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The restoration of subjectivity in the context of duality and struggle in Michelle cliff's: No telephone to heaven

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Abstract--This study claims that colonialism and patriarchy both oppress postcolonial women. Discursive practices that incorrectly depict women as passive victims sometimes obscure the actions of resistance committed by women. Women's subjugation is documented in *Abeng* and *No Telephone To Heaven* by Michelle Cliff to remedy this portrayal of women. Cliff breaks the colonial and patriarchal illusions that make women helpless. According to this idea, the liminal zone is crucial for empowerment and resistance. "Third Space" is a term coined by Homi K. Bhabha to describe an individual's ability to inhabit two distinct universes simultaneously. Migrants like Michelle Cliff can witness and document the oppression and struggle of the colonized from this Third Space. Using postcolonial theory, the paper explains the colonized's fractured and conflicting experiences.

Keywords---colonialism, patriarchy, post-colonialism, struggles.

Introduction

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, a liberated Michelle Cliff documents the protagonist's personal and collective struggle against their tyranny and their search for subjectivity. Clare and Kitty Savage are enslaved by colonialism and patriarchy simultaneously. Clare and Kitty's father, boy, operates as a colonial agent in his efforts to control and integrate his family into the mainstream. He "passes for white," adopts the colonizer's laws, and becomes an oppressor in his own right. The following illustrates the boy's deceit: "He held his tongue, neither agreeing nor objecting. Silent in his mestee/ sambo/ octoroon/ quadroon/ creole skin. They naturally took his silence as acquiescence, believing, against their better

judgment, that there was the son of a plantation owner in their midst-which is how he introduced himself" (NTTH 75).

Blackness and his former existence in Jamaica are the two things that he tries to distance himself from. While the boy tries to sabotage Kitty's "enjoyment" of shopping for ethnic cuisine at the local supermarkets, Kitty refuses to give in. Slavoj Žižek's use of "enjoyment" is how I use it. Ethnic communities' long-term viability, according to him, depends on their capacity to keep their traditions alive. He posits that "a nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices" (NTTH 202). Initiation ceremonies, feasts, prayers, funerals, mating, and other rituals are examples of these behaviors. The "Other" may see these rites as dangerous to a certain group. According to Slavoj Žižek, modern racism is rooted in "a loathing of the special manner. One's own "enjoyment" is a protective barrier when a group or person is under imperialist assault. Kitty experiences liminality in various ways while living in the United States. Because of this, she has the strength to enjoy herself and finally refuse. Despite the boy's displeasure, Kitty goes to the stores where she can get the foods she desires despite his cautions.

She broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice, even as she brushed the loose dirt off the yam-skin, imagining its origins in the bush, stroked the rough green lips where the Cho-cho² split, stuck her finger in the sap where the mango had been joined to the tree, remembering how it could bum and raise a sore. "In these places she was unto herself, speaking to the shopkeepers as if solitary". (NTTH 65)

To convey the sensations she gets from eating indigenous cuisine, and she had to use sexualized words. The absence of maternal separation may be seen in the expression of delight. Kristeva³ refers to this as the semiotic, regulated by body sensations in the non-linguistic, pre-language, subconscious, 'gutfeeling,' but containing strength, power, and durability. Kitty is in this dimension, recognizing that she must adhere to 'enjoyment' to overcome her enslavement. For example, when Kitty gets a premonition that her mother will die, the boy is a foreigner in this non-scientific world. When I heard the dogs howling, "The two women in the room caught each other's glance, the dogs howled on, ignoring the man Boy into silence. He could never understand these things as they did. The man was citified". (NTTH 68).

Kitty's liminal position is heightened, and her separation from the boy and other relatives becomes ever more obvious as she gets cut off from her culture. Given her current state, she has now completely occupied the Third Space, which is vital for resistance. "Boy hemmed and hawed"(NTTH 62). as Kitty's relatives tried to connect with them. Neither my relative nor anyone else from my family ever phoned me again, and no one ever invited me back to Queens to eat curried chicken and rice with my relatives or play mento four on my electric guitars with my cousins In this way, another link to Kitty's country is broken, increasing the liminal distance between the top and lower stairwells. As they drift apart socially, their sexual chemistry deteriorates as well. One night, Kitty casually brings up the possibility of a divorce: "Busha, is may be time we cut the cotta ... what you

think? She broke the silence addressing him as overseer with reference to divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors". (NTTH 82).

Kitty's neighbors have complained about the strong, disagreeable scent of Kitty's meals, which adds to the tyranny she faces inside the walls of her apartment. This, according to Zizek, is an effort to take Kitty's delight. She uses 'Air-Wick' to try to mask the stench, but it doesn't work "This was something new again. Like sticking a thick white plug into yourself, instead of letting the blood flow onto a cotton cloth washed in sweet water and bleached in the sun" (NTTH 65). Using the air-wick as a metaphor for migrants' liminal suffering in a new country is important because it refers to their struggle to re-create and sustain a sense of identity and happiness in a new place.

While at work, Kitty is subjected to a daily barrage of banal, repetitive duties with no apparent purpose. "Unemployment" is how Cliff defines her situation. "She did clerical work, of which there was little, catching water from the tap in the basin in the one washroom to make coffee in a stained percolator for the boss, fetching him doughnuts from the bakery two blocks away, dusting the confectioner's sugar from the desk where it settled like a pale pollen". (NTTH 72). To keep Kitty busy, her employer has given her the responsibility of giving laundry tips to customers. As a substitute, she sends out strong political messages to the White consumers, encouraging them to purge their hearts of prejudice and hate. Throughout the novel, Kitty's liminal position becomes more apparent, and she finds her voice in these forceful messages that lead her to her final emancipation, as she lives in between the first and third worlds. As a result of her act of resistance, she subsequently decides to return to Jamaica with her light-skinned daughter and leave her husband in the United States.

Michelle Cliff's life is mirrored in the lives of bi-racial immigrant Clare Savage. Clare's quest for her actual identity and native country comes to a head in *No Telephone To Heaven*. Boy and Kitty, her parents, are also bi-racial and cope with their liminality in various ways. Kitty returns to Jamaica, where she was born and raised, while the boy seeks to "pass for White." Clare's oppression stems from her divided identity and her father's adoption of an American "homeplace" that she refuses to accept. Her liminality is a tangled web. However, even though she is bi-racial, she prefers to identify and recognize solely with her African-American heritage. In addition, she maintains a mental presence in both the United States and Jamaica, where she was born and raised. Her sexuality adds another layer of complication since her parents, who are middle-class Jamaicans, would not tolerate her having a gay daughter. As it turns out, the Jamaican population is notoriously homophobic. Because of this, she cannot satisfy her sexual appetite for both men and women at the same time. Due to her ability to straddle the line between standard heterosexuality and homosexuality, she has a more ambiguous sexual orientation than others. I believe her knowledge of both worlds gives her a distinct advantage.

Because of her fair complexion, Clare had some social advantages in her native Jamaica. However, when she moves to New York, she finds that she has been "redefined as black and unprivileged." (Agosto 115). When Clare's father attempts to pass her off as White, the high school principal points out that "there is no

place for in-betweens" (NTTH 99). Clare rejects her father and his instructions due to her embarrassing interaction with the principal "on concealment and secrecy Self-effacement. Using camouflage in various ways" (NTTH 100). Clare's opposition takes the shape of a condemnation of the "white, imperial, patriarchal authority her father represents" (Moynagh 117).

This condemnation, along with a letter from Clare's mother encouraging her to "never forget who your people are" (NTTH 103), drives Clare closer to self-acceptance and resistance. Split between the realms of remembering and forgetting, she eventually goes to Jamaica, where she joins a militant, revolutionary gang attempting to disrupt the recording of the Maroons' history. Historical truths are predicted to be distorted and glamorized in the film. Both optimism and pessimism are represented in this actual and symbolic voyage to oppose and assert subjectivity, with the persistent reminder of the novel "*No Telephone To Heaven*." Heaven implies hope, joy, and endless life, yet not having a phone denotes a detachment from heaven. As a result, the vehicle signifies restricted access to endless life. We are not shocked when the protagonists arrive at the grandmother's estate but perish before completing their goal.

The revolutionaries' coordinated effort to destroy the film making is foiled, and Clare is killed in the conflict. Cliff may be referring to the futility of seeking to recover an accurate account of the past while it remains controlled, managed, and, to some measure, owned by colonists who discover new methods to enslave the population. The failure of the revolution does not imply Clare's failure, for, in the end, she finds peace and a "homeplace" on her mother's farm. She overcomes the liminal gap in death. Indeed, there are further hints of resistance and success when the woodland comes alive with birds chattering shortly after Clare's death, and the narrative concludes with the words "Day Broke." Christopher's resistance takes on a more aggressive tone as he struggles to become a human. He is portrayed as the personification of poverty in Jamaica, condemned to a life of hopelessness, humiliation, and exploitation. He was brought up in a shanty in the ghetto with his grandmother as a youngster, and his life is traced back to that time. He "squirmed across mountains of garbage" (NTTH 32). At the age of eight, Christopher is more alienated from his already disadvantaged group after the death of his grandma. In the end, Mas Charles, a member of the planter class, steps in to save him and gives him a job doing odd jobs around his sister's home.

Even though Christopher is neither bi-racial nor bisexual, he can learn about his grandmother's "duppy" in physical and spiritual worlds. When labeled as an atheist by his pastor, he is only seven years old, "The Jesus who has come to us is one of us. This is the genuine Jesus... this is the authentic Jesus. Look at him, and he's got my children in his sights! Look at the resemblance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (NTTH 36). The church members shook their heads and wondered as the pastor bowed down to worship the deformed, abject and objectified Christopher. "I don't see how he could refer to himself as Jesus Black. Cyan will have much fun" (NTTH 36). As The pastor anoints Christopher, he is referred to as a "now bwai, and you have blessed as Christ-bearer" (NTTH 39). "liminal" area between heaven and hell, reality and fantasy, God and man, death, and life, Christopher inhabits.

Rather than depicting strength and power, his black, disfigured physique mimics that of a mistreated girl. As a woman, he has access to the illogical and spiritual realms. Christopher's liminality is both powerful and damaging since he inhabits a realm that is both real and imagined at the same time. Christopher remains fractured and divorced from reality after his journey through this unconventional realm. A representative of the White class, Mas Charles, is asked by Christopher whether he can provide a small plot of land so that his grandmother might be properly laid to rest in his fictional world. As a result of Christopher's long-standing ties to the family, Charles is enraged by his entrance, calling him a "stupid bwai" and a "true jackass," among other things (NTTH 47). "You completely out of order ... now get your damn self out of my house!" is the next insult. Forty-seven, Christopher must act swiftly and forcefully to transform from an object to a subject. He'll have to go up the stairway immediately. Paulo Freire's words, "Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons-not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized" (Freire 55).

Christopher then proceeds to murder Charles and his whole family with a hacksaw brutally. Her deceased employer Christopher is comforted by Mavis's words of support. "He punished her in a terrible way, exacting not just silence but obliteration, and he could not have said why. He cut her like an animal, torturing her body in a way he had tortured theirs" (NTTH 48). Freire's claim that "The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited within his bones against his own people" may be an example of horizontal violence (NTTH 62). Despite her hatred of her race, class, and position as a maid in the household, Mavis strives for Whiteness in her words and deeds. She tries to admonish Christopher for killing her oppressors, forgetting her exploitation as a maid. The colonized are also unwitting colonists, highlighting the complexities of the colonial position. Christopher must eliminate Mavis to release himself fully. Christopher represents their collective manifestation of resistance for the oppressed class, and hence his actions must be regarded as a collective statement.

In the same way, Charles and his family represent the repressive nature of the plantation class. No matter how much Cliff may oppose or condone Christopher's actions, his continued freedom implies that he is not guilty as a person. In his performance, he's making a political statement about the possibility of the underclass rising and freeing them from tyranny. Freire says that "the oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. To retain their humanity, they must cease to be things and fight as men and women" (NTTH 68). Instead of peeing on himself, Christopher pisses on the kitchen wall, and he leaves via the front door for the first time in his life. Then, possibly as a symbol of repentance, "he went around the side of the house to wash their blood into the swimming pool, the chlorine bleaching his khaki free of stain" (NTTH 49). Later, we see him playing the roles of watchman and forest god, proclaiming himself as "neger Christ . Shadow-catcher. Duppy conqueror. I am the beginning and the end. The bright and morning star" (NTTH 179). Liberation is a condition in which someone seems to be separated from reality. After the story, Christopher seems to have transcended both mortality and morality. Sasabonsam, the woodland deity who can defeat any foe, transforms him after his

release from prison. He is told to do so by the film producer "Loudly and repeatedly: "Howl! Howl! I want you to bellow as loud as you can. Try to wake the dead...Remember, you're not human". (NTTH 207).

Christopher's Christ-like characteristics are evident in his voice, and the narrator adds that "Sasabonsam did not let up in the pitch dark. Had his noise extinguished light?" (NTTH 207.) Christopher is a re-defined 'thing' as a person, object, now subject. Cliff allows the oppressed, Neger Christ, to conduct resistance, and she wants readers to understand why Christopher had to resort to violence to assert his subjectivity, as she said in an interview with Opal Palmer Adisa. Harry/Harriet represents the shattered, raped, and mistreated in Jamaica. They show the duality of Jamaican culture that, strangely, knows what it is to be oppressed and controlled while continuing to marginalize and oppress others. Cliff points out that "to be colonized rendered insensitive" (Aegerter 17). The narrator remarks that "had they known about Harriet, they would have indulged in elaborate name-calling, possibly stoning, in the end harrying her to the harbor" (NTTH 171). At that touristy club, Harriet draws attention to her lack of safety by stating that she feels more at ease there than in a "rum shop in Matilda's Corner" (Cliff 121). Among the locals, they would stand out as unusual, as gay "inviting an attack" in the rum store. According to Freire, "the oppressed, in their struggle for freedom, tend to become oppressors or "sub-oppressors." Their ambition is to be men, yet being men means being oppressors to them" (NTTH 45). People like Harry/Harriet become the Other in this manner, and as Zizek argues, "we always impute to the other an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life), and he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment." However what worries us about the "other" is the unique way he arranges his pleasure, namely the surplus, the "excess" that is associated with that style: "their strange manners." (NTTH 203).

Through their tyranny and suffering outside of society, Harry/Harriet acquires crucial wisdom that other prominent characters may lack. He/she rejects her oppression by researching conventional and non-traditional healing procedures that symbolically heal both them and the people in their community. It is hinted that Harry/medication Harriet might also help persons who have been emotionally and sexually abused due to a restrictive culture. This is seen by the way Harry/Harriet assists Clare in discovering and understanding herself. Farah Griffin claims in "Textual Healing" that "various sexual, maternal, and spiritual acts" may lead to the reclaiming and healing of Black female bodies (NTTH 6). "For Cliff," she writes, "These acts are a fundamental component of black, female resistance to their oppression" (NTTH 6).

I contend that Clare and Harry/Harriet discover the power to resist and reach completeness via their acts of intimacy. After being raped at the age of ten, Harry/Harriet no longer lingers on the fact that an officer at Up Park Camp split his "asshole." Instead, he acknowledges that he just went through what his mother and all other slave women did. Cliff depicts Harry/Harriet as the complete figure since he understands male and female bodies. They even assist Clare in revealing and accepting her sexuality. After kissing and exploring each other's bodies, Clare has an epiphany and declares, "we are neither one thing nor the other" (NTTH 131). This astonishing understanding of their liminality is the

tipping point that propels them to claim their shattered identities. In response to Clare's enlightenment, Harry/Harriet says, "The moment will come for both of us to decide. Cyaan has a live split. No way in this world" (131). In the end, Harry/Harriet understands that it is possible to "live split," and he finds completeness in his shattered personality. Harry/Harriet is liminal in every aspect, neither black nor white, heterosexual nor gay. There is no simple place for such a fragmented personality in a homophobic Jamaica, but this character's success depends on their capacity to transcend these constraints to become complete. He/she accepts her/his hybridity and sexuality and is not scared to express her splintered self. Her greatest act of resistance is her determination to be both Harry and Harriet, to not choose one state over the other. She wears her penis beneath her skirt as Harriet, implying that identity and sexuality are continuously disputed. Harry/Harriet, to use Bhabha's phrase, avoids the politics of polarity inside her liminal realm.

Michelle Cliff alters the balance of power in favor of repressed females and the underclass by portraying these liminal characters as strong and effective agents of resistance and change. She also believes that the liminal area is essential for resistance. Cliff becomes more tolerant of her liminality, allowing her to enter new realms and successfully practice discursive resistance methods. However, in *No Telephone To Heaven*, she is liberated from her ignorance and discovers completeness by realizing and embracing her fragmentation. Michelle Cliff uses her liminality to uncover and expose the myriad ways of how colonialism and patriarchy work together to oppress Caribbean women and men. Michelle Cliff carefully juxtaposes a counter-narrative of resistance with Caribbean people's subordination, dominance, and oppression. Additionally, Cliff can see and document the oppression and struggle of Caribbean people from a different perspective because of her migrant situation. Homi Bhabha refers to this as the "Third Space" Michelle Cliff's work liberates her and serves as a reminder to the Caribbean people to keep up their resistance to injustice in all its forms.

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