and hatred are replaced with a confused melange of simultaneous connection and distance. Instead of the mother as nurturer becoming the mother as oppressor, the mother is often both at once with ‘intense love and intense hatred’ (Alexander, 45) occurring simultaneously. Manuela Coppola states that mother figures ‘have always been represented as dispensers of infinite love and nurturing but, at the same time, as goddess-like creatures exercising the power of life and death over their daughters’ (59). The contradictory nature of the mother figure, which both Alexander and Coppola note, is relevant to many of the texts in the coming of age genre. There are a number of texts where the mother figure is more clearly a positive one but even so in the majority of texts the mother-daughter relationship is one of contradiction and tension. Maria Cristina Rodriguez states that ‘contrary to the anglo and hispanophone Caribbean narrative, francophone Caribbean women writers frequently present antagonistic mother-daughter relationships’ (30). I would argue that contentious mother-daughter portrayals abound across geographical boundaries although truly negative portrayals are less frequent, with more weight given to complex and paradoxical mother figures. The mother is a complex figure, like an archetype or a goddess with different aspects she can appear as nurturer and carer or as aggressor and oppressor. In many texts the mother is in fact nurturer and oppressor, friend and enemy, protector and jailor simultaneously. Alexander discusses how the mother fears

¹⁸ Kincaid’s *Annie John* and its spiritual sequel *Lucy* that can both be described, to varying degrees, as coming of age novels have already been discussed extensively with relation to mothering. For a detailed analysis of Kincaid’s texts and the mother figure see Simone Alexander’s *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women*, Manuela Coppola’s article ‘Sublime Mothers: Caribbean Genealogies and Deadly Configurations in Jamaica Kincaid’s Narrative’ and Alison Donnell’s ‘When Daughters Defy: Jamaica Kincaid’s Fiction’, to name but a few.

for the daughter but also fears her, fears her loss of control and tries to prevent her becoming independent. Alexander notes that ‘[i]n an attempt to protect her daughter from “such evils” the mother builds a protective wall around her. These “high banks” initially designed to protect and shield the daughter from “the dangers of the larger world” eventually function as suffocating walls or barriers that silence and subsume the daughter’s subjectivity’ (46). Alexander follows this with Kincaid’s announcement that the mother-daughter relationship has links to the coloniser-colonised relationship, in which the ‘the mother shows her [daughter] how to be in the world, but at the back of her mind, she thinks she never will get it. She’s deeply skeptical that this child could ever grow to be a self-possessed woman’ (Alexander, 46). The desire to protect which becomes stifling also leads to a fear of the daughter stepping outside that protection because it is inconceivable that she will ever not need it. Alexander constructs this as a colonial power relationship, or rather how it mimics and is exacerbated by that dynamic of powerful versus powerless. While this is not unconvincing, more interesting perhaps is the fear of change that this dynamic displays, the fear of loss of control, stemming from a protective urge but which becomes stifling. Comfort turns to suffocation so that the mother is always a dualistic figure who can be both nurturer and oppressor not only simultaneously but also with the same action or the same impulses. For example, Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban* wants to protect her daughter. At times this protective urge is wanted and praised, as with the incident where a patron of the bakery insults Pilar’s painting and Lourdes flies into a protective rage, an act which pleases Pilar: ‘I love my mother very much at that moment’ (144). This same urge however can also be stifling and confining, as with Lourdes’ insistence that Pilar conform to a specific American ideology of capitalist success in order to get ahead in life. Lourdes wants Pilar to work in the

bakery to teach her responsibility (27) and discourages her from going to art school because ‘artists are a bad element’ (29). While neither the protective urge nor the desire for her daughter to be responsible are inherently negative, by taking them to these levels they become confining. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* the same dualistic roles also coexist. Martine tries to protect Sophie from men by keeping her safe at home but also by isolating her and testing her virginity. It is possible that these mothers, who have both suffered trauma, see themselves in their daughters and want to protect not only them but also the parts of themselves they see in their daughters. This continued conflation of identity is limiting to the daughters and must give way during the coming of age process. The paternalistic colonial relationship Alexander discusses and whose protective/controlling impulses we can see played out in the texts here portrays its own duality and its in-built creation of rebellion. As Alexander states ‘in her effort to protect, she instead institutionalises her daughter. Understandably, the daughter rebels against institutionalisation, another subtle form of colonization’ (46). Such protective/controlling impulses necessitate the opposing reactions of the daughters, in other words, rebellion against maternal strictures. In these texts such rebellion manifests as Sophie’s self-violation and marriage to Joseph, and Pilar’s running away from home and rejection of conformist Americana for punk’s radical anarchy. The mothers’ intentions are nurturing but their actions become oppressive and instigate rebellions that are necessary for the protagonists coming of age.

The duality of the mother is also obvious in the restrictions placed on the daughter. The mother is the arbiter of femaleness, of appropriate behaviour and of sexuality (discussed later on in this chapter), she polices her daughter and keeps her contained within appropriate boundaries. During Clare’s childhood, as described in *Abeng*, we see that, while this policing is perpetrated by both men and women, it is

the women in the text who most clearly warn against derivations from the limitations placed on their gender. When Clare steals her uncle's gun to go hunting and accidentally kills her grandmother's bull, her grandmother's and her parents' anger is not solely towards her theft but towards her gender. Her own conception of the act is also gendered; she wants to hunt the wild pig partly because of all the things she been forbidden 'when she had been told absolutely by the boys, by the dressed up women, by Miss Mattie, by Mad Hannah, just who she was to be in this place' (114). The litany of limiters, mostly women, is particularly evocative, and when Zoe convinces her that finding and killing the pig is unlikely and pointless Clare asserts her continued rebellion by considering that '[s]he was a girl, she had taken a gun and ammunition; perhaps that was forbidden act enough. She had stepped out of place.' (114). Cliff describes this as Clare 'taking [power] through a male mode' and that she 'can't take it through a female mode because the power she's witnessed is always through a male mode' (Schwartz, 616). It is not simply power beyond her place as a child that she rebels against, but her powerlessness as a female. Later Miss Mattie laments not only how 'mean' and 'wicked' Clare is but also that she is '[a] girl who seemed to think she was a boy' (134). Stealing the gun is a more severe rebellion because it is a symbol of male power and she has no access to it. Likewise Boy is concerned not just that his daughter might become a thief but that she was no longer 'so quiet, so girlish so "demure"' (145): 'She had been caught in rebellion. She was a girl. No one was impressed with her.' (150). At other points in the text Clare also becomes aware of the limitations of womanhood. She is not allowed to eat the hog privates the boys cook, she is rejected from their circle: "'Is jus no fe gal pickney dats all"' she had heard this before – spoken in different ways' (58). Miss Mattie tells her where to walk and when, not to go alone, and especially now that she is 'developing'

(62) her grandmother places further restrictions on her. Clare is no longer allowed to play with her male cousins and ‘Miss Mattie was more careful about her’ (62) now that she was becoming a young woman. She must learn her place ‘in this house, with all the dressed up women’ (61) while her male counterparts are ‘allowed to do so much she was not’ (61). The impulse to protect and control are clear in Miss Mattie’s actions as is the resulting suffocation and constriction experienced by Clare and the direct reaction of rebellion against such constrictions. Finally Clare is sent to Miss Beatrice, an old family friend to learn how to become a ‘lady’ and to do so ‘Miss Beatrice allowed her no movement at all’ (157). These two surrogate mother figures attempt to protect Clare and train her for the wider world but this protective, initially nurturing impulse makes them oppressive and controlling figures, suffocating Clare’s identity formation and contributing to her continued rebellion. With Miss Mattie this manifests as taking up the male symbol of the gun while with Miss Beatrice it involves talking to her “mad” sister in direct contradiction of Miss Beatrice’s orders. Control and rebellion therefore not only coexist but also engender each other and the female coming of age is marked by mother-daughter relationships that teeter between protection and constriction. The mother is ultimately expressed as complex and dual, consistently shifting between the figure of nurture and comfort to one of oppression and control.

The Blurring and Separation of Identities:

In contrast to the mothers’ fear for their daughters, the mother-daughter relationship is also marked by the daughter’s fear of the mother. Rich calls this ‘matrophobia’ and states that it:

is not the fear of one’s mother or of motherhood but of becoming one’s mother, [it] can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to

become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free...Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery (230).

This fear of becoming the mother is shared by both the daughters and the mothers and is a part of the becoming process. In order to become oneself fully a distinction must be made between mother and daughter. The blurred identities Rich speaks of must be redrawn more clearly. Ronnie Scharfman's work on 'mirroring and mothering' contends that the mirroring between mother and daughter allows daughters to identify with their mothers and the maternal discourse which is pivotal in identity formation but that they merge making it impossible to delineate where mother ends and daughter begins and to clearly differentiate the mother's story from the daughter's (90). This blurring of identities and stories creates the bond between mothers and daughters initially but also necessitates a separation, the radical surgery Rich describes.

Applying Scharfman's idea of mothering and mirroring to *Breath, Eyes, Memory* we can see that for Sophie this merging and blurring of identities has certain negative effects. There is a sense that Sophie is repeating her mother's life, that there is a cycle of pain which Sophie inherits as she inherits her mother's nightmares. Sophie re-enacts Martine's experiences with sexual violation, just as Martine re-enacts Grandmé Ifé's testing with her own daughter. They both have problems with intercourse and suffer bodily disgust and even get pregnant at similar times, though Sophie does not mirror her mother's suicide attempts. The union and closeness Martine attempts to develop between them extends to isolating Sophie and as a young adult Sophie must break this communion with her mother. She does so by rebelling against her mother's strictures, first by meeting in secret and beginning a relationship with Joseph and later, when this is discovered and Martine begins testing her virginity (84), Sophie

further rebels by violating herself to destroy the appearance of virginity (88) – which she describes as ‘like breaking manacles, an act of freedom’ (130) - and leaving home to marry Joseph (89). It is significant that it is after the discovery of this initial rebellion that Martine accuses Sophie of abandoning her for a man, that they could have been like the Marassas but for Sophie’s betrayal: ‘The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man who you didn’t know the year before. You and I we could be like *Marassas*. You are giving up a lifetime with me’ (85). The Marassas are twins, two individuals thought to have one being. Martine calls them ‘two inseparable lovers. They were the same person duplicated in two’ (85).¹⁹ What is most significant about their inclusion at this point in the narrative is that they display Martine’s longing for an intimate and exclusive bond with her daughter at precisely the moment when her daughter’s coming of age necessitates a distancing between them. Martine’s Marassas are ‘copies’ or ‘mirrors’ of each other, ‘vain lovers’ who admire their similarities and she cannot imagine how Sophie could enter into that closeness with Joseph: ‘When you look in a stream, if you saw that man’s face, wouldn’t you think it was a water spirit? Wouldn’t you scream? Wouldn’t you think he was hiding under a sheet of water or behind a pane of glass to kill you?’ (85). Due perhaps to her own experiences with rape the mother cannot imagine that union and sense of similarity occurring between her daughter and this man. They are too different and instead Martine desires that mirroring and

¹⁹ The Marassas are a particularly apt metaphor for Danticat to use, since as Marilyn Houlberg notes they are connected to sickness, healing, water, crossroads and Ezili Danto (14-19), all of which connect Martine and Sophie, as well as being Vodou Iwa, a particularly Haitian frame of reference. Interestingly, Florence Bellande-Robertson connects the Marassas to hybridity, defining “‘Marassaness’ as a concept of co-existence, and collaborative endeavors based on mutual understanding and respect of differences... the different elements must merge (at some acceptable level) and work together’ (8). The twins are symbols of the hybrid, connected yet separate, which again makes them an apt metaphor for both Martine’s and Sophie’s hybrid identities.

closeness for themselves. Martine wants them to be Marassas, the blurred identities of the same entity split into two bodies, as inseparable as if they were the same soul, but in order to become herself Sophie must deny this impulse, she must redraw her own boundaries and separate their identities. This impulse might be associated with Martine wanting to retrieve the closeness, intimacy and blurring of boundaries that they have missed because of her absence in Sophie's early life. Danticat offers the Marassas as a metaphor for the mother-daughter relationship: 'I wanted to use all the connotations of twins in the story. Going back to the mother-daughter relationship, the idea is that two people are one, but not quite; they might look alike and talk alike but are, in essence, different people' (Shea, 385). Coming at the moment of greatest conflict between mother and daughter the concept of the Marassas succinctly conveys Martine's view of their mother-daughter relationship at the moment of its breaking; her longing for it as well as Sophie's distinct and contrasting view of their relationship as one of control, trauma and powerlessness. For Martine the Marassas represent the idea of being each other's doubles, two divided but ultimately connected selves. For Sophie such doubling has negative connotations since it is connected to her disassociating during the violation of testing: 'I learned to *double* while being *tested*' (155). The novel as a whole rejects the idea of the inseparable intimacy of the Marassas, two but one, as linked to the mother-daughter bond since it directly relates the impossibility of such closeness as the daughter becomes an adult. For Martine such unity is an ideal but all her attempts to enforce her will, to keep Sophie away from Joseph and remaining as her Marassa twin, serve instead to damage her daughter and their relationship, which can only be repaired over time so that even years later we learn from Sophie that 'sometimes I claim her...sometimes I do not' (166). The blurring of identities, which the intimacy of the mother-daughter bond creates, is not

presented as positive and the separating of identities, the move away from that intimacy, is represented as a complex process filled with tension and conflict. In contrast, Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* displays the separation between mother and daughter as effortless and positive. At a pivotal point in Yolanda's journey of becoming, her mother Laura symbolically passes on responsibility onto her daughter: 'It was as if, after that, her mother had passed on to Yoyo her pencil and pad and said, "Okay, Cuquita, here's the buck. You give it a shot."' (149). Across the texts the movement towards separation is presented as necessary, irrespective of whether that separation occurs easily or with difficulty.

The desire for a breaking away from the mother figure is expressed in most coming of age novels whether that maternal figure is presented as positive or negative. In Merle Hodges' *Crick Crack, Monkey* the protagonist Cynthia/Tee is in the care of two othermothers, her two aunts. She begins her childhood with Tantie and then is moved to Aunt Beatrice's keeping so that in the text the two mother figures embody the disparate and paradoxical nature of the mother bond with Tantie representing early love, nurturing and joy while Beatrice becomes the oppressor, a controlling figure determined to correct Tee into becoming Cynthia, turning her into her version of a lady. The text encapsulates the conflicting emotions connected to mothering by embodying them in separate figures but it also highlights the impossibility of returning to that childhood innocence and intimacy by showing how Tee cannot return to Tantie's world once she has adapted to Beatrice's; she does not fit there, cannot see it except through the veneer of class distinction, snobbery and understanding that Beatrice has given her. Similarly Beatrice's stifling restrictive control also becomes a space to flee from. The text captures the need to escape from that maternal space, whether once loved or filled with hatred in order to find oneself:

‘Everything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be, since I had moved up and no longer had any place here. But it was painful, and I longed all the more to be on my way’ (122) ‘I desired with all my heart that it were the next morning and a plane were lifting me off the ground’ (123). Both aspects of the maternal bond, the nurturing of Tantie and the oppression of Beatrice must equally be distanced from in order for Tee to discover her sense of self. It is not just the desire to leave but also the necessity of it that comes through. *Crick Crack, Monkey* is a coming of age novel that ends when the coming of age is merely beginning. Tee is not yet comfortable in her skin, not yet able to find her sense of self but in leaving she is making the next step on that journey and in order to do so she must first leave both Tantie and Beatrice and all the complex maternal aspects they represent. Similarly, in Kincaid’s *Annie John* the daughter must leave the mother and her homeland in order to find her sense of self outside of the blurred boundaries engendered by their previously close and now tumultuous relationship. This need to leave the maternal sphere creates the mother as not simply oppressor but as antithesis, as that which must be broken free from. In *Dreaming in Cuban* Pilar’s and Lourdes’ difficult relationship leads the daughter to embrace abstraction, anarchy and art in the face of her mother’s insistence on black and white thinking, capitalism and practicality. Pilar’s decisions are not merely a reflection of her personality but a rejection of maternal control and ideology. Lourdes’ edicts are what Pilar rages against and in doing so she finds herself. Whether Pilar’s ideological rebellion or Annie’s departure, the consistent theme is that the daughter’s identity is formulated in reaction to the mother.

The separation or rebellion frequently present in the coming of age novel is however often accompanied by a return or an acknowledgment of the unbroken link

between mother and daughter. There is a paradox of simultaneous connection and separation present in Kincaid's *Annie John* for example so that the separation enacted by Annie is matched by her act of leaving with a trunk which is 'a treasured memorabilia of the womenfolk of her family... In this trunk, their different, yet similar lives are stored. This trunk holds a legacy; a history that try as she might Annie cannot escape' (Alexander, 74). The centrality of the mother to the entire narrative also serves to clarify the importance of understanding or negotiating that relationship in order to come of age. Even in departure Kincaid highlights the connection between mother and daughter however complicated by resentment, anger or tension that connection might be. Lucy, in the novel of the same name by Kincaid, finally laughs at her own desire to break away from her mother, noting: 'I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I had missed the whole story: I was not like my mother - I was my mother' (90). Alongside this recognition of their similarities Lucy also acknowledges that '[m]y past was my mother' (90) as if only through her mother can she understand her life. The sense of connection is obvious despite their tense and difficult relationship and their separation. The mother is an important figure to the sense of self, a figure to be understood and acknowledged, even in conflict. Another example of this phenomena would be Silla and Selina in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in which a great deal of Selina's sense of self comes from her conflict with her mother, her rejection of and rebellion from all she represents. It is significant that Silla is usually referred to as 'the mother': not simply 'a' or 'my' but 'the' a goddess-like figure, an archetype as much as a person. As such it is impossible to forget the power dynamic present in the maternal relationship and it also becomes possible to view every statement about 'the mother' as a universal or communal understanding of the mother-daughter dyad instead of an

individual, personal relationship. The power of the mother is evident in the text and as such it is easy to see Silla and Selina as battling each other, with Silla representing that which Selina must fight against. Selina ultimately rejects Silla's idea that 'in making your way you always hurt someone' (307) and her acquisitive ambition for the brownstone with its attendant wealth and status. Silla's ambition, which subsumes her emotions and morality leads her to manipulation and lies to reach her ends.

Initially Selina mirrors this as she manipulates the scholarship committee but she eventually rejects this maternal pattern by confessing her deception and refusing the committee's money. Selina and Silla's conflict however stems from their similarities as much as, if not more than, their differences. As Silla says, 'two head-bulls can't reign in a flock' (307). Selina's final rejection and separation from Silla actually occurs because of this similarity: 'Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina, but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and as your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want. I want it!' (307).

This moment brings to light not only the need to be your own person, the need to escape the maternal shroud in order to become but also that doing so does not negate the connection between mother and daughter, it is the desire to recognise their similarities, their same need to be themselves that necessitates Selina's leaving.

Alongside this rejection and rebellion we are presented with Selina's need for her mother, the recognition that she is Silla's child which comes from her recognition that '[a]bove all, she longed to understand the mother, for she knew, obscurely, that she would never really understand anything until she did' (145). In both Selina's rejection of her mother's ideals and methods and in her acknowledgment of their similarities the novel highlights the simultaneous separation and connection between mother and

daughter. In rebellion from, and in acknowledgment of, the power of the mother the text displays that both processes are necessary for the coming of age of the daughter, they are not mutually exclusive but work in conjunction. Lourdes and Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* are also in opposition not just because of their different goals in life but because of their similar attitudes and temperaments. They are both headstrong and stubborn, unwilling to compromise or give in. In one of Lourdes' first descriptions of her daughter she notes 'the smell of defiance that is Pilar' (22) while Pilar states that 'If I don't like someone I show it. It's the one thing I have in common with my mother' (135). It is easy to see that they share the same disregard for the opinions of others, the same stubbornness and dynamic drive. What makes Lourdes furious is Pilar's rebellion against her control, but it is precisely that character trait which she inherited from Lourdes, that attitude which refused to be cowed by the guards who attacked her or by her snide mother-in-law, which gave her the drive to create her own business and make it successful. When Pilar wonders 'how Mom could be Abuela Celia's daughter. And what I'm doing as my mother's daughter. Something got horribly scrambled along the way' (178) she is correct in that the connection between grandmother and granddaughter is obvious whilst the relationship between mother and daughter is strained but it denies the basic elements of similarity these three women share and which come across from the text taken as a whole: their shared indomitable defiance and survival through suffering. Simone Alexander notes that in Kincaid's work 'in spite of this turbulence there is no denying the mother that exists within the daughter' (46). I would argue that it is precisely because the mother exists within the daughter than such turbulence exists. The conflicts between mother and daughter within the coming of age novels is a result of the maternal bond, of their combined identity formations rather than a mark against their connection.

As can be seen the mother and the mother-daughter relationship in the coming of age novel is never simple or one-dimensional. Taken as a whole the genre seems to present the mother as many things: absence, abuser, victim, oppressor, friend, mirrored self. She is all things, in various combinations, often all at once and each to be negotiated and accepted in order to become. As Danticat acknowledges '[o]ften all we know about being women, we pick up from our mothers' (Shea, 383) and this is equally true whether in rejection or acceptance of the mother, whether in her absence or presence. The mother is the central point of reference. It is the very complexity and constantly shifting landscape of mother-daughter relationships that serves to promote the formation of a unique identity in the daughters, or occasionally in the mothers themselves.²⁰ The mother is a complex but central figure to all these narratives across the genre and it is her complexity that allows the daughter to come of age. The tension or connection between them gives the protagonists something to work against or grow from, often both at once. Whether present or absent, whether friend or foe or both the mother is the first identity against or with which the protagonists negotiate and in doing so begin to negotiate their own complex selves.

BODIES:

The previous section touches on the aspect of mother figures as their daughters' wardens and arbiters of femaleness. They guard and control their daughters and they do so by controlling the body. As the first ways in which girls

²⁰ In Merle Collins' *Angel* for example the coming of age described is not just Angel's but Doodsie's as well. Her sense of self is altered by the events of the novel and by the experiences of motherhood and daughterhood in the text. Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* exposes a similar pattern; it is not just Clare who comes of age but also Kitty, who throughout the text finds her voice and identifies her place in the world.

learn how to be women these mother figures teach femaleness, which is itself bodily encoded. While this inevitably includes that body as sexual, which I will discuss in the following section, here I will explore how bodies, particularly female bodies become a feature to be negotiated and understood in the process of coming of age.

The Dangerous Female Body:

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, after being mistreated by her husband's family and finding out that she is pregnant Celia makes the decision on whether to run away based on the gender of her unborn child:

Celia wished for a boy, a son who could make his way in the world. If she had a son, she would leave Jorge and sail to Spain.... If she had a girl, Celia decided, she would stay. She would not abandon a daughter to this life, but train her to read the columns of blood and numbers in men's eyes, to understand the morphology of survival. Her daughter, too, would outlast the hard flames (42).

There are several ideas encapsulated in this piece of text but primarily it is the disjunction between genders; that a son could make his way in the world whilst a daughter would need guidance and protection. For a female then the world is not full of opportunity but full of danger. Simply being female is dangerous because that bodily identity involves an entirely different encounter with the world. This excerpt also highlights that the danger to female survival is the inability to read men. Being able to 'read the columns of blood and numbers in men's eyes' is necessary for survival. This phrase evokes not only the bloody violence Lourdes later undergoes - the assault and rape which she is particularly vulnerable to as a female - but also the calculation and valuation the male gaze places on women. Being a column of numbers implies being an object, a possession whose value can be judged, noted and sold. 'Blood and numbers' therefore evokes the complex power relations between

men and women. García is equating femaleness not only with danger but also with objectification, violence and commodification. The female body becomes a site of value and danger as can also be seen in Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' from *At the Bottom of the River*. The epigraph at the start of this chapter highlights the value of the female child in terms of what she can do, what her body is capable of (cooking, cleaning, loving, giving birth) but also how dangerous that body could be if left unchecked. The mother's repeated admonishments to act like a lady instead of 'the slut you are so bent on becoming' (3) alongside her litany of warnings against talking to wharf-rat boys, squatting to play marbles and too short hems work in combination to create the idea of the female body as an object to be controlled, to be limited and thus rendered appropriate. In both 'Girl' and *Dreaming in Cuban*, the female body is implicitly shown as an object, as a product to be both kept safe against outside attack but also made safe before interacting with the wider world. The body therefore becomes more than a physical reality; it also becomes a site upon which a number of societal ideas and ideals are placed. As Susan Bordo states '[t]he body...is a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body' (13). This is explored in a number of ways within these texts. In *Dreaming in Cuban* the body becomes the site of patriarchal hierarchies. Celia's 'columns of blood and numbers' expresses the objectification and power over women that patriarchy exerts and which are continually negotiated through Celia and Jorge's marriage. During the course of their marriage Jorge's control over Celia is maintained through his control over her body. When they are first wed he punishes her for having a previous lover by leaving her in the hands of his mother and sister who consistently mistreat her; taking her clothes, feeding her poorly and verbally abusing her (40-41). She is a prisoner in that

household, trapped by her marriage to Jorge and by the strictures of society that make her mother and sister-in-law bitter and cruel towards her. Once she becomes pregnant and has a mental breakdown Jorge further curtails her independence by placing her in a mental institution under the guise of protecting her fragile nerves. When she finally leaves, he also removes certain music from the house so that it will not spiral her into melancholy again. This series of events exposes how much power Jorge has over Celia, how society contributes to this idea of the female as property of the male and how such systems of power are enacted through the body, through Celia's physical restraint. To counteract this bodily control Celia's escape and sense of self occur through the mind, through her mental break, which allows her to escape the confines of her reality and later through her mental connection to Felicia, another woman in the institution whom she befriends (51). Pilar and Lourdes' also find themselves made objects within the text during their encounters with male violence. Lourdes is assaulted, raped and forced to wear the illegible words carved into her by her assailant whereas Pilar is molested by a group of boys who hold her at knifepoint. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Martine has a similar experience, where violence expresses itself as the bodily violation of rape. In these cases the female body is subject to male power and violence, their bodies are treated as objects for male pleasure and sites of control over female rebellion or power. There are also subtler ways in which the female body is coded as dangerous and therefore as something to be owned and controlled. Sophie's body for example is treated primarily as a gendered object whose purity is of utmost importance and her mother therefore curtails her movements and activities. Similarly, Miss Mattie's concern in *Abeng* that Clare not wander on her own, that she limit her movements, highlights how her gendered body must be controlled and monitored. The constant vigilance over the female cousins that occurs in the Dominican Republic in

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents likewise implies that the female body is to be protected and controlled. Yolanda is even explicitly told, in much the way Clare is, that there are certain things women do not do, ‘women just don’t travel alone in this country’, they must be chaperoned (9) and there are clear divisions between what is acceptable for girls and boys to do. Identity as an embodied concept is always filtered through an understanding of the body as gendered and therefore as inscribed in very specific ways. To be female is to be already imbued in a number of societal expectations and ideologies and such bodily identity clearly impacts the sense of self these protagonists can create.

The Gendered and Racialised Body:

The body, these texts imply, is a social construct, marked by social and cultural ideas of femininity. As such it must be understood in order to come of age and in doing so it intersects with several other discourses, such as sexuality (discussed later in this chapter) and race. Gender and race are two overarching identifiers under which personhood is determined. Michelle Wright makes the point that “‘Blackness’ as a concept cannot be ...produced in isolation from gender and sexuality’ (4-5). The category of race ‘can never be fully divorced from the related categories of gender and sexuality’ (Wright, 6) and so the three strands intertwine with each other.²¹ To ignore black femaleness as distinct from black maleness and then the further complication of a heterosexual assumption is to simplify the multiple significations that affect identity formation. *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* discuss the body as the site of societal rules and stereotypes involving colour. The coloured body is a

²¹ Therefore, while the theme of race is a much larger topic than can be adequately covered here, it is useful to acknowledge the coloured body as an important factor in these coming of age novels.

primary aspect that Clare must negotiate on her journey towards coming of age.

According to Michelle Wright's analysis of the black subject 'Black identity has been produced in contradiction...there is no biological basis for racial categories' (1).

Wright consistently complicates the idea of blackness as being a unifying and homogenising term, since to be black is to possess an intimidating array of different historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious and ancestral origins and influences, '[at] the same time despite this range of differences, they are most often identified in the west as simply "black" and therefore largely homogenous' (2). Colour therefore becomes more complex than skin tone, it becomes a 'social category' (Wright, 7). It is a morass of subject positions and assumptions placed onto the skin and these are constantly shifting: 'Blackness is an ongoing dialogue possessing an ambivalent past, a complex and energetic (if uncertain) present and a boundless future' (Wright, 150). Blackness becomes an ambiguous term, one which can be placed onto the body, regardless of skin colour and which signifies different things depending upon the society which embeds those ideas onto the body. As Clare moves between Jamaica and America for example her body takes on different significance. In Jamaica she is lauded for the paleness of her skin and the straightness of her hair - 'Visibly, she was the family's crowning achievement.... Much comment was made about her prospects, and how blessed Miss Mattie was to get herself such a granddaughter' (*Abeng*, 61) – and she is aware that she is 'a lucky girl –everyone said so- she was light-skinned' living in 'a world where the worst thing to be –especially if you were a girl- was to be dark' (*Abeng*, 77). Clare's society equates not just the dark body with hardship but particularly the dark female body. Alongside this praise Clare is simultaneously excluded because of her colour. She is not at home in the country and her friendship with Zoe is always marked by their differences: 'wunna papa is buckra. Wunna talk

buckra... Dis here is fe me territory' (*Abeng*, 118). In America her mixed body is the cause of suspicion. Upon attempting to enter a new school Clare and her father are interrogated as to their race, called 'white chocolate' and told that 'we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens' (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 99). In America her hybrid body is seen as somehow corrupt or corrupting. Clare's racialised body moves from being a source of pride and advancement to a source of suspicion and deceit. Racial categories also shift according to location; Clare is white in Jamaica because of her golden skin, green eyes and straight hair whilst in America she is black because of her heritage, irrespective of her physical appearance. Belinda Edmondson notes that Michelle Cliff's self identity and her social identity are at odds, which she shares with Clare: 'Although from all evidence Cliff regards herself as black or mixed, in Jamaica she is considered, socially and economically speaking, "white"' (191). When Sally O'Driscoll discusses Cliff's work and Edmondson's articulation of racial categories she notes that '[i]n Jamaica, "white" functions differently - along lines of class, and with a particular history of color lines as class markers - than in the United States. To claim one's identity as "black," then, is not enough: the location in which the claim is staked alters the definition...."White" and "black" are not absolute terms' (63). Racial categories in America are more rigidly drawn whereas in Jamaica, as Clare attempts to explain, 'everyone is Black, it's just that some are blacker than others....It's a question of degree...from ace of spades to white cockroach' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 153). Racial categories therefore are not fixed or essential but placed on the body to signify other prejudices, social roles and hierarchies. This is something the protagonists have to discover and negotiate on their own and which the texts show them doing. Blackness in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to*

Heaven means a great deal more than skin colour and the female body becomes the site through which Clare deals with this throughout the texts.

Negotiating her body becomes a central part of Clare's coming of age, in her case a major part of this is negotiating the fact that Clare's body and identity are not matched, a physical and mental hybridity. This is something she shares with Cliff who in an interview with Meryl Schwartz discussed the disjunction between body and identity: 'It's one thing to look x and to feel y, rather than to look x and feel x, and that's part of the difficulty being light-skinned: some people assume you have a white outlook just because you look white. You're met immediately on that level' (607). In the texts Clare suffers through this same break between body and mind. Firstly, she is aware that she is dual – 'I am mixed' (*Abeng*, 164) – that there is a 'split within herself' (*Abeng*, 96) and that she will be asked to choose a side: 'The Black or the white? A choice would be expected of her' (*Abeng*, 37). Later in her life, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, this disjunction between body and identity becomes more pronounced, she describes herself as an 'albino gorilla' (91) not only hybrid but unusual and conspicuous. Her internal self-identification is black, she is not ashamed of her maternal lineage and finds herself politically in tune with the black rights movement, as when for example, she is horrified by the casual racism of her fellow students (138) and is moved by the racially motivated Sunday school bombings (100-102). Despite these leanings however, her body is seen as white, encoding her in a series of social roles and ideas which she herself is unconnected to. Clare's identity formation is therefore bound up in the body, in how the body stands in for a series of significations, which she must break free from in order to come of age. She does this by accepting her identity in all its complexity, regardless of the confines or prescriptions of the body: 'She is the woman who has reclaimed her grandmother's

land. She is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter' (91). Clare's journey then is partly a bodily one, or at least the search for ways to make her body signify more than her society allows.

There are several other texts where the racialised and gendered body must be negotiated. In Olive Senior's short story 'Bright Thursdays' the protagonist, a poor girl who gets taken in by her 'high estate' father's family, longs for her father's acceptance but in the end is rejected by him. Her colour is a deciding factor in this rejection and she internalises that understanding. During her time in their household she comes to see herself as dark and what that means to this lighter-skinned family. She becomes 'bitterly ashamed' of 'her mother's dark face' (52) and she can understand why her grandmother Miss Christie cannot add her photo to the 'forest of photographs of all her children and grandchildren all brown skinned with straight hair' (36). She internalises their racism until finally she distances herself from any relation to the family and 'ma[kes] herself an orphan' (53). Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* follows a similar pattern of internalised bodily hatred. Aunt Beatrice is trying to remake Tee to 'haul [her] out of...[her] niggeryness' (105). In this text race becomes not just a physical characteristic but also a class and social marker. Not only does Tee see her actions as unacceptable but more significantly she begins to see her body, and thus her identity, as unacceptable. Because of the social ideologies placed onto her racialised body by her aunt she wants 'to shrink, to disappear' and wishes her 'body could shrivel up and fall away, that [she] could step out new and acceptable' (107). It is a bodily concern, as much as a class one, she does not just want to be more educated or wealthier but also more physically acceptable with all the connotations attached to that. Tee sees her body through Beatrice's eyes and finds it unacceptable and so she creates an imaginary double Helen, who is 'the Proper Me.

And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness' (68). Her fracturing identity is expressed bodily in her disconnection from her physical self as is Clare's when she describes herself as an albino gorilla. The internalisation of this hatred is significant for coming of age. Blackness in *Crick Crack, Monkey, Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* becomes a marker of identity but it is an identity fraught with conflict and internalised racism. The inability to see oneself clearly, to recognise the body and inhabit it comfortably is shown in several texts. In Merle Collins' *Angel* for example Doodsie's decision to name her daughter Angel is met with scepticism: 'she too dark for angel now. Where you ever see black angel?' (60). It is impossible for them to connect a godly messenger with their own bodily identity. In *No Telephone to Heaven* we have a preacher who people think is 'stark raving mad' (39) because he says Jesus was 'Black as his mother was Black' (36) and uses Christopher as the emblem of this (39). The inability of the people to accept a saviour who inhabits the same body as themselves implies a severe internal schism that rejects the self, by rejecting the body. We can also view Christopher's violence as stemming in part from self-hatred. According to Cliff her intention with Christopher was to show:

how a murderer is created, how somebody like Christopher is created, and how any chance that he has for self-respect or self-love is bashed, and his violent act is based in his self-loathing. When he asks to bury his grandmother and is brutally rebuffed, it's just too much for him. But he does brutalize the woman who works in the house who's the same color as he is far worse than he does the others (Schwartz, 613).

The internalised self hatred is both projected and expressed bodily, in Christopher's extreme violence against Mavis – 'He cut her like an animal, torturing her body in a way he had not tortured theirs' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 48) – who is significantly a black female, the only member of the household who is closest to his own situation. For Tee, Christopher and Clare the body marks them as within specific cultural and

social constraints and they rebel against this in their own ways, as part of their coming of age, Tee by leaving, Clare by returning and Christopher through violence.

Blackness is not only a physical characteristic but also a cultural, historical and social identifier - as *Abeng* makes clear 'colour is of course often metaphorical' (128) - and this bodily identity impacts on the identity formation of the characters.

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* also deals with the issue of the coloured body, though in the interstices of the text rather than overtly, as Cliff does. Though not as central to the text there are moments when the politics and ideologies associated with the black body are invoked. For example, there is a significant moment when Sophie, visiting Haiti, is extravagantly praised for her 'charcoal-cloaked beauty' (94) given to her by the 'great gods in Guinea' (93). The association of her beauty with blackness and with Africa highlights the shifting meanings of bodily appearance. In Haiti Sophie's coloured body is the source of praise but in contrast Martine's discomfort with her body's colour is evident in her use of whitening creams (51) until eventually her skin becomes 'unusually light, a pale mocha, three or four shades lighter than any of ours' (159). Martine is attempting to alter her body to fit a different set of beauty and body ideals. Not only that but she lies about her efforts to her mother - 'It is very cold in America... The cold turns us into ghosts' (160) - when asked if she 'use[s] something' (160). Martine's discomfort with her self, expressed through her body, could stem from her trauma, which was physical and which she relives bodily, but it could also hint at her assimilation into American society where whiteness is prized above blackness. These two small moments hint at a much larger societal view of blackness, as well as the shifting values placed on the body across countries.

Belinda Edmondson argues that in Cliff's texts 'whiteness, as a masculinized epistemology, and femaleness, which is aligned with blackness and historylessness, cannot be assimilated to each other' (184). She points to Clare's name, meaning light but named for a black woman (184), as highlighting this fundamental schism. I would argue however, that it is precisely this that allows Clare to at least partly assimilate the black and white sides of herself. The paradox of her name serves to show that the surface interpretation and the reality might be distinct but for those who look deeper, they coexist. Clare's name points to her duality, her place as both light and dark. She rejects Boy but bodily she represents his half of her identity and in returning to Jamaica and her grandmother's land she acknowledges the black parts of herself. The disjunction between her bodily and mental identity in fact melds the two aspects of her identity together, the physical and internal live together and though they oppose each other Clare herself is a combination of the two. She embodies the melding of hybrid identity, not easily or comfortably perhaps, but she lives that duality, inhabiting the reality that 'she was of both dark and light' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 36). This uncomfortable coexistence points to the hope for a resolution of Clare's hybridity had circumstances allowed. Silka Dagobvie however argues that Clare's hybridity only leads to confusion: Clare is 'at once investing in the corporeal and rejecting it' (96). In accepting her blackness as well as her lightness according to Dagobvie 'she creates an inconsistent space for herself and cannot make sense of her place in her community and the world' (96). While it is true that Clare herself is mired in the confusion of making a place for herself, and this is only ended by her death, the text does posit a third space, outside of the binaries which entrap Clare, through the figure of Harry/Harriet. S/he embodies the acceptance of being physically one and identifying as other, of body and identity not matching. Unlike Clare however,

Harry/Harriet's constant hybridity is figured in positive ways, allowing for fluidity and movement rather than a fractured lack of place. Harry/Harriet is 'the most complete character' in the novel, it's 'hero/ine' (Schwartz, 601), a complex, multiple figure 'represented physically in her/his bisexuality and biraciality, but also intellectually in her/his training, which combines western and non-western knowledge' (Elia, 353). S/he combines sexualities, races and practices: as a nurse Harry/Harriet studies 'at university and with old women in the country' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 171). Accepted into both forms of knowledge, these women call her/him 'Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 171), all aspects combined in one body. Despite his/her assertion that you '[c]yaan live split' (*No Telephone To Heaven*, 131) this is precisely what s/he achieves. Harry/Harriet is the model for productive hybridity in the novel and significantly s/he never undergoes a physical transformation remaining dual in body 'physically a male, socially a woman' (Elia, 363), in a parallel to Clare's situation. The difference being that, unlike Clare, Harry/Harriet reconciles the disparate aspects of her/his being. I agree with Nada Elia who states that 's/he ultimately represents the healthy coming together of diverse elements that would otherwise have led to fragmentation and paralysis' (353) which we partly see in Clare's narrative. Elia goes on to argue that Harry/Harriet's constant duality 'is a truly subversive act, as it allows her/him to deconstruct dominant ideas of race, sex, and class without substituting new ones that would merely have the effect of creating additional divisive boundaries' (353). The subversive nature of this is such that 'even Harry/Harriet's "passing" is not an act of capitulation, but a strategic ruse that admits her/him into ever wider circles, allowing her/him to practice her/his healing sciences among ever greater numbers of people' (Elia, 354). Judith Butler argues that 'drag,

butch, femme, transgender, transsexual persons...make us not only question what is real, and what “must” be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted’ (*Undoing Gender*, 29). By remaining physically male but presenting as female Harry/Harriet questions the reality of gendered identity, displaying how bodily identity can shift over time as the body begins to signify different aspects or is gendered differently, and how such an identity is formed through the body. S/he also becomes the text’s model for what a productive resolution of hybridity might look like, not a rejection of one aspect over the other but a constant duality which creates a ‘harmoniously multiple personality’ (Elia, 354) instead of Clare’s struggle with her fragmented self. Both Clare’s struggle and Harry/Harriet’s resolution are enacted bodily, through the disjunction between internal and external realities and through attempting to embody different aspects of the self, albeit with varying levels of success. The body is always the means through which we encounter the world and through which the world encounters the self, and so by exposing what it is possible to say through the body Cliff is inviting her readers to accept alternative modes of identifying the self and of being hybrid. While the issue of race is not central to the coming of age genre as a whole it is a factor in the coming of age of several characters. The racialised body is also always the gendered body, and the negotiation of the body, of how identity is formed through the body, is central to the coming of age process presented across all the narratives.

Bodily Protest:

The body is not just the site upon which social categories such as gender and race are placed it is also the means through which the protagonists rebel against such

control. The social markers placed on the body by external powers and the control exerted over the female body is matched in several texts by a reclaiming of the body on the part of the female protagonists, in both healthy and unhealthy ways. Having been denied control over their own bodies several female characters regain that control through self-destructive acts. A prime example of this is Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* who deliberately violates her own body to prevent the virginity testing being forced on her by her mother and her mother's adherence to a patriarchal society which values female worth based on the body's purity. This violent attempt to regain agency has long lasting effects on Sophie but significantly it is a protest enacted on the body – 'My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it' (88) – the initial site of the maternal and societal control. Martine also exhibits the same self-destructive attempts to regain control over the body, as with her multiple suicide attempts during her first pregnancy (139) and her eventual success during her second pregnancy (224). Donette Francis borrows the term 'embodied protest' from Susan Bordo to discuss Sophie and Martine's coping techniques stating that 'in the absence of anyone to lash out against, Martine and Sophie harm themselves' (84). The term 'embodied protest' highlights not only the resistance to external control embedded in these acts but the fact that they manifest on and through the body. Martine lives her trauma bodily, 'she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh' (139) as she relives the event in her nightmares: 'it's like getting raped every night' (190). These nightmares haunt her throughout her life and eventually are shared by Sophie: 'Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn't both spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl' (193). The active verb of 'pounding' implies the physicality of the dreams, while their shared and continual

presence means that the rape ‘remains a persistent body memory’ (Francis, 80) which they both deal with through the body, in various ways. One form of embodied protest exhibited in these texts is the control over what the body consumes. Sophie is bulimic at certain points in the narrative and this is explicitly linked to her lack of control over her body. For example, Sophie uses bulimia to control her flashbacks to the sexual violation of testing after having sex with Joseph: ‘I waited for him to fall asleep, then went to the kitchen. I ate every scrap of the dinner leftovers, then went to the bathroom, locked the door, and purged all the food out of my body’ (200). This bingeing and purging allows Sophie to offset the loss of control she feels during the sexual act and that she felt during the period of testing to which she flashes back. By controlling the body, what it consumes and what she allows to stay within her, Sophie is attempting to regain control over the past, the present, her trauma and her identity. The body is the only thing they have control over and which was once out of their control and as such becomes the method of enacting control, however fleeting. Francis argues that for bulimic women ‘eating serves to numb pain and enable them to cope with bodily violations’ with the subsequent purging paralleling the ‘dissociating and denying that often occurs during sexual abuse’ (84). Sophie eventually finds alternative means of regaining control over her own body, as in her therapy and her sexual phobia group but the violations she has undergone change her relationship to her body. For example, Sophie says ‘I hate my body’ and the body becomes something she is ‘ashamed of’ (123). It is significant then that in the sexual phobia group their mutual affirmation is ‘We are beautiful women with strong bodies’ (202), reclaiming the body against those feelings of shame and self-disgust. This form of reaction to the loss of control over the body involves acknowledging the trauma, its perpetrators and affirming their control and appreciation for their own bodies. Once

more the protest, although less violent, is in the form of reappropriating the body from external control, an important part of Sophie's journey of becoming.

There is a similar situation described in *Dreaming in Cuban* where Lourdes' corporeality is an expression of her internal anxieties and trauma. During the period of her father Jorge's illness and death Lourdes first loses then gains weight, alongside this she first craves then abhors sexual pleasure. The personal trauma of her father's illness is explicitly linked to her shifting bodily appetites: 'after her father arrived in New York her appetite for sex and baked goods increased dramatically. The more she took her father to the hospital for cobalt treatments the more she reached for the pecan sticky buns and Rufino' (20). After Jorge's death she stops eating and having sex with her husband. She 'welcomes the purity' (167) and 'longs for a profound emptiness, to be clean and hollow as a flute' (169). Both the excess and denial are linked to her emotional state and are ways of compensating for her lack of control over her father's illness and her grief. According to Rocio Davis Lourdes is 'converting food into the language of her grief as her father undergoes medical treatment' (65). This argument allows us to read Lourdes' later denial of food as expressing the unspeakable nature of her grief, her inability to cope. Lourdes' emotional trauma is expressed first through bodily abandon and then severe bodily control. These two extremes also express Lourdes' inability to find a middle ground. Lourdes is, as Roger Bromley notes, 'the keeper of binaries' for her 'everything is either black or white, America or Cuba, fat or thin...oversexed or celibate' and '[s]he abhors ambiguity' (69). We can read Lourdes' bodily changes and changing sexual appetite as symptomatic of her changing emotional landscape and needs, while her desire for excess in both directions can be read as expressing her strict identity construction and her binary mentality, her inability to be fluid or to find the middle ground as Pilar does. Lourdes

must go to extremes, there is no ‘not instead of...but more than’ in Lourdes, as there is for Pilar (236), it is only either/or and that lack of fluid identity is expressed bodily in her need for extreme control and denial or laxness and permissiveness. The body becomes the site of expression of cultural and personal pressures and the means by which such pressures are excised. The body is not merely a physical presence within the world but a signifier of internal realities. Pilar also connects identity to physical manifestations: ‘I think migration scrambles the appetite’ (173). As a metaphor it highlights that the life experiences of the individual affect identity in part through the body, as it is made to express the internal reality of the characters, be it their grief, trauma or hybridity in positive and negative ways.

Gloria Anzaldúa states that: ‘For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the body – flesh and bone – and from the Earth’s body – stone, sky, liquid, soil.’ (*Borderlands*, 97). This insistence on the body as the means through which identity is constructed, particularly transformative identity, is expressed in these coming of age novels through their insistence on the bodily ramifications of identity, the body as a site of societal concepts and embodied protest. The body and identity are intertwined and even more so when that identity is fractured or hybrid. Displaced people are often called ‘*mal dans leur peau* (ill at ease in their skins)’ (Bellegarde-Smith, 61). Disgust with the body is symptomatic of a lack of self-acceptance. The body is the site of control, objectification, social categorisation and self-identification. Cultural ideas are placed onto the skin as in for example Yolanda’s potential lover Rudy Elmenhurst who equates her Hispanic body with exoticism and sexual availability: ‘I thought you’d be hot-blooded, being

Spanish and all' (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, 99). The body is loaded with codes and signifiers which are socially and culturally attached but these coming of age texts present how such disjunctions and signifiers impact female identity formation and in doing so offer a map for negotiating that bodily reality.

SEXUALITY:

Having discussed the mother and the body it remains to discuss the last element in these intertwined aspects of coming of age: sexuality. Intimately linked to the above discussion of the body, control over the female body also includes control over female sexuality. Sexuality and sexual awakening are aspects that the women coming of age in these texts must deal with but alongside this lies the issues of the commodification and control of female sexuality by patriarchal society, sexual violence against women as a means of this control and the ways in which female sexuality is figured. Sexual relationships are not the main focus of these novels but they are present, a part of these women's lives and coming to an understanding of oneself as a potentially sexual being is part of the process of coming of age.

Sexual Awakening:

A major part of the coming of age process is that, as these girls become women, they become aware of themselves as sexual beings in various ways. Burgeoning sexuality is often a confusing time for the protagonists. It is marked as distinct from male sexuality and often shrouded in mystery, silence and shame. Despite this, it is a part of the coming of age process and so is a recurring theme throughout the texts. Whilst sexual relationships, or the awakened awareness of the self as sexual, are rarely a primary theme throughout the texts discussed, they are

present and connected to several other issues such as the changing body from girl to woman and attitudes towards female sexuality more generally. Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* and Clare in *Abeng* are the clearest examples of this. Pilar chronicles her sexual awakening in the text, describing how she discovers her body can give her pleasure: 'I like to lie on my back and let the shower rain down on me full force. If I move my hips to just the right position, it feels great' (26-27). Clare's narrator also takes us through her burgeoning desire and discovery of her body as sexual. Her self-exploration is described as being 'in the middle of something which could change her for good' and how she 'was eager' for the completion of that change (*Abeng*, 107). Knowing the body and learning its sexual responses is presented as part of the process of coming of age, as a stage of development. The narrator describes how Clare and Zoe come to understand 'the ways into their own bodies' (*Abeng*, 120). Their curious explorations are accompanied by an understanding that their bodies are sexual and reproductive agents - it is 'a corridor through which their babies would emerge and into which men would put their thing' - while also deferring this external ownership and utility aspect of their bodies to the future: 'Right now it could belong to them' (*Abeng*, 120). The assumptions or stereotypes surrounding female sexuality are exposed here. Namely, that female sexuality is only valued in the pursuit of reproduction or for male use. Female pleasure is not mentioned, only the uses to which female sexuality can be put to, as owned by men, as producers of children. There is also the assumption of heterosexual normativity, the expectation that these girls will have husbands and babies. As later expressed it 'would never have occurred to [Clare] to place those swift and strong feelings –largely unspoken feelings – she had for Zoe in the category of "funny" or "off" or "queer"' (*Abeng*, 126). Whilst still confused by it, we have a sense of Clare beginning to be a desiring, sexual being,

particularly during the scene when she and Zoe swim naked in the river. She wants Zoe, admires her body - 'she had wanted to lean across Zoe's breasts and kiss her' (*Abeng*, 124) – and while that desire is bound up in their friendship, it is the start of construing others and the self as sexual. Clare's and Zoe's curiosity and concern with sex and the numerous discussions they have of it amongst themselves as they try to figure it out, also highlights a turning point in their maturation. The novel narrates a pattern of increased curiosity and interest in sex and their own bodies as sexual. This is also mirrored in several other texts, for example Oonya Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice*, which relates several experiences of the protagonist's sexual curiosity, including role-playing (89), spying on adults having sex (71) and self exploration (99). All these protagonists are coming into a new understanding of their bodies and of their identities as sexual beings. *Abeng* actually ends when Clare starts menstruating, a moment of bodily change and a marker of movement from childhood into adulthood. The coming of age process does not end here, as we see in *No Telephone to Heaven*, and across the genre there are varying levels of significance given to the sexual awakening of the protagonists but it is always a part of the process of becoming.

Sexual Relationships:

After these periods of self-discovery, there are also numerous sexual relationships described in the novels. What many texts feature is the multiplicity of sexual relationships, their potential and complexity. In the *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* this is especially prevalent. The reader is presented with girls being pressured into sex by their male partners, as with Yolanda who is pursued by Rudy Elmenhurst and cajoled into sex, using among other things the argument that male sexuality and female sexuality are distinct: 'unlike a girl it was physically painful for

guys not to have sex' (99). There is likewise Fifi whose Dominican illegitimate cousin Manuel is pressuring her into unprotected sex because of his belief that condoms 'might cause impotence' (123). What both these instances display is the varying ways in which male sexuality is in the foreground of sexual relationships, and female sexuality is secondary. Rudy is not concerned that Yolanda 'didn't want to just be in the sack, screwed, balled, laid, and fucked [her] first time with a man' (97). Instead she wants the romantic ideal: 'If Rudy had just said, *Sweet lady, lay across my big, soft bed and let me touch your dear, exquisite body*, I might have felt up to being felt up' (96). Rudy's series of arguments and complaints about her 'hangups' and frigidity (96-97) demonstrate that Yolanda's pleasure and comfort are secondary. Simultaneously, Yolanda's desire for the perfect romance highlights societal mores surrounding sex. The idealisation of sex and the construction of it as meaningless lie side by side in this scene. The unrealistic idealisation of sexual relationships is also displayed in Laura's carefully constructed romance, which replaces Fifi and her husband's actual relationship: she tells 'how God brought you and Otto together from opposite ends of the earth in Peru...and fell in love at first sight' (62). Later on we are also shown the passionate energy Yolanda experiences with other lovers, shown through her poetry (46) compared to the conflict and tension of her relationship with her husband: 'She opened her mouth to yell, *No, no!* He pried his tongue between her lips' (75). Yolanda's marriage is plagued by miscommunication and this is present in their physical relationship. Yolanda says no to sex and John, her husband interprets it as her needing to be persuaded: 'she stoppered his mouth with her hand. He ignored the violence in the gesture and kissed her moist palm' (76). Again we have the male partner pressuring the female partner into sex, making female sexuality secondary.

The García girls collectively describe a myriad of healthy and unhealthy relationships, highlighting how female sexuality is multiple, never straightforward or simple.

Likewise in *Dreaming in Cuban*, we follow Pilar, not just through her sexual awakening but also through several sexual relationships. She has a number of boyfriends, ranging from Max, who is described in positive terms (136-137) to Ruben, who cheats on her with a Dutch exchange student (180). Sexual relationships work in the texts to highlight the societal ideals and assumptions surrounding sex and as elements of the protagonists' interaction with the world. Ruben's betrayal exposes male hypocrisy, as does Rudy's relationship with Yolanda, but this experience also propels Pilar into a new stage in her life. After discovering Ruben with another woman Pilar buys a bass, and begins making music: 'I don't know what I'm doing but I start thumping...and thumping until I feel my life begin' (181). The life-affirming energy and this new aspect of Pilar's life are directly related to Ruben's sexual betrayal. These sexual relationships are not glamorised but shown as part of Pilar's experience of the world and therefore part of her coming of age. The other characters in the novel also display the potential and complexity of sexual relationships. Felicia for example, has three husbands, each of whom represents a distinct dynamic. The narrative presents the sexual license and mindlessness of her third marriage to Otto Cruz, which occurs when she is in a fugue state, outside of herself and which ends with the suggestion of her murdering him (154-155). There is the needy and maternal aspect of her relationship with her second husband Ernesto whom she falls for after he falls off his bicycle: 'He looks like a colourless worm, writhing on his stomach...Felicia is smitten. She helps him up and, without a word, pats his hair' (149). The text also displays the violence of her affair and marriage to her first husband Hugo, which is marked by his physical violence, infidelities, and sexually

transmitted diseases and finally ends when Felicia sets him on fire (80-82). Later she also sublimates her conflicted feelings towards the regime with sexual fantasies about El Líder (110-111). Felicia's sexual relationships are symbolic of her inner turmoil, her search for something to ground her fractured psyche, which she finally discovers in santería. Having given herself over to the religion and become a santera she is described as 'finally [having] found her peace' (188). In Celia's narrative we also discover different sides of sexual relationships, for example there is a stark contrast between the joyful excess of her affair with her married Spanish lover Gustavo - 'We used to stay up whole nights, there was so much to learn from each other' (206) – and their 'ruinous passion' (157), and the tension and repression of her marriage to Jorge. Celia's marriage is filled with resentment and her husband's attempts to control her. Jorge's ghost describes it to his daughter with regret: 'A part of me wanted to punish her. For the Spaniard. I tried to kill her, Lourdes. I wanted to kill her...I wanted to break her, may God forgive me' (195). On their honeymoon Jorge 'makes love to [Celia] as if he were afraid [she] might shatter' (49) but there is still an element of his need for control: 'He kisses my eyes and ears, sealing them from you. He brushes my forehead with moist petals to wipe away memory' (49-50). Later their relationship descends to 'making love tensely and soundlessly' (40) in the repressed atmosphere of Jorge's mother's house. In Celia's dutiful marriage and Felicia's multiple marriages, which all begin with anonymous sexual encounters, we see female sexuality as a commodity. This is similar to Martine in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, who has sex with Marc in exchange for having someone to keep the nightmares away – 'If that's what I had to do to have someone wake me up at night, I would do it' (191) – or Sophie giving her husband what he wants despite her aversion to sex: 'I felt it was my duty as a wife. Something I owed him' (130). Sex is portrayed in these relationships

as a good to be bartered or as the female's duty in exchange for marriage or financial and emotional support. Female pleasure is subsumed to the idea of sex as a chore, which a dutiful wife/partner submits to. Although Jorge and Celia later realise they love each other their sexual relationship is fraught with resentment and duty: Celia writes to Gustavo that she 'discovered [she] loved' Jorge but that it was '[n]ot a passion like ours, Gustavo' (54). These two loves and two sexual relationships mark Celia's life, she writes to Gustavo for years and remains married and faithful to Jorge until their deaths. The two relationships are very different but equally part of her life. By the time of Jorge's illness Celia has also 'fallen in love again' but this time with the revolution (194). She has 'devoted herself completely to the revolution' (111) and keeps a photo of El Líder 'by her bed, where her husband's picture used to be' (110). The sexual passion Celia has repressed becomes sublimated to the power of the revolution and she turns it into political fervour. These texts show a spectrum of ways in which to manage sexuality; there is no one way to be sexual, just as there is no one way to be a woman. Thus they deal with sexuality in various ways but they all foreground its significance to identity formation, these women are marked by their relationship to their own sexuality and the sexual relationships they undertake.

Female Sexuality as Shameful and Dangerous:

A recurring theme that accompanies the sexual awakenings and relationships in these texts is the idea of female sexuality and its accompanying cycles as shrouded in silence and secrecy. There is a clear dichotomy presented between the joyful pride and vitality associated with male sexuality and the silence and shame associated with the female. Simone Alexander notes that '[s]exuality is taught to be feared and repressed by girls and is celebrated by boys' (53). The silence surrounding female

sexuality is obvious in several of the novels; it is often brought about by other women and is part of what creates that sexuality as somehow shameful. A prime example of this is visible in Jacqueline Bishop's *The River's Song* where there is a conspiracy of silence surrounding becoming a woman: 'Neither Mama nor Grandy ever spoke to me directly about *it*...no one really sat me down and talked to me directly about it...innuendoes were supposed to suffice' (45). The mystery and silence instil in the protagonist Gloria a sense that this change is 'dangerous' and shameful, that her body will 'betray' her (34). Sexual awakening and bodily changes become taboo subjects, both secret and frightening. In *Abeng* Clare sees sexual awakening as a time of change, 'as something which would allow no turning back', a 'milestone' (107). She is 'eager for the menstruation that would complete these feelings of change and growth' (107) but at the same time her self-pleasure is something secret, not mentioned even to Zoe (108) who is her confidante in all other areas. Both sex and menstruation are taboo topics, which cannot be discussed with adults. Alexander argues that '[b]ecause female sexuality is deemed taboo, a young girl is denied "proper" initiation into womanhood' (53). This is evident in Kitty and Clare's relationship in which there is much that remains unspoken, mirroring the silences between Kitty and her own mother Miss Mattie. Anything sexual makes Kitty 'speechless and sometimes angry' (80) so Clare 'did not tell her mother anything which was close to her' partly to avoid subjects which might make her mother uncomfortable or hurt her (80). Kitty's speech about female matters is all euphemism and avoidance, Clare has to break her 'mother's code' (106) after having been given less opaque guidance from Zoe. Even teachers 'hinted around the fact of menstruation' so that Clare is kept 'ignorant about the details' (107). Boy's contribution to the subject is to tell Clare that 'boys were after only one thing - he

didn't say what this one thing was' (106). All of the adults in the text shroud the sexual aspect of female bodies in secrecy, code and silence. What comes across from these multiple elliptical and obscure conversations is that female bodies and female sexuality are taboo, not to be spoken.

This aspect of female identity is constructed as simultaneously shameful and dangerous. The only thing that becomes clear from Boy's conversation about sex with Clare for example is that 'it could be dangerous' and a girl can 'easily be "ruined"' (106). The conversation is never contextualised or explained. Likewise, Miss Mattie is silent on the subject of sex but very clear that Clare and Zoe need to 'watch themselves around men because they might tempt the men without knowing they were tempting them' (104). These warnings not only imply that female sexuality is dangerous, it can incite violence in men and when unguarded can ruin a girl, it also places the culpability for that danger squarely on women. Male sexuality is not to blame but rather the temptation of women, so that it is female sexuality that becomes culpable for sexual assault. This pattern of culpability or elision of responsibility on the part of men occurs several times in *Abeng*, as with for example the news story about the five year old girl in Peru who gives birth and the local story of Mas Freddie (104). In both stories male blame is avoided: the news story has no mention of the baby's father - 'the birth of a baby to a five-year-old girl became the story – not the act which produced the baby' (105) - and Mas Freddie is said to have 'given his daughter a baby, or so people said; and people said it exactly that way' (104). In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, as with *Abeng*, there is a sense of female sexuality as out of bounds for discussion and something to be guarded. Yolanda notes that 'her mother did not believe in sex for girls' (46). Laura tries to police what her daughters know about sex even trying to ban a book on women's bodies and sexual

pleasure because it mentioned things ‘to be ashamed of’ (110). During Fifi’s time in the Dominican Republic the narrative exposes the double standards of a patriarchal attitude towards sex. The girls’ male cousin celebrates Fifi’s boyfriend’s success in convincing her to go to a motel/whorehouse – ‘Hey, hey! Way to go’ (125) – but is stymied when his sister implies she has had sex: ‘For all his liberal education... his own sister has to be pure’ (125). The double standards are clear: male sexuality is celebrated while female sexuality should be repressed.

We also see that it is the women who are responsible for curtailing sexual freedom and for policing the young girls under their care. When in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* Fifi is discovered unaccompanied with her boyfriend her mother and aunts exclaim for ‘*her reputation*’ (129) and cover up the incident from the men of the family – ‘If your father should find out!... A disgrace to the family’ (130) – whilst punishing Fifi by sending her away. It is always the women, primarily the mothers or othermothers, who are responsible for guarding female sexuality, construing it as dangerous and keeping it regulated. *Dreaming in Cuban* displays a similar maternal concern with policing female sexuality. When Lourdes reads Pilar’s diary, ostensibly because ‘it’s her responsibility to know [Pilar’s] private thoughts’ (26) - already a form of oversight and policing - she discovers that Pilar has been exploring her bodily pleasure in the shower. As soon as this comes to light Lourdes ‘beat [Pilar] in the face and pulled [her] hair out in big clumps’ while calling her ‘*desgraciada*’ (27)²², a particularly violent reaction. As a consequence she polices Pilar’s private time to prevent further exploration: ‘Now, whenever I’m in the bathroom, my mother knocks on the door like President Nixon’s here and needs to use the john’ (27). Later on, when Pilar is in art school she continues this policing and

²² In this context ‘*desgraciada*’ can mean a wretch, a miserable or vile woman [my translation].

suspicious behaviour, calling Pilar at night to ascertain whether she is with a man and accusing her of being a 'whore' (168). Lourdes feels that her maternal role is in constraining her child's sexuality and keeping her pure. This attitude not only deems female sexuality as somehow unlawful, needing to be contained but also as shameful; Pilar is a disgrace for not restraining her sexual desires. Across these texts female sexuality is consistently configured simultaneously as shameful and dangerous, as something to be controlled, usually by the mother figures in the text. It is figured very differently to male sexuality and coming to grips with all the societal values attached to female sexuality is part of the coming of age process presented in the genre.

The Policing and Commodification of Female Sexuality:

The policing of female sexuality that constructs it as shameful and dangerous links into several ideas about female sexuality as having value in relation to virginity, purity and the criminalising of sex outside of marriage. In an interview with Sandy Alexandre and Ravi Howard, Danticat states:

I see sexuality as one of several spaces where women struggle for control over their lives. Most societies monitor women's sexuality in a way that they don't try to monitor men's sexuality. In *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1995), the scholar Joan Dayan talks about how some rural women refer to the space between their legs as their own plot of land, something that can be traded for goods. I'm definitely interested in the way that women - poor women, especially - try to reclaim their sexuality as a means of survival, as their own personal flight (114).

This quote highlights several key issues, namely that female sexuality becomes a commodity, a marker of value and that as such it becomes the focus of societal monitoring and restraint, as is clear from Lourdes' reaction to Pilar's sexual awakening. This is implicitly and explicitly only true of female sexuality. In Merle

Collins' *Angel*, for example, Doodsie is told it's Angel 'you have to worry about' not her son, who 'go take care of heself. He is man' (55). When Doodsie replies 'Yes. But when he run about, is not other people little girl that in trouble?' her concerns are dismissed 'Dat for them to worry about... You have one little girl dey to study, dat not enough' (55). The double standards inherent in this conversation expose female sexuality as the thing to be guarded, kept safe and policed against wildness, while male sexuality is given license to 'run about'. It also implicitly states that it is the mother's duty to protect and guard female offspring, while Doodsie's son is some other mother's problem. The double standards between male and female sexuality mean that women are meant to be chaste outside of marriage but it is acceptable for men to be unfaithful. This is visible across several novels. In Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, Beka's friend Toycie is expelled from school for getting pregnant while her boyfriend suffers no punishment because 'it is entirely up to the modesty of the girl to prevent these happenings' (119). In *Dreaming in Cuban* Felicia's husband Hugo is repetitively unfaithful and infects her with sexually transmitted diseases but her twin daughters excuse their father's actions, blaming their mother 'who destroyed him' (120). In Kincaid's *Annie John*, Mr John has numerous other women and children, some of whom try to harm Annie and her mother but 'not once did any of them try to hurt him' (17). His wife never questions his promiscuity but she calls Annie a 'slut' simply for 'speaking to young men' (102). Similarly, in Jacqueline Bishop's *The River's Song* Gloria's mother is publicly attacked for unknowingly sleeping with a married man. His enraged wife yells '[t]ell her to leave my husband alone' and only their friend Rachel acknowledges the double standards by replying 'you tell your husband to leave her alone' (31). Equally, in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* Laura is furious with the aunts for letting Fifi almost lose her virginity and

with Fifi for allowing it but not with the boy who was pressuring her (130). The consequence of this is a society where women are to blame for male appetites and female sexuality must be policed.

An aspect of this control over female sexuality is the commodification of sexual purity in women, the prizing of virginity and the linking of purity to a woman's value and impurity as somehow soiling or ruining a woman. Sexuality becomes a commodity and a marker of female worth. Despite the patriarchal ideology of this conception of female sexuality it is women who are primarily the arbiters and guardians of other females' sexuality. Women control other women and continue the cycle of oppression and the handing down of ideals created by men. As we have seen in *Dreaming in Cuban* Lourdes tries to police or deny Pilar's discovery of sexual pleasure, for fear she will become a 'whore' and in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* Laura polices her daughters' activities. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Martine polices Sophie's virginity as Grandmé Ifé did to her by continuing the system of testing – inserting a finger into the daughter's vagina to make sure her hymen is intact. Despite Martine's acknowledgment that the testing was a horrific experience for her – 'the two greatest pains in my life are very much related. The one good thing about my being raped was that it made the *testing* stop' (170) – explicitly relating it to violation, she continues the practice with Sophie. Her only explanation being that '[her] mother had done it to [her]' (170) and she felt it was her duty: 'A mother is supposed to do that until her daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure' (60). The testing is meant to ensure virginity, to keep the girl and the family from the shame of sexual promiscuity and make sure the girl is marriageable material. This practice creates female sexuality as a commodity and 'intimates that a woman is property and her worth is determined by an exchange value that is measured by her

virginity' (Francis, 82). Control of the daughter's sexuality then, is a means of remaining respectable, of fulfilling the family's dreams of honour, legitimacy and status. Atie and Martine fail to become respectable married women and so pass on this desire to Sophie, controlling her sexuality in order to achieve it. However, by presenting a family in which none of the women actually benefits from the trauma of testing the text undercuts the necessity of this maternal violation and questions the commodification of female sexuality.

Female purity is policed both because of the fear of rape/assault and also because of the fear of society's disapproval, the stigma of being impure, which would shame not only the daughter but the family as well, particularly the mother: 'if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced...If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me' (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 156). Simone Alexander quotes Gilbert and Gubar who talk about the change parents undergo at their daughter's puberty when 'the child's own sexual awakening disturbs them almost as much as their own sexuality bothers the child' (63). In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* we can read Martine's actions as partly impelled by social values but also partly by fear. She is afraid of Sophie's sexuality because she knows the dangers of it, the dangers of being raped and the social stigma attached to no longer being a virgin, however outside of her control such an act was. Martine fears the consequences of unprotected female sexuality, of seeing Sophie become like her. In conjunction with the themes of female sexuality many of these coming of age texts also deal with sexual violence against women. It is a theme repeated across several narratives though by no means all. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* revolves largely around sexual violence in various forms while several female characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* are marked by similar assaults. Other texts, such as Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging*, have this as a

major theme in the narrative or suggest that such violence occurs within the world of the text. The fear of sexual violence and assault lies behind several constructions of female identity, particularly of female sexuality as dangerous because it incites men to such violence. There are several stories within *Breath, Eyes, Memory* that exemplify this concern with sexual violence, with their society's concern with virginity and controlling female sexuality. We have for example the grandmother's story of Ti Alice walking home alone, the dangers she might encounter and her mother testing her when she arrives (152-154). This exemplifies how young girls must be guarded, how careful women need to be and the maternal duty of safeguarding their daughter's sexuality. Sophie calls this 'obsession with keeping us pure and chaste' 'a virginity cult' (154). In fact many of the stories within the novel are about the danger of female sexuality and often serve a didactic function, as with the story of the girl and the lark that tries to trick her into giving him her heart (124-125). Whilst here it is the heart that must be protected we can also read the story as a warning against talking to strange men, a warning against predatory men in general and as a message to girls to guard themselves. The girl is initially 'charmed by the lark' and his words, she takes the offered pomegranate and is enchanted by how 'handsome' he is (124). Significantly, when 'the lark saw...the most beautiful little girl...he wanted more than anything to have her' (124). The phrase 'have her' as well as the later phrase, she 'let him have his way' (124), have obvious sexual connotations. In the end the girl is not fooled and she tricks the bird instead, never giving up her heart or returning to him, but the purpose of the story is as a warning to be careful, to not be fooled, to guard one's 'precious thing' (124). There is also the story of the rich man who married a poor black girl specifically for her virginal status. Custom dictates that he hang their blood-spotted sheets outside the morning after, as evidence of his conquest but on

their wedding night the bride does not bleed and so ‘he took a knife and cut between her legs to get some blood to show’ (155). However, once cut the bride cannot stop bleeding and ‘[f]inally, drained of all her blood, the girl died’ (155). Sexuality is framed in these stories as not only dangerous but also potentially fatal if not properly guarded. The second tale is told with considerable irony for the husband’s belated grief and a certain horror for his actions, particularly his drinking her ‘blood-spotted goat milk’ at the funeral (155). The public display of virginity, which necessitates her mutilation, ‘illustrates the ways in which women’s bodies are used to service male desires’ (Francis, 83) and how female sexuality is subsumed to society’s ideas of male pleasure and to the husband’s ‘honor and reputation’ (155). The narrative exposes the commodification of sexuality and virginity and the sexual policing it creates, the dangers and fears associated with female sexuality and the machinations society goes through to control it. In exposing the hypocrisy surrounding female sexuality and the mechanisms by which it is valued and policed these coming of age narratives display its effect on the protagonists’ identities.

Sexualities:

Another aspect of female sexuality presented by the texts is that there is no singular form of female sexuality but rather various sexualities or ways of expressing that sexuality which are available to the protagonists. The texts consistently undercut notions of purity and passivity, which the larger society dictates, as the sole form of female sexuality. The varieties of sexual relationships presented in the texts clearly express this and examples of powerful, active women are set alongside the societal norms. In death Martine takes on the figure of Erzulie a goddess who appears throughout *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and whose presence subverts and contrasts with the

ideal of virginity, passivity and powerlessness presented by society. Erzulie provides an opposing view of female sexuality as powerful: ‘hot-blooded Erzulie, who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped *them*, and killed *them*’ (227). Erzulie is also a figure of multiplicity and potential: ‘Erzulie has all the manifestations of all the different stages of a woman’s life. She can be cruel and demanding and jealous but can also be the goddess of fertility and of love. She is enigmatic, sensual, powerful’ (Lyons, 194). Erzulie is representative of the multiple potentials of female sexuality and Martine becomes this powerful sexual figure in death where she exemplified the repression and fear of sexuality in life, displaying dual constructions of female sexuality. For every woman in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* who bleeds to death after being cut by her husband (154-155), or dies when her husband peppers her skin to teach her a lesson and prevent her from flying (150), there is a girl who tricked her way free of a male’s clutches (124) or a woman who escapes pain by transforming into a butterfly and flying freely (87-88). In *Abeng* we see a similar situation, where the powerlessness and repression of Clare’s young life is interspersed with the story of the slave-woman Mma Alli. She is ‘a one-breasted warrior woman’, a powerful worker of ‘obeah and magic’, who ‘loved only women’ and teaches the other women on the plantation the power of their sexuality ‘and how to take strength from it. To keep their bodies as their own, even while they were made subject to the whimsical violence’ of their owners (35). This not only highlights the potential for a powerful female sexuality but also destroys society’s strictures by presenting alternative sexualities. Other texts, such as *Annie John* can be read as having a lesbian subtext: Annie talks about her relationship with Gwen in terms of ‘overpowering feelings’ and falling ‘in love’ (33). We can also read Clare in *Abeng* as having a lesbian relationship or desire for Zoe. Even though Cliff asserts that ‘the lesbian subtext in

Abeng was unconscious, at least I think it was' (Schwartz, 601), she also acknowledges that a lesbian undercurrent can be read as present. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, there are more explicit hints that later in life Clare might have had an affair with her friend Liz while in London and Cliff has suggested that Clare and Harriet might have followed on into a relationship or Clare might have openly acknowledged her lesbianism had circumstances been different: 'her love for Harry/Harriet is a step towards herself. And if she wasn't killed she probably would have gone the whole way' (Schwartz, 601). The text also discusses male homosexuality, with the figure of Clare's uncle Robert who is described as 'funny', 'queer', 'off', 'battyman' and spoken of with 'pitying' tones and embarrassment (126). Coupled with the transgender Harry/Harriet we can see a range of sexual identities being explored and posited as existing in the Jamaican landscape Cliff presents. Whether homosexual or heterosexual the novels taken together deny a singular representation of female sexuality, replacing it with an awareness of the varieties of sexuality and modes of sexual expression that the protagonists come of age through.

Mothers, bodies and sexuality are all intertwined tropes in the coming of age narrative. The ways in which these authors tackle these three themes differentiates them from their male counterparts. Their investment in the mother figure, the concerns about the female body and female sexuality all serve to create a gendered coming of age, specific to women and in their inclusion of social practices and ideologies which span their Caribbean nations and the United States they present formations of identity that are specific to their cultural realities. These female coming of age narratives discuss the mother in all her complexity as a figure of nurturing and oppression, as the figure to separate from or rebel against and also the need to find

and understand her to understand the self. They discuss the body and how it shapes identity, how identities can be placed onto it and rebelled against through the physical, how sexualities are defined and controlled and how society shapes female identity by imposing concepts of danger and value onto ideas of sex. The protagonists who come of age must negotiate all these aspects in their interwoven complexity in order to progress and continue becoming.

CHAPTER FOUR: HOMES AND HISTORIES

Coming of age is often described as a journey, a movement from childhood to adulthood and I would argue that this movement never ceases. These coming of age texts by the women writers of the Caribbean parallel that emotional and developmental journey with a physical component. The themes of migration and travel are prevalent across the genre and there are always physical journeys enacted, journeys away from, and often returning to, the home. ‘Place becomes an “intersection” where there is a constant sense of becoming’ (Rodriguez, 15). As hybrid subjects the protagonists exist in a state of flux between their original homeland and their adopted country. This means that the theme of home is significant to their coming of age in several ways and that the protagonists have to negotiate the homespace, in all its complexity, in order to come to a sense of themselves as hybrid. In the first half of this chapter I will be discussing the notion of home as divided into two main strands: firstly, the home as a physical space, a grounded geography of country/nation and the real maternal space, the physical household of childhood; secondly, the home as an imagined concept, the imaginary homeland the exile/migrant remembers or idealises and the diasporic and literary imagined space, which can house the hybrid self. All of these aspects play into the identity formations that the protagonists undergo and the various ways in which they use the idea of home to shore up their identities. This division between grounded reality and imagined concept links in to the second theme discussed in this chapter, that of history, or more properly histories. In the latter half of this chapter I will discuss History as the imposed master narrative, which the protagonists must negotiate with and rebel against in order to become, the uncovering of the secrets of official history and the

inclusion of female narratives. Alongside this I will also discuss the necessity of multiple strands of history to position the self within and of history not as a fixed grounded concept but as fluid and subjective, an unstable imaginative act.

HOMES:

The Homeland as a Physical Space:

The home is first of all a real physical space, a geographical externality, a specific nation or country in a specific part of the world. Home is usually the land of one's birth, the country of one's nationality and the evocative phrase 'the motherland' often refers to the place of that birth. It seems a simple connection between geographical location and belonging, and so with identity. Doreen Massey however, reminds us of the mistake of looking at the homeland or any place as 'bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity' (5). Home is not a stable concept and founding an identity on the idea of home is therefore problematic. Even should we go along with this basic assumption of home as the uncomplicated source of identity, what at first seems a simple construction, a real physical space that can be accessed by the protagonist becomes more complex when we consider that, as hybrid, hyphenated subjects the women coming of age in the novels belong to several spaces at once. The home as a physical space becomes complicated when it is possible to attach the name 'home' to several spaces simultaneously. Danticat, in her introduction to a collection of short stories *The Butterfly's Way*, discusses how her diasporic identity unsettles the idea of home: 'My country is one of uncertainty. When I say 'my country' to some Haitians, they think of the United States. When I say 'my country' to some Americans, they think of Haiti' (xiv). The possibility of attaching the word 'home' to more than one space is

present in all these texts. For example, in *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents* the girls talk about being ‘shipped home’ meaning the Island (111) despite having lived permanently in the United States for most of their lives and their father talks of ‘the old country’ and the ‘new country’ (25, 26). In Gisèle Pineau’s *Exile According to Julia*, the characters talk of ‘Back Home’ and ‘Here’. Despite not having resided in the Caribbean for much of their lives it retains the title of home. This is also present in Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* where the idea of land back home in Barbados galvanizes Selina’s father while Silla is consumed by the idea of owning property in their current Brooklyn home. The mixed race narrator of Astrid Roemer’s short story ‘The Inheritance of my Father: A Story for Listening’ is similarly torn between the ‘fatherland’ and ‘motherland’ (352). Danticat points out the complicated relationships home acquires in her short story ‘Caroline’s Wedding’ from her collection *Krik? Krak!*. In this tale one daughter Caroline has been born in America while the elder daughter Grace was born in Haiti. Grace has struggled for a long time to gain American citizenship and yet is torn between the two homespaces. Despite her sense of triumph in finally acquiring an American passport – ‘I wanted to run back to my mother’s house waving the paper like the head of an enemy rightfully conquered in battle’ (157) - she is ambivalent as to her real belonging there. For the first time in her life she ‘felt truly secure living in America’ (213) but her metaphors for living there involve war and violence, her passport is a ‘bulletproof vest’ in a ‘warzone’ (213), and she still considers herself Haitian. The sense of belonging, bound up in the idea of home, is not clear-cut or simple in the case of these hybrid identities. Despite living elsewhere, having homes there, the designation of home remains with the birthplace, the original homeland but it also shifts between these two spaces as the needs of the text and characters dictate. As bell hooks notes ‘home is no longer just

one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives...that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become' (*Yearning*, 148). The protagonists coming of age have a confused and paradoxical connection to the concept of home and often have multiple sites that can be designated as home but all these serve to further their becoming.

This multiple allegiance complicates the reality of home but it is also made problematic by the colonial relationships present behind the texts. While not omnipresent in the main texts there is throughout the genre an appreciation that homeland and motherland can mean the Caribbean and at other times can mean the colonial nation, or even Africa. There is a sense of the homeland as deferred in each case, of the home space in the Caribbean as not quite fulfilling the necessities of the phrase. Kincaid's protagonist Annie John for example, longs for a larger world, to leave her Antiguan motherland behind for the colonial motherland of England. Tee in Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* is enamored of the world she sees in books, the world outside Trinidad: 'Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys...Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad' (67). Abroad then, primarily meaning England, is more real than the home around her. The fictional, imaginary 'Abroad' is a distant, unknown motherland that Tee longs to escape into, leaving the turbulence of her current home behind. There is in several novels a sense of looking outwards to external spaces in order to find oneself and to belong. The coming of age texts discussed here expose this desire to be away, to belong to a wider world and escape the imagined limitations of the homespace but also question this assumption of abroad as better, as more real perhaps than the immediate reality which surrounds them and it is only in engaging with that external

world and coming to terms with it that it becomes possible to understand the homeland. Home therefore can be a designation attached to several spaces, all simultaneously and as such complicates any negotiation of identity that is founded on the physical reality of home.

Leaving and Returning Home:

What this confused and multiple articulation of home means is that leaving the Caribbean and in some cases returning to it, becomes an essential part of the coming of age narrative. Leaving the homeland, that journey and distance, is part of the journey towards coming of age. Isabel Hoving reminds us that in postcolonial writing the issue of place is often linked to displacement, loss and an opportunity for personal transformation, to choose a new subject position (14). In Hodges's *Crick Crack, Monkey* for example, Tee's longing to leave is also a need to escape the two pulls of Tantie and Aunt Beatrice for long enough to find a space for herself. In Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy* there is a similar sense of the daughter needing to leave the homeland, and particularly its link to the maternal space, in order to be able to find her identity outside of her mother's shadow. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* there are a series of leave takings each of which represent a change in identity. Sophie does not need to leave Haiti in the way that Tee or Annie do but her departure is equally a shift in her identity from the Haitian child of her aunt Atie to the Haitian-American daughter of her mother Martine. Martine is the first character in the novel to leave Haiti and it is based on her emotional needs. Haiti has shifted in meaning for Martine so that it is no longer her home but the site of pain and trauma. When she returns later in the novel she admits that her nightmares hold more sway in Haiti: 'It is worse when I am here' (169). Moving from Haiti to the United States is then partly an economic

migration but more importantly an emotional escape. She wants to be someone new, away from the memory of her violation. This is similar to Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban*; Lourdes' rejection of Cuba is in reaction to the trauma she underwent there and her hatred of the regime is similarly a reaction to her personal experience of it. Lourdes' rape and assault cause her to reject the revolution and Cuba, seeing it as having no value, she no longer feels anything for her homeland other than contempt and 'wants no part of Cuba...no part of Cuba at all' (73). Though Maria Cristina Rodriguez notes that Lourdes' relationships with Rufino and Pilar and 'her continuous fiery discussions with other exiles about Fidel Castro evidence her attachment to the past she so vehemently denies' (76). Whatever Lourdes' subconscious attachment she consciously revels in her distance from Cuba, searching for the cold when deciding on a new place to live, to differentiate from the heat of Cuba: 'They began to drive. "Colder" she said... "Colder"... "Colder"... "This is cold enough," she finally said when they reached New York,' (69-70). She refuses to remain mired in Cuba unlike her relatives in Miami. It seems significant that she names her business the Yankee Doodle Bakery, a claim of allegiance to her new home but also a rejection of her homeland. In so naming her business she believes she can 'make people understand that her place of birth –accidental, of course- has no significance' (Rodriguez, 76). In contrast, Martine still retains links to Haiti even in America, her physical distance does not necessitate a complete rejection: she communicates with her family in Haiti, she dates a Haitian and socializes amongst other migrants. For Sophie there is a sense of homesickness when she is in New York, her homeland is a real space to be missed. When she imagines herself in a happy place she imagines herself back in Haiti. There is no sense of the colonial or neo-colonial country as somehow more real or significant than her Caribbean island. As Danticat notes:

In Haiti, though, we don't have so much the feeling of "mother country." Our occupation, if you will, ended early, and even though people have always felt the shadow of France so that they would go there for education, I've never, personally, felt us looking toward France as the mother country... I've never felt that relationship as if Haiti has a mother country, but now I feel "motherland" because of having made this journey [to the U.S.]. People in America say, "my native land-my mother land is outside of where I am." But this is very different from the mother country as a place where everyone is looking to as the model (Shea, 383).

Unlike older coming of age novels, such as Kincaid's *Annie John*, which have the protagonist leaving their homeland for the ideological colonial motherland, more contemporary texts enact that relationship with the neo-colonial centre of America. The migrations that occur involve a departure for America, but the motherland lies in the Caribbean. There is also a sense that the physical distance allows characters to view their homeland differently, to come to terms with it.

In the main texts discussed in this thesis the decision to leave the homeland is not made by the protagonists, it is not a choice, as it is for *Annie John* and so the idea of the return is particularly important. In Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare is relocated to America because of her father's wishes but later in the novel it is her choice to leave the United States for England and finally to return to Jamaica. Belinda Edmondson points out that Clare is in fact reenacting the triangle of slave trade (185). This is of great relevance in Clare's coming of age since she is constantly struggling with her black heritage and part of that is the acceptance of her slave heritage. In returning to Jamaica Clare is also making a statement in terms of her identity, she is connecting herself back to Jamaica, to her lineage, particularly her maternal lineage, and attempting to find a space for herself there: 'I returned to this island to mend...to bury...my mother...I returned to this island because there was nowhere else...I could live no longer in borrowed countries, on borrowed time' (192-193). Maria Helena

Lima sees this movement in the text as ‘essentialist’ since she figures Jamaica as female. A pre-oedipal return to the mother is, according to Lima, Clare’s way of ‘binding the fragments of self’ (38). Sally O’Driscoll argues to the contrary that ‘there is no indication that the narrative stance approves of Clare’s formulation of motherland/maternal/blackness, or validates it. In fact, an oppositional strand runs through the narrative that constantly questions Clare’s articulation of her own motivations.’ (65). Clare’s return is meant to connect her to her maternal roots but such a strategy is deconstructed by the text, it is not left unquestioned or indeed presented in a particularly positive light. In fact, Cliff sees ‘Clare’s return as tragic’ (Schwartz, 600). Within the text we are confronted by Clare’s attempts to belong, to reconnect with the homeland, primarily through her efforts with the guerrilla group but this effort is always undercut. Firstly, by their lack of success - the mission is a failure and several members of the group die, including Clare – and secondly, through the narrative’s positioning of the group. The guerrilla group is described as moving towards their target, dressed in their stolen khaki army fatigues trying to feel like real soldiers: ‘The camouflage jackets, names and all, added a further awareness, a touch of realism, cinematic verité, that anyone who eyed them would believe they were faced with *real* soldiers’ (7). Their comparison of themselves to ‘B-picture’ heroes ‘they used to see in triple features in the open-air Rialto’ (7) further serves to highlight their self-aggrandisement, their inflating of their own purpose through cinematic cliché. Clare’s return and her attempts to recapture her homeland therefore become presented as ultimately futile or at least foolhardy. Clare can physically return home but cannot automatically create a sense of belonging. What is more important, however, is not whether Clare succeeds in returning and belonging to her homeland but that the attempt has been made. Clare’s physical return stems from her need for a

sense of belonging and purpose, as a result of her fractured sense of self. The physical homeland is therefore linked to a sense of self but the problems Clare encounters in rooting her self in a geographical location only serve to remind the reader that home is not an uncomplicated space or a site of stable identity.

In similar through less permanent moves, Sophie, Yolanda and Pilar all return to their birth places in order to come to terms with certain aspects of themselves.

Though their trajectories are not as extreme as Clare's these other protagonists cannot progress in their coming of age without these returns. When Sophie is lost, when she needs to 'empty out [her] head' (184), she returns to Haiti, to confront the site of her mother's trauma, her own abandonment and her family line. Haiti as her original home space is bound up in ideas of pain and trauma but it is also essential to the healing of that trauma. In order to heal Sophie must confront her mother's trauma as much as her own, since the two are intimately linked and part of that is through confronting the motherland. Returning to Haiti and eventually facing the sugarcane field where Martine's rape occurred all serve to aid Sophie in her healing. Returning to Haiti also allows her to confront Grandmè Ifé, to discuss the tradition of testing which has so damaged Sophie and it is in Haiti that both Grandmè Ifé and Martine apologise to Sophie, acknowledging their part in her suffering. Grandmè Ifé accepts that her concern with her daughters' purity hurt them and her granddaughter – 'My heart, it weeps like a river...for the pain we have caused you' (157) – and Martine acknowledges that she can offer no excuse for her actions (170). It is only in this home space, the motherland and the house where both Martine and Sophie were children, that this process of healing can continue. The dialogue established at this point in the narrative is extremely significant since it breaks through the silences of Sophie's life; after this Martine begins to relate to Sophie differently and to explain

more about her experiences. This new communication between mother and daughter is made possible through both of their acts of returning. Rodriguez notes that it is ‘only in this “neutral” territory [Haiti] that Martine and Sophie can talk to each other again’ (50) after years of disconnection. While I would not call Haiti a neutral space for either character it is a connecting space, a home space that they both recognise and belong to and their return to it is extremely significant to both their personal journeys of identity. In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* Yolanda also enacts a return journey when she feels lost. She returns to the Dominican Republic hoping to find her place, to belong somewhere but we are left with the idea that her return can only ever be partial, that she will always be called back to either side and exist in the in-between. While her desire for an uncomplicated connection might ultimately be futile she cannot even become fully aware of her permanent hybridity until she has returned to her homeland. By the conclusion of the novel Yolanda is beginning to come to terms with her hybridity, with her home as made of the Dominican Republic *and* America rather than in the painful binary choice of the Dominican Republic *or* America. It is only in the act of returning to the physical homeland that such a monumental aspect of her identity can be dealt with. The text actually presents several returns, since the García family is able to travel back and forth to the Island during the girls’ adolescence. Each return, each new negotiation with the idea of home, highlights the hybridity of the girls, their identities as distinct from their Dominican cousins. For example, the girls’ attitudes to gender roles and relationships are very different from their cousins and aunts: ‘our aunts and girl cousins consider it very unfeminine for a woman to go around demonstrating for her rights’ (121). This clash of attitudes not only gives the girls a communal identity in reaction against their aunts and cousins but also creates in them a sense of their own difference, their identities as

marked by the American side of the hyphenated Dominican-American label. In *Dreaming in Cuban* Pilar enacts a similarly temporary return to Cuba: her links to Celia necessitate a return before her death, as does her confused identity. It is only after physically returning that Pilar can put together some of her family's history, that she can paint her grandmother, speak with her, collect her stories and come to terms with her duality. Her physical return also allows her to create a mental home space that can accommodate her duality, which will be discussed further on. Susan Stanford Friedman articulates the importance of both roots and routes, of home and travel: 'roots signifying identity based in stable cores and continuities; routes suggesting identity based in travel, change, and disruption' (153). The physical journeys these characters undertake allow them to implement both of Friedman's aspects of identity building. Maria Cristina Rodriguez notes that the homeland is 'a reconstructed space made of at least two different geographical locations with the possibility of coming and going in either direction' (177). The physical return and journeys of the protagonists therefore enable them to renegotiate their identities in relation to their homeland, in relation to a home space that is complicated and often distant.

Home as the Domestic Space:

Having discussed home in terms of its geographical boundaries it is also important to note that home has a more intimate though no less physical reality. The home also signifies the physical family home, the domestic sphere and usually the maternal space. Leaving the homeland is also in many cases leaving the mother's home, the domestic, family space and entering into a wider world. In masculine coming of age novels this shift in emphasis, this move from the private space of the home to the public space of society occurs early on, with the male narrative

emphasising schooling and the public space of education above the private maternal space. Most male narratives concentrate on experiences outside of the home, in the public sphere. For example, Chamoiseau's *Schooldays* and Lamming's *In The Castle of my Skin* focus on community life and educational institutions while Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* focuses on experiences that occur outside the home, in public spaces. The space of the coming of age story has traditionally been paradoxically both public and isolated. The first person narratives, which make up the majority of these works, mean that readers are detached from other points of view and perspectives. As discussed previously the multiple and shifting perspectives of the female texts lend a sense of fluidity and community, a group of people suffering the same coming of age or having already experienced similar journeys. In the case of the majority of male texts the opposite is true, the narrative focus is on one individual. The experience is singular, separate and therefore intensely personal but occurs in public spaces, in schools, offices, street corners. The home, the private space is tangential, one which the protagonists escape from in order to come of age. While this is true to a certain extent of the female coming of age texts discussed - as mentioned the act of leaving remains very significant as part of the journey towards selfhood – at the same time the focus of the texts is on the private sphere. For example, public areas of education, central to the evolution of self in male narratives, are less significant in female texts. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* public spaces are few and mentioned only briefly. Sophie's entire educational life in New York is condensed into a few sentences mainly concerned with how it marks her as distinct from the Americans around her outside the confines of the school: 'All the lessons were in French, except for English composition and literature classes. Outside the school, we were "the Frenchies", cringing in our mock-Catholic-school uniforms as the students from the public school

across the street called us “boat people” and “stinking Haitians” (66). Apart from a few scenes at restaurants and in liminal public spaces such as crossroads, bus stops and airports the majority of Danticat’s narrative occurs within various homes. Sophie’s public life and interactions with the wider world are largely elided in the text and the private sphere is where coming of age occurs, where Sophie finds the pieces of herself. It is not merely a need to escape this private, familial sphere that drives her coming of age but also to understand it. García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* likewise rarely mentions schooling or work other than in the context of Pilar’s relationships, for example arguments with her mother over the value of art school (29). Pilar’s schooling occurs largely in the gaps in the narrative while her interactions, particularly with her family, are the focus of the text. The other major narratives in the text, her grandmother’s, mother’s and aunt’s, also focus primarily on relationships, on the moments between people which made them who they are, and these occur primarily in private spaces, in homes. Lourdes and Celia attempt to escape the private sphere into the public, as with Lourdes finding comfort and purpose in walking the streets in a peacekeeping effort and Celia’s wholehearted enthusiasm for her role as a civilian judge and worker for the revolution. The text as a whole however, and Pilar’s story in particular, privileges the private space of the home. Even Lourdes’ and Celia’s external interests are the result of internal pressures and dissatisfactions and the majority of the text is ensconced in the domestic space of family relationships. Alvarez’s text is similarly structured though less extreme. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* includes sections dealing with the girls’ schooling - the girls are shown leaving and going to school, discussing it at times – and are mentioned as having careers or discussing work but largely these are tangential to the main thrust of the story. The emphasis is on their emotional rather than economic or educational

journeys. Yolanda's school assembly speech, for example, is the result of external forces, a school project, but the drama and identity formation which surround this episode in the text are all contained within the home: her mother's assistance and delight in helping her create the speech, her father's anger with her rebellious ideas and her own disappointment and anger towards his demand that she alter her words (141-148). The emphasis on family relationships and the domestic space privileges the private, emotional effect over the public consequences. Clare likewise, is mentioned as going to school, we see several interactions with schoolmates in *Abeng* and mentions of her schooling and university career in *No Telephone To Heaven* but the majority of the focus of the text is on private spaces: home spaces and personal connections. Kincaid's *Annie John* is also a prime example of this shift in space. Annie's schooling is significant to the text, as a public space where she engages with the outside world but the text continuously revolves around the maternal space of the home, returning again and again to the domestic sphere, either as something to long for or to rebel against. Likewise, in Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* the home is thematically the centre of the text and conspicuously the mother's domain. As I have already argued the mother is central to a female coming of age and therefore the maternal space of the home becomes equally important as both a space to identify with and one to reject. The emphasis in these texts is on intimate private spaces and emotional ties rather than on public spaces or interaction with the institutional world of education and employment. That is not to say that these public spaces are ignored or become insignificant but merely that the weight placed on the private sphere shifts the narrative focus. The home is the central focus, not the marginal space around the wider world into which the protagonist enters. By examining the private domestic sphere these texts are presenting it as equally worthy of engagement, they are

privileging a traditionally female space and female connection. The movement away from home is still present - all the characters execute a journey of some kind away from the physical familial home - and yet this space is given greater significance in female orientated texts than in their male counterparts. The home is the centre, the space in which becoming mostly occurs whereas for male texts the home is incidental, one space in a multitude and the majority of significant experiences occur outside it. The emphasis in female texts on the private and domestic in place of the public is a general statement to which exceptions can be found, and yet the trend exists and should be noted. The primacy of the home sphere in these female coming of age novels cannot be ignored. It harks back to a very traditional view of female roles and domesticity but perhaps it merely shows how prevalent these ideas still are, that the home space is a female one, the domain of the mother and consequently the main space that the protagonist must confront and come to terms with.

Home as an Imagined Space:

Having discussed the home as a real physical space - both the microcosm, the physical house and the macrocosm, the country and nation - it is also necessary to discuss the less physical realities of the home. The nation for example can be seen not just as a physical reality but also as a mental construct. Benedict Anderson famously theorises the nation as 'an imagined political community' where the nation is created 'in the minds' of each of its members (6). Doreen Massey consistently interrogates place and the notion of home noting that 'identities of places are inevitably unfixed...because the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing' so that 'the identity of any place, including that place called home, is in one sense for ever open to contestation'

(169). Stuart Hall likewise argues that cultural identity is always and continuously being produced since it is subject to the 'continuous "play"...of culture' (225). The nation, the homeland and culture are all constituted through communal belief and social practices and so are always shifting mental constructions, open to change, rather than essential in nature. The coming of age texts acknowledge these mental constructions of home by presenting both the physical reality of those home spaces and their mental creation in the memories and imaginations of the characters.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* for example, Cuba exists primarily in the memories of the characters and thus is as much an imaginary mental construction as a physical reality. Whether in Celia's recounting of the past or Lourdes' biased construction of the present, Cuba exists 'fundamentally as a memory, disconnected from time' (Vásquez, 22) and is more imaginary than real. As such, Rocio Davis notes that '[t]he representation of Cuba as motherland becomes another important subtext in the novel' (66). Cuba means different things to different characters, the home is not a static concept but one created and recreated by each character as their identities alter and their relationships with that home space change. For Lourdes Cuba is an absence, a site of trauma, something to reject and excise from her life, as evidenced by her need to migrate north, to be as distant from Cuba as possible. Her home then is an imaginary construct marred by the regime and by her belief in her people's gullibility: Cuba is 'wretched carnival floats creaking with lies' (73). In contrast, for Celia the current Cuba is glorious, a homeland of potential and revolution while the Cuba of her childhood is recollected with soft-edged nostalgia. For Pilar, her Cuban homeland is created from fond childhood memories, a place she connects with her grandmother and with comfort, and so it becomes a sanctuary for the parts of herself that do not fit or which she sees as disjointed in America: 'That's it. My mind's made up. I'm going

back to Cuba. I'm fed up with everything around here' (25). It is firstly in Pilar's imagination and memory that her connection to Cuba appears, she has visions of her grandmother and dreams their conversations, and these imaginings allow her to connect with that side of herself. Mary Vásquez notes that for Lourdes Cuba remains 'frozen in her perception of 1959: Cuba itself is immutable, lost and deviant' (22). She also argues that Cuba is always a remembrance even for those still residing there. Pilar sees Cuba through the haze of her early childhood memories and her discussions with Celia but Celia too is trapped in memory, she 'seeks to arrest the past and insert herself into it, with both she and the content of the past pristine and simultaneously changed and unchanged...Pilar on the other hand, practices the paradox of an anticipated future and need. Of course, both are exercises in invention' (Vásquez, 24). Pilar's anticipation of the future and her need for Cuba acknowledge how much Pilar expects of Cuba before reaching it, how important her idealised imagination of it is. In fact, reality becomes less important than the characters' associations and perceptions of home, since this is a major part of what influences the comings of age that occur in the novels. All three characters view Cuba through the lens of memory, personal desire and prejudice, all of which are highly subjective, especially memory which is, as García notes, 'a reflection of our own fiction about our lives' (Irizarry, 183). Lourdes only sees the elements of Cuba she wishes to whilst Celia is caught up in her past, and Pilar is enveloped in her grandmother's nostalgia and imagines that Cuba will give her a sense of belonging. Home for all of them is a mental construction. In a similar fashion Danticat also acknowledges the importance of memory, and with it nostalgia, in the experience of being a hybrid subject. Memory, particularly the partial, subjective and fluid nature of memory, serves to create both connection and disjunction. As Danicat notes:

I think memory is the great bridge between the present and the past, between here and there...It's what helps us rebuild and start over in another country, to reconstruct our lives. I know many people who would rather forget the past, but even trying to forget is a chore. Some people swear that they will never go back to Haiti because they would rather remember the Haiti they grew up with.... A lot of people idealize an older Haiti they still remember and try to pass that idealized vision on to their children, who can't reconcile the Haiti that their parents are always pining and longing for with the one they read about in the newspaper or see on television. Some people still living in Haiti idealize the past because things have gotten so much worse for them.

(Alexandre and Howard, 125).

Here Danticat is highlighting how memory functions as a tool for recreating the homeland from a distance, as a way of creating a mental homeland, which serves to connect but also confuse the diasporic subject. The imaginary Haiti created by the subjective memories of immigrants creates a sense of community and home despite distance but as Danticat notes it also creates a disjunction between the reality of Haiti, which hybrid subjects are faced with, and the idealised imagination they have to cling to. It also points to the function of memory and nostalgia as creating the past. Danticat examines the diasporic connection to the homeland as marked by these mental processes: 'Since so many Haitians have been forced to leave the country, I think there will always be a kind of ambivalence about migration: having to leave but wishing you could stay.... Nostalgia is part of the life of every immigrant, and so is that ambivalence' (Alexandre and Howard, 115). The ambivalence Danticat mentions here is somewhat present in Sophie's coming of age: she does not agonise over her place in Haiti or America, she simply exists in a reality where she has roots in both and manages them. However, particularly during her childhood, Sophie is homesick for Haiti, caught in the nostalgia of her time with Atie and it is to that homeland that she returns when trying to clear her head. She is in-between, and so nostalgia and

memory play a huge role in her construction of Haiti but Sophie never returns permanently, part of her life is in America now. This in-between hyphenated identity relies even more heavily on the nation and culture as a mental construction. The physical distance and complicated relationship to both original and new homelands necessitates a different and more complex ideation of what home means.

The Idealised Homeland:

The home space can be imaginary not only by existing as memory but also in the sense of an idealised homeland, which does not match the reality of that physical space. It is possible to create an imaginary original homeland outside of the individual's experience. For example, in the construction of Africa in much Caribbean literature: rather than a real, complex place Africa becomes a mythical motherland, an originary space to which black Caribbean subjects can belong or return to. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat has her characters mention the 'Great gods in Guinea' (93) and Sophie is told 'about a group of people in Guinea who carry the sky on their heads' (25). Marilyn Houlberg defines Guinea as 'being the generalized ancestral homeland of Africa, where souls are said to go when mortal death occurs' (14). Patrick Bellegarde-Smith also mentions that 'Haitians return to Afrik-Ginen upon death, a metaphorical land perhaps, but home to the gods, ancestors, and the newly departed nonetheless' (58). Florence Bellande Robertson also notes that '[f]or the Haitian Vodou believer, Africa remains the centre of spiritual and material energy, whether mythological or real' (4). What is evident from the rather tangential mention of Guinea in both Danticat's text and the critical analysis of Vodou is that Guinea, and therefore Africa, in Haitian culture has transformed from a real geographical space to become an imaginary metaphorical homeland. Therefore it is imaginary in

two senses; being ancestral and therefore historical it is the imagined past homeland which no longer exists, and being the realm of the dead and the gods it is a metaphorical, spectral realm rather than a real space. By relating Sophie to Guinea the text further highlights her interstitial home space. She is neither at home in Haiti or America but the space in-between. Connecting her to a powerful, illusory, ancestral homeland it immediately signals her connection to Haitian cultural ideology and simultaneously provides the possibility of calling home a space that is imaginary more than physical.

With the imagining of a homeland also comes the potential to idealise that home. We can see this in relation to Africa in for example, Maryse Condé's *Heremakhonon*, where Caribbean researcher/academic Veronica travels to an unnamed West African country. The reality of Africa does not match her imagination of it, her idealised expectation of belonging, connection and rooted identity any more than Tee's childhood fictional image of Britain as the motherland of 'Reality and Rightness' (Hodge, 67) is likely to match her real experiences of it. There are several novels, such as Maryse Condé's *Tales from the Heart*, which refer to Europe as 'truly the Mother Country' (3) as the centre of the world while the Caribbean is at the margin. However, the texts usually refute or undercut such idealisations, as in *Tales from the Heart* where the narrator questions whether her parents are 'alienated individuals' (6) because of this conception. This potential to idealise or romanticise the homeland from a distance is also present with regards to the Caribbean itself. In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* for example, Yolanda's somewhat romantic 'antojo'²³ to pick guavas in the campo in the Dominican Republic is quickly disrupted by the uncomfortable reality of being a female stranger alone with two fieldworkers

²³ Whim [my translation]

(17-19). As Doreen Massey points out '[i]t is interesting to note how frequently the characterization of place as home comes from those who have left' (166) and as the texts demonstrate that characterisation often involves an idealisation or romanticising of the distant homeland. In Gisèle Pineau's *Exile According to Julia* for example, Julia's stories of home are all 'magnified visions of her homeland' (89), full of magic and romance. They are part memory, part fiction – 'she pulls apart bits of stale news from long ago, turns them over to see the other side, picks them apart, and then sews them back together again any old way' (90) – but despite the hardships she faced there the Guadeloupe of her memory is her 'beloved' home (7). In telling these stories to her granddaughter Gisèle, Julia creates a Guadeloupe that is based less on reality than on personal subjective emotion. Memory and nostalgia turn her Caribbean home into a different country, completely separate from lived reality. Lucía Suárez and Maria Cristina Rodriguez both discuss how Julia recreates her homeland in France. Suárez points out that she 'brings another rhythm and language (Creole), and other scents and flavors, thus rendering the private space of the home into a reproduction of the island' (16). Rodriguez similarly notes that 'Julia stays inside speaking Creole, trying to cook homestyle food...returning to her roots while residing elsewhere' (49-50). It is clear that Julia is creating a facsimile of the island through her everyday actions, which she refuses to adapt to her new homeland France, but it is also clear that in doing so she creates an imagined version of Guadeloupe in France. This does not make such a construction of home any less necessary or fruitful since the idealised images Julia creates allow her to survive in cold, hostile Paris. She leaves her body in France and travels in her memory and imagination to Guadeloupe: 'Man Ya's spirit is used to going back and forth like this between Guadeloupe and France...Even if her body is condemned to remain here, that does not change anything. She has only to go

down into the depths that she is cherishing in the midst of her soul' (47). Her recounting of the homeland also gives her granddaughter something to hold onto, an identity to cherish in the midst of the casual racism and rejection of France, the supposed motherland: 'She pictures it for us...She conjures up an everlasting, flowing spring...She lets us see her river...She sings the song of every bird...We see it all through her eyes and believe' (8). Later the protagonist's younger brother paints 'suns and houses in Guadeloupe that he has seen in Man Ya's eyes' (87). Upon returning to the Caribbean the narrator, Julia's granddaughter, confronts the reality of the physical homeland but that does not disrupt the necessity and centrality of the imagined home to her coming of age and identity formation. Her grandmother has, in the power of her memories and stories of home, 'laid down the path for them' so 'they will not be lost' (87) either in exile or upon their return.

While this idealised home has few negative consequences for Julia's granddaughter, the same cannot be said of Hyacinth in Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging*. Like Julia and Gisèle, the imaginary Jamaica that Hyacinth carries with her in her head is essential to her sense of self, it is the means by which she copes with the hostility and pain of living in England but where Gisèle's construction is open to alteration as she comes of age, Hyacinth cannot cope with the shattering of her illusions. Hyacinth refuses to listen to her friend Perlene who has more immediate knowledge of Jamaica. Perlene recognises her denial- 'Girl you must wear blinkers' (110)- and urges her to '[g]et your head out of your test-tube and take a look at the real world for once' (111). Instead Hyacinth remains firm in her romanticism, ignoring news of Jamaica - 'she found it hard to believe what they were saying' (110) - and insisting that 'it will be better when [she] get[s] to Jamaica' (112) so that when she finally returns to her homeland and is confronted by its reality she cannot cope.

That confrontation with reality breaks the sense of identity that she has cultivated so that in this moment of destroyed illusions ‘inside her, deep down buried inside her woman’s body, trapped and bleeding in the deepest recesses of her, a young girl screamed. As the scream echoed in her mind, the tears seeped out and Hyacinth knew she would never be free until that child had healed’ (143). Winston James makes the point that ‘it is impossible to re-enter a society at the point of departure’ (248) which is what Hyacinth is attempting to do. It is not that a return is impossible but the return to that childhood is and it is an idealised, childhood Jamaica that Hyacinth has been basing her identity on. It is clear within *The Unbelonging* that Hyacinth’s naiveté and inability to recognise her own romanticism will be her undoing and it is clearly presented as a negative, if common, result of distance from the homeland. Michelle Wright notes that this particular construction of the imagined home, based in nostalgia for a lost childhood, is a direct result of Hyacinth’s inability to find a space for herself in Britain. The hostility of her adopted British home means that she ‘claims her birthplace of Jamaica with even greater ferocity’ and begins to see Jamaica as a ‘Black Utopia where skin tone bias, poverty, corruption – in fact any sort of ugliness – does not exist’ (Wright, 200). This idealistic view of Jamaica is then negated by its reality when upon her return she can only see it through ‘her English gaze’ (Wright, 201) and so is bewildered and repelled by what she finds. As Wright’s analysis demonstrates the black female subject in the end belongs nowhere ‘there is no space, no refuge, no counterdiscourse’ (201). Hyacinth lacks cultural moorings (Wright, 202) and so is left adrift. There is no homeland for her, having been treated to the racism of England and unable to overcome her colonialism and idealisation to become a part of Jamaica. She has no place to set roots, grow from and so her identity remains fractured, a hybridity that is chaotic and damaging. Wright argues that in *The*

Unbelonging ‘Riley sees Jamaica as a land to which the immigrant cannot return despite a desperate need for refuge’ (211). Rather than reading the novel’s ending as describing the futility of all immigrants attempting to return home, it is possible instead to read it as a condemnation of colonial indoctrination and of the destructive potential of constructing an idealised home. Hyacinth cannot meet Jamaica except through her preconceptions and so her construction of home is ultimately destructive, in contrast to the creative energy and comfort Julia’s idealised home generates.

Where Hyacinth fails to come to an appreciation of the complexity of her homeland Andrea Levy’s Faith in *Fruit of the Lemon* succeeds. Born in England, prior to her journey to Jamaica Faith has only a vague understanding of her parents’ homeland ‘pieced together’ from ‘little scraps’ of her mother’s past (4). In the novel she returns to Jamaica after a nervous breakdown, urged by her parents because ‘everyone should know where they come from’ (162). As Wright notes though:

Levy uses Jamaica to introduce the complexity and ambiguity of one’s racial and ethnic roots. The bulk of Faith’s visit is composed of oral histories told to her by friends and family, and as the story progresses, so does the sketch of the Jackson family tree, which begins with a nuclear family at the novel’s outset and develops into a sprawling centuries-long diasporic history of immigrancy, war, marriage, death – as well as deceit, rape, exploitation, hatred, racism, self-loathing, not to mention branches of the family marked only by question marks, disputed arenas where a curtain has silently been drawn (209).

In the text Jamaica becomes ‘both a place of origin and the embodiment of diaspora’ (Wright, 211). Faith’s complex family tree uncovers the homeland not as a pre-eminent origin place but as already mixed, and hybrid. Home is already a site of multiplicity and ambiguity and Faith’s mental construction of that home gains texture and depth when she encounters its reality. The visual of the increasingly complex family tree parallels Faith’s growing understanding of her own complex identity.

Unlike Hyacinth, Faith's imaginary homeland has the potential to change rather than remain static. For Wright, in her analysis of Riley and Levy, 'neither Jamaica nor England can or will operate as a home space in the most traditional sense. Instead subjects move toward belonging in the in-between that Riley designates as unbelonging' (211) but which Anzaldúa would call the borderland. *Fruit of the Lemon* ends with Faith's return to Britain, repeating her parents' journey but this time capable of stating without embarrassment '[m]y mum and dad came to England on a banana boat' (339) a phrase which haunted her as a child at the start of the novel. This lends circularity to the novel and adds a sense of homecoming to both of Faith's journeys. This homecoming is however 'heavy with ambiguity' (Wright, 210) and only partial, like her parents Faith initially misreads the Guy Fawkes fireworks as a welcome home and finally recognises England's indifference to her arrival, as it was of her parents. Both Jamaica and England as home spaces in the novel are ambiguous, both welcoming and rejecting the hybrid subject, Faith. The construction of home works in both directions and is complicated by Faith's relationship with both Britain and Jamaica. Ultimately, as with Riley's text, *Fruit of Lemon* allows for the construction of home to become an obvious process, whether deliberate or unconscious, which creates the homeland and potentially idealises it depending upon the needs of the protagonist. The imaginary or idealised homeland can therefore have both positive and negative effects, but in either case it is a necessary part of the coming of age process for the protagonists caught between several home spaces.

The Third Space – The Borderland:

One way in which the protagonists negotiate the complexity of having multiple homelands is to create an imaginative third space from which to form their

identities. In place of a confused dual allegiance to two homelands Danticat claims an imaginary space, the diaspora: 'Haiti has nine geographic departments and the tenth was the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living in the *dyaspora*' (*The Butterfly's Way*, xiv). This idea of the diaspora as an ideological and therefore imagined homeland, a new third space to belong to, replaces the physical boundaries of the homeland, whether that be the new or adopted country, with a much more fluid and permeable construction based on mental affiliation more than physical distance or connection. In her thesis on the homeland and Danticat, Juliane Okot Bitek asks the question: 'If one's country is the place from which to claim culture, a name, an identity, a world view, what happens when there is more than one place from which one can make that claim?' (3). This question goes to the heart of the theme of home. As the basis from which a social, cultural and personal identity stems, a hybrid relationship with the homeland necessitates a complex repositioning of identity in relation to home, since that home is no longer singular but plural. The plurality of homes becomes an internal homeland, an imaginary space which Gloria Anzaldúa calls 'the new mestiza consciousness' marked always by crossroads and borders by living in the borderlands, the third space (99-101). Salman Rushdie calls them 'imaginary homelands', the mental countries created from the fictions of exiled or migrant writers (10). Bitek connects this mental landscape to the work of Ed Soja where the third space is mental and social, 'an encrypted reality' present in thoughts and utterances rather than grounded in physicality (6). The writer Luis Rafael Sánchez on the other hand speaks of the *guagua aérea* (the airbus) as '[e]l espacio de una nación flotante entre dos puertos de contrabandear esperanzas!' (205): a floating nation where hopes can be smuggled. What these articulations all have in common is their acknowledgment of the home space as being internal and imaginative. Being

ideological in nature does not mean that the home loses its impact on identity. In fact, these multiple constructions of this new third space floating between homelands points to how crucial the homeland is in identity formation. It would not be necessary to construct a mental space for the hybrid or mestiza subject if home were not an important foundation for identity. The coming of age texts highlight the protagonists' negotiations with home and their constructions of home as imaginary internal spaces. Danticat's Sophie is equally at home in Haiti and in America, instead of a rejection of one she retains her language, her love of Haiti. During her time in the States she is surrounded by Haitians, eats the food of her home and when on her first return to Haiti a bus driver evinces surprise at her knowledge of creole – 'People who have been away from Haiti fewer years than you, they return and pretend to speak no Creole' (95) - Sophie replies that '[s]ome people need to forget' but she 'need[s] to remember' (95). Whatever her physical inhabitancy Sophie's mental landscape is both Haitian and American, never solely one or the other. In *Dreaming in Cuban* García tackles this complex reworking of home by making Pilar belong to America 'more than' to Cuba rather than belonging to America 'instead of' Cuba (236). This statement of hybridity follows Pilar's 'dreaming in Spanish' (235) for the first time and thus presents Pilar with an ideological space to call home, an imaginative homeland, a new combined consciousness which houses Cuba and America, even if it only exists inside her head. Alvarez's repetition of the yawning mouth at the beginnings and ends of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* restates the characters' dualism. Yolanda is not American or Dominican but forever yearning for both. While this might seem a hopeless situation, always pulled to the other side of the hyphen, Alvarez proposes that Yolanda has made her home outside of both physical spaces in the same nebulous internal landscape as Pilar. Yolanda -

significantly a poet and writer herself - has made her home in language: 'she needed to settle somewhere...she took root in the language' (141). Alvarez herself, for whom Yolanda is a semi-autobiographical surrogate, states that her homeland is textual: 'English, those verbal gadgets, those tricks and turns of phrases, those little fixed units and counters, became a charged, fluid mass that carried me in its great fluent waves, rolling and moving onward, to deposit me on the shores of my new homeland.... I had landed in English' (*Something To Declare*, 29). As a result of their hybrid identities, which provide no physical land in which to root themselves entirely, both Yolanda and Alvarez substitute a mental landscape, an imaginary land which is created through the text but also exists in the creation of the text. As Alvarez herself cautions, this new landscape, this borderland, can exist on the page: 'I'm mapping a country that's not on the map, and that's why I'm trying to put it down on paper' (*Something To Declare*, 173). The page is a homeland for other writers as well. According to Katherine Payant, Cristina García, like Alvarez, belongs to a generation of uprooted writers for whom 'fiction can provide a home of sorts, a place to explore the meaning of the past, and one's personal place in it and the present' (163). It is possible to read the choice by so many authors to narrate a coming of age journey as their attempt to make a space for their hybrid selves. This literary space is another imaginative homeland on which to base a mestiza or hybrid self. Danticat sees this act of mental creation as entirely necessary: 'I am, as you like to say, "trying to make art out of everything"'. But you must know by now that this is how I have survived' ('Legends: The Daughter', 214). According to Bitek, Danticat is creating a 'café au lait text' (4) that is itself a hybrid and which can contain that identity, making sure it survives. The imaginary homeland is therefore a necessary ideological imagining which is created in the consciousness of the characters and represented on the page.

The texts become the medium through which to understand the self, the ground to alight on when a hybrid identity makes you unable to land fully anywhere else.

These texts consistently make obvious the centrality of the homeland to the coming of age process. Whether the original homeland, the maternal space, the adopted homeland, the imagined third space or the distant home of memory and idealisation, these homelands are always negotiated by the protagonists. The complex ideations of home that these protagonists construct are all used in some way to further their coming of age whether with positive or negative repercussions. The homeland as both real and imagined must be negotiated and come to terms with as part of constructing selfhood.

HISTORIES:

The concept of home, the homeland and the nation are all in part created by history. The nation is a historical construct, much as a specific national identity and culture are the products of historical forces. If the ideas of home and of the homeland are always constructions, then they are partly constructed through the use of a particular historical narrative. As Doreen Massey notes in her deconstruction of place as fixed or bounded, '[t]his does not mean that the past is irrelevant to the identity of place. It simply means that there is no internally produced, essential past... Instead of looking back with nostalgia to some identity of place which it is assumed already exists, the past has to be constructed' (171). There is a narrative at work in history, a deliberate, though at times unconscious, construction of the past. With regards to the Caribbean for example, there is a difference between a colonial history of the Caribbean that begins with Columbus discovering the islands, with conquest, gold and colonisation, and one that begins with the indigenous peoples. Olive Senior's poem

'Meditation on Yellow' highlights how the nature of the Caribbean is shaped by this originating history of the search for gold which in turn becomes the tourists' search for the golden sun. In her poem the reality of the Caribbean yellow is in the 'Yellow Macca', the 'street gals', 'Bob Marley wailing' (17-18), a completely different idea of home from that of a homeland available for consumption, of yellow metal and sunshine, shaped by colonial history. History shapes the reality of the nation and of the identities that exist in that space. To deconstruct or reconstruct that history, as these coming of age texts do, is then a revolutionary act. History impacts on the present and to reconstruct the past is partly to engage in a new future. As Dipesh Chakrabarty notes '[a]ll our pasts are therefore futural in orientation. They help us make the unavoidable journey into the future. There is, in this sense, no "desire for going back," no "pathological" nostalgia that is also not futural as well' (250). History shapes the identity of the region, the nation and likewise it shapes the identities of the protagonists. Rewriting the past allows the authors to make something new, to know the past differently 'not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us' (Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken', 35).

The Master Narrative of History:

History often means the grand, supposedly factual, narrative that has been written or told of the past. What this at times ignores is that, in being a narrative, history does not tell us everything. There are events that are chosen as worthy of record, as significant and meaningful for remembrance but this choice is never objective, it is always made with an agenda, whether acknowledged or hidden, of a specific tale and a specific history, which is being told. This is particularly true of a colonial or external history of the Caribbean, with its agenda of superiority,

submission and power relations. According to Michelle Wright the relationship between coloniser, colonised and history is paradoxical. The colonised is at once elided from history and made insignificant and yet becomes necessary to the historical narrative in order to display the might and superiority of the empire: 'this is the central and ultimately confusing paradox that defines the Other-from-without: that Other's existence is consistently denied any role of importance, and yet its implied inferiority is the crux of Europeans' arguments for their ostensibly self-evident superiority' (8). The official colonial history marginalises the Caribbean and yet marks it as essential to that history of empire, at once eliding it and maintaining its centrality. This exposes the construction of history, its narrative aspects and undercuts its appearance of completeness or singular truth. Official history, particularly a colonial history can therefore be challenged and we see this perhaps most clearly in Michelle Cliff's work. In *Abeng* an overarching master narrative of history is undercut and rebelled against by presenting an alternate view, presenting the hidden histories of the nation. The text consistently interrupts the personal narratives of its characters with fragments of slave history, the forgotten elements of Jamaica's narrative. Clare's personal narrative is pieced together with the slave histories of Jamaica, so that her history and the history of the nation are brought to light together. Cliff gives us fragments of history about Nanny Maroon, the slave woman Inez and the powerful obeah slave woman Mma Alli. These are as much Clare's ancestors as the 'honourable' Justice Savage that Boy's version of history privileges. The hidden histories that are uncovered in the text and brought to light display the fragility of official history, its gaps and silences. The official history is never left undisturbed or unquestioned. The official narrative of Columbus discovering the Caribbean, for example, is immediately disrupted by the narrator musing on what an odd word

‘discovered’ is and following it with a fragment of history about the Carib people (66-67). This same disruption and disjunction occurs in *No Telephone to Heaven* where the official recorded history is immediately juxtaposed and undercut by the unspoken stories of the nation:

These are the facts as I believe them. But as you no doubt are well aware, there are no facts in Jamaica. Not one single fact. Nothing to join us to the real. Facts move around you. Magic moves through you. This we have been taught. This fact that there are no facts. Wait. I can call up one fact. “The adamantine refusal of the slave-women to reproduce” - a historian report that. What of Gamesome, Lusty Ann, Counsellor’s Cuba, Strumpet called Skulker - not racehorses, mi dear, women: barren. Four furious cool-dark sistren. Is nuh fact dat? Fact yes, but magic mek it so (92).

The above passage highlights how official history denies certain narratives, how it silences them, how what Cliff calls ‘fact’ and I would term History can be destructive. Cliff does not allow that official ‘historian report’ to stand without the intervention of personal, local history, the names of the ‘cool-dark sistren’ whom history has ignored. The discussion of fact and magic also serves to undercut traditional ideas of History as the factual recounting of real, provable events. Magic - and Cliff seems to say Jamaica - disrupts that fantasy of fact and simultaneously highlights how Jamaica has been denied a history. As Belinda Edmondson argues ‘[f]or the colonized West Indian, Europe had a history, Jamaica did not: the little history it did have consisted of a recitation of the skirmishes of the European imperial powers fought to determine who would own the territory. In colonial and much of post-colonial Jamaica, Jamaicans lived without knowledge of their past-they lived with absence’ (187). In both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff’s disruption of official History with unofficial or hidden histories allows her to restructure history in relation to her home and her self and so deny the colonising impulse to remove significance from the

colonised. Fiona Barnes uses Foucault's idea of '*reprogramming* popular memory', the impulse to provide a 'fake archaeology of history' to describe the 'glamourized and comfortable' version of history Cliff is disrupting (Barnes, 24). This idea of reprogramming however, of picking and choosing and repackaging history as desired, is not merely limited to official sources. All narrating of history becomes a reprogramming, a way of presenting a new version of the past and Cliff uses this technique by presenting not a 'fake' but a more inclusive, rewritten archaeology of the past. By writing a history that includes what has been previously ignored, Cliff is rewriting the past and so reprogramming history and cultural memory. This retelling ensures that the colonial version of history is reworked for the reader into a new structure, one that includes the knowledge of the Carib people and the slave women who gave birth, so that a new weaving of history is possible which includes multiple narrative threads. Cliff includes not only the histories of the island that have been ignored or not taught to its inhabitants but also melds history with myth and folk tales. Belinda Edmondson sees this as Cliff's 'attempt to dismantle notions of "official" history and the relation of history to myth, myth to "real life" and "real life" to fiction by conflating Jamaican legends and myths with ancient and contemporary histories, autobiographical anecdotes and among all these, intertwining Clare Savage's personal journey' (185). What Edmondson clearly highlights here is the lack of distinction Cliff makes between official accepted social history, the subjective histories of individuals and mythic constructions of reality. The boundaries between these narratives are broken down. It is interesting that Edmondson calls this a dismantling, with all that implies of destruction, confusion and splitting into component parts, and Barnes uses the metaphor of reprogramming, with its associations of rebuilding, restructuring and creation. They both have elements of destruction and deletion but I

believe Barnes' metaphor with its attendant ideas of refiguring and making new is more apt in the case of these narratives. Cliff's texts do not leave us with dismantled chaos but pieces we are invited to string together, to restructure into a new narrative.

Cliff is also constantly highlighting the lack of knowledge that official histories engender, the 'absence' of history Edmondson mentions. Repeatedly in the text an uncovered or alternative history is contrasted with the present day lack of knowledge or misinterpretation of history. In *Abeng* for example, a short section of text repeats variations of the phrase 'they did not know' seven times (20-21) with reference to how present day Jamaicans are ignorant of their past. They do not know about their own ancestors - 'they did not know who Kishee had been...they did not know who Nanny had been' (20-21) – or their own history – 'they did not know their ancestors had been paid to inform on one another...They did not know about the Kingdom of the Ashanti or the Kingdom of Dahomey, where most of their ancestors had come from' (20). At other points in the novel it is made explicit that this ignorance is deliberate and that gaps have been created in the histories being told: 'No one had told the people' (19), 'none of this was ever mentioned' (29). The consistent refrain of the lack of knowledge and the unspoken, reminds the reader of the hidden gaps in any history especially since these silences occur in both personal and public histories. We discover in *Abeng* that Boy's family 'wanted to forget about Africa' (30) and so they created a 'carefully contrived mythology' of wealth and colour 'which they used to protect their identities. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted' (29-30). This personal excising of family history ignores the non-white and non-acceptable aspects, so that Boy remembers his ancestor the white Justice but not his darker forbearers. Boy's family even makes the Justice's 'mistress' into a 'dark Guatemalan...part Indian, with some Spanish

blood...the personification of the New World' (30). A vision that is then contrasted with an account of Inez the 'half-blood Miskito Indian' slave the Justice raped and the story of how she escaped (33). Similarly towards the end of *Abeng* we are introduced to Mrs Beatrice Phillips and her sister Mrs Stevens. Beatrice's version of her sister's story presents her as a mad woman whose wildness forced their father to send her to a convent and whose 'selfishness' drove her husband away (159). Mrs Stevens' version of her own history relays how she was sent to the convent to give birth to her mixed-race baby and her child was then taken away (162-163). Her madness is only the family's description of what they saw as her unacceptable behaviour because she had 'let a coon get too close to [her]...because [she] had a little coon baby' (162). There are two histories told, two separate narratives, one of which has been stripped of what is deemed unacceptable or shameful to the family, a sanitising of history. The mythologising, censoring and cleansing of the past enacted by the Savages and Mrs Phillips are mirrored in the public sphere. The two fragments which discuss the Savage's white-washing of their own history are interrupted by a discussion of Clare's schooling in which we learn the sanitised coloniser's version of history she is being taught: 'She knew there had been Maroons, and that many of them still existed in the towns of Cockpit Country. But she learned that these towns had been a gift from England in compensation for slavery. Slaves mixed with pirates. Revolution with reward. And a sense of history was lost in romance. This history was slight compared to the history of the Empire' (31). Throughout the text the gaps in history are shown as created not just out of ignorance but also out of deliberate decision, an excising of certain unsavoury facts and unacceptable aspects of the past. Clare's education, for example, ignores external histories, such as the history of racial oppression and riots in America, because it had been decided that 'the children should

not know this part of the history' (90). The narrator later calls Jamaica an 'island intent on erasing the past' (128) and implicitly that self-identity becomes confused 'on this island which did not know its own history' (96). History and its connection to identity are in Cliff's novels centred on the subjectivity of history, its agendas, its erasures and as such how it keeps people in ignorance of their pasts, which are part of their selves. Clare is coming of age amid these histories and the text attempts to portray how these official narratives of history need to be undercut, rebelled against and shown up as limited or biased in order to have a more complex construction of Clare as a Jamaican, as a self identity in relation to her homeland and its history.

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* does not engage with history as directly, although several of Danticat's other texts focus on historical events and the official histories of Haiti and undercut them to relate the forgotten or ignored histories of the people. For example, *The Farming of Bones* deals with a historical moment, the 1937 Massacre, and brings the details of this conflict to light, imagining the terror and horror of those events, which have been almost erased from the Dominican Republic's national history. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* does not deal with a specific historical moment that has been expunged but it does more subtly evoke the notion of the gaps in the official histories of the nation. Donette Francis suggests that the Caco family name hints at the unofficial histories of the land referring to 'the root source of cocoa and chocolate that remains important to the local economy' and also to 'the Cacos, the Haitian peasant guerrillas' who fought against U.S. soldiers during the invasion of Haiti 1915-1934 (77). As Francis points out, 'the complete story of the Cacos exposes the reluctance of nationalist narratives to admit that these native insurgents also raped women of the very nation they were assembled to protect' (77). The text therefore subtly hints at the buried histories of Haiti: in economic

dependence on external markets, in unofficial resistance groups and in the silences of the national history that surrounds those movements. These competing discourses of local resistance and sexual violence highlight how these female experiences of violence are ‘made invisible through strategic acts of concealment’ (Francis, 78). By evoking this alongside Martine’s rape by a Tonton Macoute in the 1970s, Danticat ‘demonstrates a long and continuous social history of rape in twentieth century Haiti’ (Francis, 79). The national histories ignore and conceal these acts of violence against women while the text offers an alternative personal history, which demonstrates the pervasiveness of sexual violence and the ways in which women are culturally and historically silenced. Martine cannot and does not speak out or attempt to get justice for herself nor would her suffering, much as the Cacos victims, be included in a historical narrative of the nation. Danticat’s text evokes the various unacknowledged histories of the nation and in a similar fashion so does García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*. García’s novel comments on the hidden aspects of national history through the inclusion of Felicia’s childhood friend Herminia. Like Cliff, who undercuts the whitewashed, sanitised version of history, García is including black histories and the less palatable narratives of her homeland. Herminia, a black Cuban, is given her own space in the narrative and she tells the reader that ‘nobody spoke of the problem between blacks and whites. It was considered too disagreeable to discuss’ (184-185). Herminia goes on to relate the events of the Little War of 1912 where ‘our men were hunted down day and night like animals’ (185). The atrocities of this war that killed Herminia’s ‘grandfather and great-uncles and thousands of other blacks’ is relegated to ‘a footnote in our history books’ (185). Cuba’s national history silences these racial tensions and the place of black Cubans. In presenting Herminia’s story and her recounting of this historical ‘footnote’ the text repositions this history as significant

and worthy of note, colouring Cuba's past and present. Olive Senior in her poem 'Seeing the Light' notes that 'many leaves / must fall to cover up our dying' (96). While she is referring specifically to an erased slave history it is clear from all the texts discussed that the leaves of official history have covered up unpalatable histories and the texts deliberately lift these leaves, uncover the underbrush and expose the hidden histories of their nations. These authors work with the official histories of the Caribbean and use their texts to undercut them, to rebel against their limitations, to show up their gaps and highlight their agendas. In doing so they remove history from its traditional associations with truth, fact and static, rigid certainty to a new construction of history as fluid, malleable and multiple. This is not to say that the authors I discuss are the first or only authors to have undertaken this radical approach to history, but it seems significant that in the process of coming of age, the protagonists and the reader are faced with the knowledge that history must be negotiated with and ultimately broken down to expand its horizons to fit new stories and so serve new identities.

Female Histories:

Part of the process of undercutting and restructuring history is in revealing untold histories, the black histories, slave histories and histories of violence, but also the untold female histories. Michelle Wright argues that within discourses of the nation 'women are either passive or invisible. In narrative form, then, the story of the nation is always and only the story of men, rendering the nation's birth, its origins, its present, and its future wholly in the hands of men. Women are only the mothers and mates needed to create male heirs' (138). By giving a gendered history of the nation, these coming of age authors are reworking that national history to include the

feminine. If as Wright proposes, '[n]ationalistic discourse, whether white or black, relies on certain strategic exclusions' (141) then the inclusiveness of the texts, their emphasis on plurality and female narratives destabilises the narratives of history which have previously been imposed on the protagonists. Speaking of Haitian literature Myriam Chancy argues that women authors have consistently provided a 'feminized reading of the history of our country' (6). Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* does focus on the personal histories of the women of the Caco family. Their experiences with state violence and cultural violence are at the centre of the text and make visible these previously ignored or unspeakable acts. As discussed the evocation of the Cacos' history and Martine's experiences with the Tonton Macoutes highlight the silences of Haiti's national history with regards to sexual violence against women. By placing their stories at the centre of her text Danticat is not only bringing to light the unofficial, hidden histories of the nation but also presenting a particularly female version of the historical narrative. It is women's experiences of state and cultural practices – the soldiers' violence and the violation of testing – that are portrayed. It is a particularly female history of Haiti that is being displayed for the reader. Danticat explicitly links her own work to the re-telling of women's stories: 'a thousand women urging you to speak through the blunt tip of your pencil' (*Krik? Krak!*, 222). It is this accumulated female history that has been silenced and that Danticat is attempting to give voice to in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Beyond Haiti however, it is clear that this desire for a feminised history is shared across the Caribbean; female authors are rewriting the historical narrative to include women. Andrea Levy, in a discussion on the writing process in her novel *The Long Song*, remarks that '[w]riting fiction is a way of putting back the voices that were left out' (410). For the authors discussed here those voices are the women of the Caribbean. Cliff's *Abeng* for example, is not

only subverting the official history of Jamaica by including slave narratives and indigenous narratives but also by including female histories. Cliff includes the stories of historical figures such as Inez, Nanny and Mma Alli to serve as a backdrop for Clare's coming of age as well as a litany of more immediate female histories such as Kitty, Miss Mattie and Boy's mother. Cliff is therefore providing female ancestors for Clare, a lineage of foremothers with which to identify, completely reshaping the history of the country to include their lives. This feminine history undercuts the traditionally male, historical narrative and its elision of women, exposing it as a partial and subjective narrative. The first historical figure we encounter in *Abeng* is Nanny, a powerful, rebellious female figure. We are given her story and its relation to Jamaican history in fragments interspersed with the story of Clare's family, relating it to the present day, personal narrative. Characters such as Nanny serve to undercut the notions of female passivity, silence and obedience, which Clare is struggling with in the present. The past therefore not only becomes exposed as more complex than an official narrative might display but also as including female rebellion; a past which provides inspiration for the present; a sense of lineage and possibility. Adrienne Rich termed the re-vision of the past as 'an act of survival' for women. She saw the 'act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes' as radical and revolutionary and as a way of countering the 'self-destructiveness of male-dominated society' ('When We Dead Awaken', 35). Cliff, and the other authors discussed, put this re-visioning into practice, reading the past with new eyes and providing a set of histories that the female protagonists can use, can see themselves in and can root their identities in. Cliff presents us with multiple female histories that the reader is invited to piece together to make a picture of Jamaica, both past and present, and perhaps more importantly to use as a map for coming of age, to present the influences upon Clare's

coming of age. In Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* there is a similar emphasis on the female and the multiple: all four sisters and their mother Laura speak at once, providing multiple female histories of the family and of the Dominican Republic's past. In García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, we have the stories of all the women in the family and Herminia. Ivanito is the only male narrative we have any direct or extensive contact with. Although we do discover a bit about each of the men in the family they remain mostly ciphers or related only to their relationships with the female characters. It is significant that here, as with Yolanda, Pilar questions the stories she has been given. Like Yolanda deciding to write Pila's story and her grandmother's - the forgotten silenced women of history - Pilar too questions received history and 'who chooses what we should know or what's important' (28). She wants to write about women in the Congo 'or the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay' (28). Her storytelling is marked, like Yolanda's, by a desire to tell forgotten or silenced female stories, a movement paralleled by the text itself. García has noted that traditional history 'obviates women and the evolution of home, family and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men' (Lopez, 107). The tapestries of personal, familial or national history presented in these texts are therefore always multiple and heavily weighted towards the female in order to undercut the traditional historical narrative. These texts put women back into history and alter the traditionally male perspective of historical accounts. For example, Merle Collin's *Angel* focuses on a historical moment of political struggle in Grenada but the perspective on these events remains entirely with Angel and her mother Doodsie. Any grand, national narrative, which might focus on masculine or larger conflicts is, in *Angel*, replaced by the personal, female perspective. The post-independence struggles of the country are filtered through the

personal perspectives of the female characters as when Doodsie notes in a letter: ‘we had independence earlier this year so we no longer British...sometime I really wonder what difference it make. The only thing I really glad about is that I wouldn have to dress up no children to go an burn whole day in the sun for Queens Birthday parade’ (206). This not only works as an indictment of post-independence politics but also demonstrates the text’s tendency to view the historical and political moment through the lens of the female characters’ preoccupations. The focus of the text is always on the personal impact of these political ideologies and actions on the female characters. Thus these texts provide a different history than that which might be told elsewhere, highlighting how elements are foregrounded, included or excluded according to which narrative it is desirable to tell.

Multiple and Personal Histories:

Alongside this undercutting of official history therefore lies the idea that all history is subjective and fluid. It is not just that a particular narrative of history implicitly has its own agenda and omits that which it does not wish to say or deems unworthy of saying, but also that any narrative of History ignores the fluidity of history, the reality that there are many histories and many stories that can be told and that each story or the plethora of stories alters the identities formed through them. Stuart Hall maintains that ‘identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’ (225). What is significant here is that it is not only how the past positions us that creates our identity, but the ways in which we choose to position ourselves. History can therefore be undercut or reshaped to fit the desired identity. Hall highlights that history is not static or fixed but rather a construction, a narrative, and therefore can be as fluid as

any other narrative. Accordingly '[c]ultural identities are the unstable points of identification... which are made, within the discourses of history and culture' (226) and, in being bound by the unstable narratives of history and culture, identity can be fluid and changeable. We see this in the multiple presentations of events and the multiple narratives that are common in the female coming of age genre in the Caribbean, as previously discussed in Chapter Two. The choice of the multiple over the singular emphasises the potential for many stories, many histories and the flexibility rather than rigidity of the past. The authors discussed use stories to make sense of the past but always by widening the potential of that history rather than by limiting it. Donna Perry notes the importance of replacing History with stories - 'stories become a way to rewrite the history of an oppressed people' (249) - not only by speaking the unspoken but, I would argue, by replacing the fixity of History with the fluidity of (hi)stories. It is not just female Caribbean writers who enact this shift - Patrick Chamosieau's *Texaco* for example is an extensive engagement with the replacing of History with histories - however, the female authors discussed here consistently present multiple histories in place of a singular fixed narrative, as part of the coming of age process. The production of a hybrid identity it seems lies in the multiplicity of stories told, or perhaps in the telling. García's *Dreaming in Cuban* for example, presents all the constructions of Cuban history and personal family history as equally valid despite their contradictions, much as Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* gives equal weight to multiple remembrances of the past despite their differences. In García's text we are also forced to confront the malleability of history, the flexibility of it, its connection to memory and its unstable relationship with truth. We are told how Lourdes alters history to suit her needs (177), a similar phenomenon as that enacted by Laura in Alvarez's text. We are also told, however,

that 'telling her own truth is' for Lourdes '*the truth*' (177), encapsulating the fact that history is a narrative - choices are made about what to say and how to say it - but also that history and truth are personal and subjective. Lourdes tells her history, her truth and as the text continues we realise that each character is telling their truth, that there is no distinction between them; they are all true. The text places memory and stories at the heart of the text and so solidifies their importance in the construction of a history, whether personal or collective. Similarly Cliff highlights the importance of multiple histories, never singular history. In *Abeng* we have several histories both official and unofficial at play between Clare's own narrative, and in *No Telephone to Heaven* we have multiple personal histories played out together, primarily Clare and Christopher but also Harry/Harriet; a triad of stories that only meet and merge briefly in the text. The novel also gives us Kitty's voice, her recollections of her mother and her childhood. These multiple voices and individual histories combine to form the presentation of the past in the text but no single history is privileged.

These coming of age novels not only highlight the importance of having multiple narratives from which to garner information and construct a self but also the intertwined nature of personal and public histories. Radhakrishan claims that '[a]mong the many selves that constitute one's identity, there exists a relationship of unevenness and asymmetry since each of these selves stems from a history that is transcendent of individual intentionality.' (754). This seems to imply that history is not constructed through individual intention but via communal agreement: the individual positions him/herself with or against a history that exists outside of the self. This is something that the texts I discuss counter by highlighting the personal nature of history, how all history can be told only through the subjective lens of individual effects and experiences. Lourdes', Felicia's and Celia's histories of the revolution for

example would all be very different. Lourdes would see the revolution through the lens of the pain it has caused her, Celia would view it through the comfort it has given her and the hope she associates with it, while Felicia's history of the revolution might focus on her time spent in a rehabilitation guerrilla training camp. David Mitchell also argues that the 'the submerged text informing and structuring national life is that of the familial' so that the narrative of nationalism 'becomes more of a "public" excuse for acting out familial strife' (53-54). The nation is subsumed by and in service of the personal. Alvarez's García girls have childhoods rooted in the terror of the Trujillo dictatorship but this is never removed from the personal consequences and perspectives on those events. For example, in the episode where the family's home is searched and they are questioned by the police (198) the reality of the political situation, which in another text might have lingered on the events and actions of Trujillo's dictatorship, in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* never strays from the personal consequences of that political, historical period: the girls' confusion, their mother's fear, the family's subsequent need to migrate and even the guardia's 'ashamed and cornered' reaction in the face of 'these strange white people' (214). The personal realities of the historical moment are brought to the forefront. As Pilar's cousins remark in *Dreaming in Cuban* 'families are essentially political' (86), in other words the personal is always political and what Alvarez and the other authors demonstrate is that the inverse is also true, the political is always personal. Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* more closely deals with this theme, taking historical figures and re-creating their fictional personal lives, making them people as much as historical agents. In the course of writing the novel Alvarez admits: 'I believed that only by making them real, alive, could I make them mean anything to the rest of us' (*Something to Declare*, 203). Only in the personal could the historical impact of the

Mirabal sisters be understood, could their historical actions 'mean anything'.

Similarly Danticat's *Dew Breaker* and *Farming of Bones*, though not coming of age novels, take historical events, the 1937 Massacre and the real life of torturer Emmanuel Constant and create fictional representations that highlight the personal tragedies and lives that are omitted from a political/national history. This same personalising of history occurs in her coming of age novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, where national history is a backdrop for events, alluded to - as with the mention of the Tonton Macoutes - but never explicitly developed whilst the consequences of that history - for example the trauma faced by Martine due to the Tonton Macoutes - are the focus of the text. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, as the other texts discussed, places the personal ahead of the public history. Danticat explicitly states that she tries to 'aim at nuance', to look at the grey areas, move away from the general and 'bring people closer to individual experiences' (Mirabal, 33). For Sophie, as for Danticat, it is the personal that is pre-eminent. History frames the narrative but the silences Sophie wants to unearth are the personal ones, a history of the self. As a coming of age narrative the self is central, while political and national history are part of this in their connection to the personal, in how they inform identity formation. Sophie is not a political or historical figure but her personal narrative and that of the women around her is the national narrative writ small. According to Myriam Chancy, Haitian women writers have created a feminine history of the country that 'reflects a political strategy used not only to create a sense of extra-textual intimacy, but also to create a space within the parameters of the genre that redefines national identity in terms of the personal' (6). The focus on feminine histories has already been discussed but it is the redefinition of the national in terms of the personal that is of significance here. The historical does not exist in these texts as separate from the lives of its characters but

rather as intimately constituted by and through the personal. Another example of this would be Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* where Belize's struggle for independence and Beka's coming of age are paralleled, so that the personal and political are intermingled, influence each other and follow similar patterns. In these coming of age novels the idea of an objective, official narrative of History is undercut by the inclusion of previously silenced histories, by the use of multiple histories and also by placing that official history always in the service of subjective personal histories.

Home and history or rather, as I have argued, homes and histories are major elements in the coming of age of the protagonists. They influence the ways in which the characters position themselves in the world and how they see themselves as part of a larger narrative, a personal history or a national identity. These coming of age novels shift the concern of the traditional bildungsroman from the public space to the private and, in their insistence on female histories, alter the ground of the coming of age novel to allow it to speak female experiences of becoming. Caught up in the intersections between multiple discourses the women coming of age in these novels deconstruct traditional ideas of home and history through their hybrid identities and the authors destabilise singular constructions of both themes in their continual decision to place the multiple above the singular. In being plural both the texts and the characters negotiate a middle ground in which to belong, one which makes space for their multiplicity and hybridity and presents that plurality as necessary for an understanding of the complex self.

CONCLUSION: MAPPING A NEW COMING OF AGE

In the introduction to this thesis I asked why the coming of age genre should be so prolific amongst Caribbean women, how they use it and what they use it to say. Over the last four chapters I have discussed answers to the latter two questions and in this conclusion I intend to provide possible answers for the first question. This thesis has shown that the authors I have focused on - as well as the authors of the secondary texts I have mentioned throughout - use, alter, play and engage with this genre to allow the texts to speak their female and Caribbean experiences. I originally posited a similarity of focus and structure that united the coming of age texts by women across the Caribbean despite their distinct languages, cultures and nationalities. In this work I have explored these similarities, identifying themes that span the texts, which regardless of their variations, remain in their essence connections that span the region. In the structure of these texts— their plural and rebellious narratives – and their main concerns – for example, the private domestic space and the mother figure – these texts display their difference from their male counterparts. Even when tackling similar themes – such as history or sexuality – they display a female-centred focus. Across their thematic concerns these texts emphasise fluidity and multiplicity over the linearity and rigidity of their masculine predecessors. The traditional bildungsroman, as previously discussed, maintains a linear and singular approach to the process of becoming. An approach that is usually single-voiced, progressing chronologically through time and resulting in a definitive end point after which the subject, typically male, has entered the wider world of society and has become a fully realised individual. The in-depth, textual analysis of my four main texts clearly expresses how themes and narrative choices link these texts together into a cohesive genre that is

distinct from the male bildungsroman and deserves the term coming of age. The rigid structure of the traditional and male genre is continuously played with and replaced with the fluidity and expansiveness of the coming of age novel. The themes and production of identity common in the traditional male narrative are supplanted by a distinct focus and a formation of identity that revolves around fluidity, hybridity and becoming as a continual process never reaching the fixity of having already become. Thus turning a forward movement to the moment of having become into an ‘endless negotiation of a crossroads’ (Fraiman, x), an infinite series of becomings. In order to focus on the female coming of age they wish to express, the authors gravitate towards different ways of telling their stories.

While the masculine tradition within and outwith the Caribbean is also changing and moving away from the European roots of the bildungsroman there is not the widespread use and reassessment of the genre that appears amongst female writers. Junot Díaz for example, engages with the coming of age genre in both his interconnected short story collection *Drown* and his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Díaz’s use of multiple voices, chronological complexity, shifting perspectives and fragmentation puts him more in line with the female writers discussed here than with his masculine predecessors. This shift in the ways of telling stories is clearly not solely the province of female writers. The claim I would make however is that female writers have adopted and adapted the genre to tell their experiences, and when looked at in their totality a pattern emerges: a gendered approach to coming of age. These texts, in their thematic and structural concerns reject and revolutionise the traditional male narrative, they expand the linear progression of the male quest, be it by European or Caribbean writers, and design a different structure to express their female experience of coming of age. If to write as a

woman is a revolutionary act, as Anzaldúa and bell hooks prominently argue, then to write as women about women, to prioritise the female protagonist and the female coming of age, is to explode the boundaries of the genre. The complexity and multiplicity they provide their protagonists with allows them to go even further than mere revolution. Not only do they deny the male narrative, they also deny that women's identities are formed solely or even primarily in relation to men. Rather than make their narratives a discussion of how men, and patriarchy more generally, influence female coming of age they place the focus on women, the significance of female relationships, female stories and even female control and oppression. This is not to say that the patriarchal authority of society or the nation are not acknowledged, as can be seen most clearly in the discussion of sexuality in Chapter Three and in Chapter Four's discussion of the homeland and national history, but neither are they presented as the opposite side of the gender binary. Instead the emphasis throughout the texts is on the dissolution of binaries. The female is not set up in opposition to the male but rather their identities are formed in a complex web of relationships.

In the course of portraying a distinctly female version of identity production these authors are also presenting a specifically Caribbean identity. In discussing their use of language, their concern with history and locality and in the storytelling and particular narratives evoked throughout the novels it becomes clear that these texts are firmly rooted in the authors' cultural backgrounds: there is a sense of place and specificity that renders them Caribbean novels. Annie Eysturoy makes a similar claim for the Chicana bildungsroman that they 'expand the female quest story by exploring the crucial effects particular ethnic contexts and patterns of economic deprivation have on the female developmental process' (134). In the Caribbean context I would argue that the languages, themes and concerns of these texts when taken together

expand the bildungsroman to allow both a female experience and the multiplicities of a Caribbean experience to be explored. The process of becoming for the women in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, as well as all their counterparts, is unique to their Caribbean context. The genre has been shaped around their difficulties and struggles, their identity negotiations, which are specifically female and Caribbean. In tandem with this there is an exploration of a hybrid identity that emerges throughout the genre. The female identities portrayed are inflected not only by the Caribbean but also by the idea of the Caribbean as a space beyond its geographical boundaries. The novels and characters are involved in a series of movements between cultures, from their nations to North America and Europe, and there is a sense of multiple cultures explored at once. The diaspora and the multiplicity of cultures within the Caribbean become part of the identities being discovered amidst these novels and this hybrid identity emerges as a new and unique consciousness. It is not solely a Caribbean identity on the page but a hybrid Caribbean identity and its construction moves from a source of fracturing and difficulty to a powerful dynamic energy. Just as the binary of male/female dissolves in the multiplicity of the texts so too does the binary of centre/margin become obsolete in these new narratives. The various Caribbean birthplaces of the protagonists become the centre point from which the texts emerge, inflecting the lives of the characters and beyond this the opposition between North America/Europe and the Caribbean is destabilised in favour of a nebulous third space. Both Sophie and Clare move between countries yet return to their homelands, gaining strength from that return, while Yolanda is called across the divide between the United States and the Dominican Republic, belonging and not belonging in both, and Pilar belongs to America more than but crucially not instead of Cuba. From these

interstitial positions the female protagonists tell their stories, become writers like Pilar and Yolanda or storytellers like Sophie or turn the energy of their struggle with in-between-ness into revolution like Clare but this middle space, which is neither side of the binary is the productive space of identity formation. The borderland Anzaldúa posits, and which I have argued fits these texts, is a dynamic and positive space, a hybridity that is not a burden but a source of inspiration and power and which is not a physical space but ‘a new mestiza consciousness... a consciousness of the Borderlands’, a distinct way of thinking about the self (99). The texts discussed here all struggle with that hybrid identity. The coming of age narratives as a genre display their concern not only with a female Caribbean experience but also with the hybrid identity inherent in that experience. Instead of attempting to resolve this hybridity by choosing a side, these protagonists remain in the unresolved negotiation, always in-between, always becoming and they display how that fluid hybridity can remain in that state of becoming, instead of needing to reach a fixed completed selfhood. This is not to say that all protagonists achieve a positive productive sense of their own hybridity. We have only to consider texts like Joan Riley’s *The Unbelonging* to see that this end is not always achieved but even the texts that point to the struggles a hybrid identity can create also offer a map for negotiating that identity. Hyacinth’s method of shoring up her own identity is unsustainable, just as we could argue that Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven* never finds a comfortable fluid hybridity but both texts suggest that choosing one side of the binary can be destructive and in characters such as Harry/Harriet they also suggest that productive hybridity is possible. Taken in conjunction the genre deals with hybrid identity as the reality of these women’s lives, not as a negative or merely chaotic but as a source of potential and possibility. Salman Rushdie’s metaphor of migrant identity as ‘straddling two cultures’ (15) is apt here.

As he posits in that ‘plural and partial’ identity, similar to the hybridity found in these texts, there is the possibility of falling ‘between two stools’ but also of finding fertile ground for the writer (15). The borderland is a difficult but necessary space to inhabit.

If the borderland is fertile space for the characters in the texts then it stands to reason that it would also be so for the authors. This brings us back to the original question, why this genre should be so popular among female writers across the Caribbean. Though there can be no definitive answer to this I would suggest the following possibilities. Throughout my research many texts emerged which could be classified as coming of age narratives from short stories to novels, from Paule Marshall’s 1959 text *Brown Girl, Brownstones* to Maggie Harris’ 2011 *Kiskadee Girl* or even the forthcoming 2013 short story collection by Barbara Jenkins *Sic Transit Wagon and Other Stories* which promotes itself as a coming of age narrative, a wide range of authors from disparate countries who wrote narratives involved in the production of female identity. Of the plethora of coming of age texts by female authors that I collected while researching this thesis, some of which were short stories or more partial explorations, they all charted a female protagonist’s experiences. A few of these authors also had a narrative featuring a male coming of age, for example Christopher in Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* and Olive Senior’s male narrator in her short story ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’, but as a whole they dealt primarily or exclusively with female protagonists. To have so many writers consider the same subject suggests that this narrative allows them space to consider something of significance. To write the female experience of development brings to light the marginalisation of female voices, female concerns and female identity. To write the Caribbean female experience then is to privilege an identity that has hitherto been ignored or deemed less important. Making a space within literature to speak of

women and for women is in itself a significant act. This might explain the primacy of literature surrounding female experience and its continued use to writers from the Caribbean; they are continually reimagining their identities and making space for themselves in the canon of Caribbean literature and in international mainstream literature. It is a vivid statement to say that these women exist and that they are worth writing and reading about. Several authors write multiple coming of age texts indicating that these themes are worth revisiting and analysing under different circumstances. Julia Alvarez for example, wrote *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and then went on to write *In The Time of the Butterflies*, *Before We Were Free* and *Finding Miracles*, all of which are coming of age narratives, though all are distinct. The coming of age narrative not only allows these authors to expand literature to include female experience but the narrative formation also allows for an exploration of exactly what it means to be female and from the Caribbean. It is not simply women's narratives but the focus on female developmental narratives that is useful. The trajectory of the coming of age narrative, more than other genres, allows for the progress of selfhood and in altering it to meet the needs of female, hybrid Caribbean selfhood that trajectory remains necessary. In the course of the texts the protagonists and the authors are mapping out their identities, their selfhoods and in doing so making a claim for that identity, that it is significant, worthy of literature and that it might provide maps for others. It seems meaningful that these authors choose to pattern their texts on their own experiences, making the majority of the texts semi-autobiographical. Lacan speaks of the mirror-stage of child development where the child sees itself for the first time in the mirror and recognises its selfhood. What occurs however if there is no metaphorical mirror to turn to, no literary space which reflects and acknowledges the self? This is precisely what these coming of age texts

work towards; in mapping out their various processes of becoming they are holding up a mirror to a female Caribbean hybrid identity and reflecting it back into the world. The text becomes a mirror that reflects a specific selfhood or journey of selfhood, and which provides both guide and comfort to those undertaking similar journeys. Perhaps this is why they are so popular as a genre, they allow authors to express their own journeys and selves, to write and understand themselves, and also allow them to provide the guidelines they might have wanted or which might help others. This genre's popularity and longevity depends upon its openness, its function to map out journeys that are significant, symbolically and nationally but also individually as legitimising themselves and their concerns as Caribbean, hybrid women. When reading Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera* in all its linguistic complexity I came to realise for the first time that my own native code-switching speech pattern was not illegitimate or wrong but worthy of literature, poetry and discussion. This helped me to construct my identity, to fit myself into my skin more comfortably and I would argue that these texts and this genre are providing a similar function for hybrid individuals. They create a mirror or map for hybrid females, a pattern that shows they are worthy of literature, that others have gone before them and that allows the authors to work through their own hybridity and perhaps find their homes 'on paper' as Alvarez has suggested she has done (*Something to Declare*, 175). Alvarez also speaks of this moment of self-recognition, how her writer's voice was influenced by the male canon but the voice she heard when she listened to herself 'was the voice of a woman, sitting in her kitchen, gossiping with a friend over a cup of coffee...I had, however, never seen voices like that in print. So, I didn't know poems could be written in those voices, my voice' (*Something to Declare*, 160-161). It was only once she wrote with those voices that her poetry flowed and I would argue that her coming of age novel

serves the same function for others, a way of legitimising those myriad female voices, allowing other hybrid women to see themselves in print. In a similar vein Danticat admits that she is writing towards a specific end: ‘When I write, I think of the girl I was when I was fifteen. I write what she would have liked to read’ (Alexandre and Howard ,127). She is writing for those ‘young Haitian-American women who are looking for images of themselves in English’ (Alexandre and Howard, 127). In doing so she is providing that mirror to reflect their identities and that map for their own lives, while making their experiences and concerns valid. It might explain why several of the main authors also write young adult fiction that deals with similar themes of female identity, hybridity and belonging. Julia Alvarez for example, thirteen years after writing *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, which closely follows her own family history, wrote *Finding Miracles*, centred around a Dominican-American teenager and written more directly for a young adult audience. Cristina García’s novel *I Wanna Be Your Shoebox* and Edwidge Danticat’s *Anacaona: Golden Flower* similarly follow young women and engage with similar themes to the novels discussed in this thesis but are written more specifically for young adult readers. This pattern of numerous coming of age tales and young adult novels seems to indicate that the authors mentioned are not only writing the stories of themselves but also attempting to map out these processes of becoming for others like themselves.

The persistence and pervasiveness of the genre across generations, across countries and cultures demonstrates that the identity formation produced is relevant and significant to Caribbean women, to the writers and readers, that it provides something new and distinct from what had been previously available. The importance of having narratives that display their specific reality and consciousness cannot be ignored. These authors when taken together map out an identity which had been

marginalised or ignored and make it legitimate and significant. Toni Morrison linked the idea of creation and narrative very poetically in her Nobel Lecture in 1993:

Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a surgeon's hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly – once and for all. Passion is never enough; neither is skill. But try. (52).

These evocations of narrative as surgery and a forging fire seem apt alongside the implication that narrative creates that which it narrates. Stories create and heal and as such are necessary acts. Like Anzaldúa 'carving bone' with her writing 'creating [her] own face, [her] own heart' (*Borderlands*, 95), the narrative act of creation is neither painless nor easy but, as these texts display, it is essential. As Morrison and Anzaldúa state it is the creation of self, in all its bodily complexity, which is occurring through the powerful and creative act of narration. For, as Anzaldúa notes, '[n]othing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads' (*Borderlands*, 109). In producing these texts the authors are not just writing themselves but writing for others like themselves as well as for those who had never considered them. They are creating an identity for themselves, carving their own faces, suturing their own wounds and they are also creating a reality in which they can exist. If all identity is performative, as Butler posits, then narrating an identity performs it to the audience. Butler also reminds us that 'I cannot persist without norms of recognition that support my persistence: the sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can imagine myself' (*Undoing Gender*, 32). The self cannot exist outside the social norms of the world and in order to be able to imagine the self there must be recognition of that self in the world. If we are 'not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable' then, Butler argues 'we

have been foreclosed from possibility' (*Undoing Gender*, 31). While Butler is relating specifically to the changing norms of society it cannot be ignored that literature contributes towards the creation of such norms. Narrative allows us to imagine the possibilities of the self and to recognise others. Those whose identities do not fit with the norm are unlikely to be able to recognise themselves in canonical narratives of personhood and so are forced to create new narratives. As Michelle Wright reminds us 'a fiction is just as powerful as any reality when you can compel enough people to believe in it and act on it' (64). If fiction is powerful enough to shape reality and reality is always shifting then it stands to reason that having been unable to find themselves in the narratives of the past these female Caribbean writers have created new narratives to support and express their own sense of self, to create a new norm for their specific realities.

An interesting area for further study is the way in which the identities presented and created within the novels are contrasted or supported by the packaged identity of the texts as material objects. For example, in the way they are marketed to the public and packaged for consumption by readers, the paratextual elements that influence the reading of the text, such as the design of their jacket covers for different markets and editions, cover images, the blurbs and quotes used, the language used to market them and author photographs and biographies. The Ballantine edition of García's *Dreaming in Cuban* for example has cover art depicting a sensual image of a white Cuban with flowers in her hair and half her face covered, evoking ideas of sexual availability, exoticism and fetishisation. It would be valuable to consider whether the texts are made deliberately exotic, creating difference and sold through that exhibition of otherness. Paratextual elements construct a specific identity for the text and it would be interesting to research how these juxtapose or reveal the

narratives within the books as well as what readership the novels have reached and the context in which they are read. Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* for example is often found on Latin American literature courses placing the text firmly within a specific context while Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was featured in the Oprah Book Club and subsequently included this heavily in its marketing. The paratexts work to create a certain image, a certain identity which is Caribbean or Latin American or Black and which above all is saleable. Does this act of manufacturing identities undermine or reinforce the processes of identity formation that occur in the novels? Does the context in which the books are marketed and read influence the way in which readers approach the protagonists? The manufactured identity of the texts would work in much the same way as a tourist image of the Caribbean is perpetuated, as a way of packaging that specific identity for consumption and would make a fascinating further study especially when taken together with the complex evocations of the tourist gaze within certain novels.

Even without considering this paratextual layer of identity placed over the texts, the identities created within the texts are always complex. They speak to a specific and complicated set of experiences, however they also serve to make connections outside of their particular cultural context. The issues faced by the women in these texts can find echoes across cultural borders while always remaining specific to themselves. Seeing the links between varied texts and calling them a genre is meant to highlight how the identified genre is being put to use, how it is being altered to fit every individual coming of age and how taken as a whole, certain repetitions and leitmotifs become obvious. This is not to deny the particularities of each text or each character's experiences. Genre is always fluid and in this case calling these texts a genre is merely meant to highlight how their similarities might

provide a way of seeing links within the Caribbean, of seeing these texts in concert as a body of literature with a great deal to say about identity formation. Together these texts present a view of female hybrid Caribbean coming of age, all distinct but linked, like Antonio Benítez-Rojo's repeating island, no iterations exactly alike but 'each copy a different one' (9), showing the echoes of each other. These echoes ripple outwards from the literature of this region mapping out the process of becoming and providing new ways to negotiate the borderlands for other women coming of age.

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