

**FEMALE BONDING AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN  
THE FEMALE CARIBBEAN *BILDUNGSROMAN***

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## SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of selected female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* by Jamaica Kincaid, Zee Edgell, Merle Hodge and Michelle Cliff, exploring how gender relationships in terms of female bonding play an important role in the female protagonists' development and identity formation in the colonial Caribbean context. I argue that in the complex Caribbean social conditions under colonialism, the young female protagonists' identity formation is dependent on female bonding. In view of the impact of colonialism, female bonding may be positive and powerful, or negative and disempowering. Thus, female bonding does not necessarily ensure the young female protagonists a coherent and well-adjusted identity. Nevertheless, the young female protagonists of these novels still endeavor to mature and understand their selves and the world through negotiating relationships with other females.

Chapter One gives a concise overview of the development of the *Bildungsroman* genre from its birth in eighteenth-century Germany and its prevalence in nineteenth-century Europe to its continuation and adaptation in the twentieth-century Caribbean, exploring the Caribbean adoption and reworking of the *Bildungsroman* and the subject of female bonding. Chapter Two examines Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, showing that identity formation is possible for the two female protagonists because they are able to achieve autonomy through negotiating relationships with other females. Female bonding plays a positive and effective role in the protagonists' development. Chapter Three discusses Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack*,

*Monkey* and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, illustrating that the protagonists fail to achieve a unified identity because female bonding is jeopardized by the social stratification of race and class resulting from colonialism. The impact of colonialism is greatly felt by the female protagonists when they are not nurtured by the female community to form viable identities.

By analyzing the two chapters with contrasting results concerning identity formation, this study demonstrates how female bonding makes available a female community that plays a vital part in young women's development and identity formation. Nevertheless, as the differing results show, female bonding may have only limited efficacy given the deep social divisions foisted on the Caribbean context by colonialism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction: Caribbean Rewriting of the European *Bildungsroman***

The *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre has never faded even though its “golden age” in the nineteenth century has long been past. Known for its early characteristics of being European, male and bourgeois, the *Bildungsroman* has undergone transformations with the radical changes in human society and its employers in different periods. Since the late twentieth century, new cultural, social and gender codes have been put into the construction of the novels of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Colored women writers subvert the traditional markers of the *Bildungsroman* in its being white, male and bourgeois. They employ the traditional *Bildungsroman* form to portray the development of black, female and oppressed or colonized subjects. As a result, when speaking about the modern *Bildungsroman*, we will no longer consider it a biased genre which only applies to the experience of a certain group of people. Today the *Bildungsroman* embodies the development experiences of males and females, whites and coloreds, European and other persons worldwide. In this study, I explore, in the late twentieth century, Caribbean women writers who adopt and rework the traditional *Bildungsroman* form to present different stories of young women’s growing up and their identity formation in the colonial Caribbean context.

The *Bildungsroman* is defined as “the novel of education” or “the novel of formation,” which traces the development of the protagonist’s mind and character

from childhood into maturity through varied experiences of spiritual and moral crises. It also involves the protagonist's recognition of his identity and role in the world (Abrams 193). Many scholars have expressed their interest in the *Bildungsroman* by writing books or essays to discuss the genre. According to Marc Redfield, the *Bildungsroman* is frequently "borrowed" because the word itself connotes representation (*Bild*) and formation (*Bildung*), which engenders a homology between "the education of the subject" and "the figuration of the text" (38-39). Franco Moretti defines the *Bildungsroman* as "the 'symbolic form' of modernity." He notes that the *Bildungsroman* has epitomized the features of youth in mobility and interiority. As a form of modernity, the *Bildungsroman* conveys "youthful attributes of mobility and inner restlessness" (5). M. M. Bakhtin also gives us a definition of the *Bildungsroman* in his unfinished essay "*The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism*" (1986). He categorizes the *Bildungsroman* as one of the subcategories of novel genre that is classified by the construction of the image of its main hero. He defines the *Bildungsroman* as "novel of emergence," which thematically provides an image of "man in the process of becoming" (19).

The origin of the *Bildungsroman* can be traced back to eighteenth-century Germany. With its prevalence in and outside Germany, the *Bildungsroman* form developed three subcategories: the *Entwicklungsroman*, the *Erziehungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman*, which emphasized different aspects of a young man's growth.<sup>1</sup> In a broad sense, the *Bildungsroman* encompasses these three subcategories. Therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bildungsroman>. An *Entwicklungsroman* is a story of general growth rather than self-culture; an *Erziehungsroman* focuses on training and formal education; and a *Künstlerroman* is about the development of an artist.



protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* can be of various types, be it picaresque or artistic, so long as he seeks self-cultivation and self-integration.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1777-1829) symbolizes the birth of the *Bildungsroman* and is generally considered the prototype of the genre. Goethe's hero strives for self-realization through art, demonstrating the idealist tradition of the Enlightenment, which assumes individual achievement and social integration (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 5). Goethe, along with other German novelists such as Christoph Martin Wieland, Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt, popularized the *Bildungsroman* novel form in nineteenth-century Germany. Outside Germany, writers in France and England adopted the form and made it "realize its full potential as a pragmatic ideological discourse" (Castle 13). From the Victorian period to the early part of the twentieth century, English writers produced a large number of novels that picture the protagonist's development in various ways: *Emma* (1816), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Great Expectations* (1861), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *Of Human Bondage* (1915) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). These novels expand the *Bildungsroman* genre, exhibiting that individual development involves not only achievement and integration but also conflict and rebellion. However, the English *Bildungsroman* demonstrates the characteristics of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: the use of autobiographical form, an orphaned or fatherless protagonist, formal or informal education, leaving home for initiation and an end in death or a happy marriage. Usually, the ending of the novel signifies the completion of

the protagonist's initiation. He has reappraised his values through "painful soul-searching" and is able to integrate into the modern world (Buckley 17-18). This does not mean that these characteristics are included in every novel of development. They are partially applied by the successors of the English *Bildungsroman* in the later periods.

Among the traditional *Bildungsroman*, a majority of the works inscribe the linear progress of a male character's development, while few works focus on a female character's development, which makes the traditional *Bildungsroman* male-biased. Compared to the nineteenth century, the twentieth century saw a boom in the novels of female development by women writers. Recent studies of the genre begin to notice the novel of a young woman's development, namely, the female *Bildungsroman*. The examination of the female *Bildungsroman*, as Lorna Ellis states, will lead to "a more complex understanding of the genre as a whole and of the historical circumstances that produce it" (15). Therefore, the study of the female *Bildungsroman* is of great importance to the development of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre. This thesis contributes to the study of the female *Bildungsroman* and to the understanding of the genre's development in the late twentieth century.

At this point in my introduction, I would like to review three critical works on the study of the *Bildungsroman*, which together present a scope that spans the traditional European *Bildungsroman* to the modern twentieth-century female and black *Bildungsroman*. As an early critical work on the *Bildungsroman*, Jerome Buckley's *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) is an influential

work and is perhaps the most frequently cited work in the study of the Anglophonic *Bildungsroman*. Buckley analyzes in depth the characteristics of the classical *Bildungsroman* such as having a protagonist who leaves the provincial home for the city, and who achieves success in his profession and life. Buckley's discussion of these generalized themes exhibits typical Victorian values. However, he fails to examine the issues of gender, class and racial differences, which limits his analysis of the genre with a broad vision. Some critics consider that Buckley's work demonstrates "heavy reliance on bourgeois, patriarchal hegemony" (Wojcik-Andres qtd. in Feng 5) and his definition "blatantly upholds the idea of the bourgeois *status quo* and supports the reproduction of existing social structures and values in relation to class, gender, and race" (Feng 5). Thus, Buckley's outline of the "typical *Bildungsroman* plot" (17) does not apply to the contemporary *Bildungsroman* by women of color.

The traditional account of the *Bildungsroman* such as Buckley's focuses primarily on male protagonists by male writers. It is only upon the publication of *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* in 1983 that the female *Bildungsroman* was singled out where it elicited more critical attention. This collection of essays provides a good account of the fictional representation of female development. Differing from the previous critical works which still focused on the male *Bildungsroman*, *The Voyage In* examines female versions of the *Bildungsroman* by integrating gender with genre. The essays in this collection delineate novels from nineteenth-century Europe to twentieth-century America, expanding and modifying the notion of development. Nevertheless, even with coverage of works of both white and

black women writers, this collection fails to address the issues of racial and cultural differences between these writers and the different growing up experiences of their protagonists (Feng 13).

Geta LeSeur's *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman* (1995) focuses on fiction by black writers in the United States and the Caribbean. LeSeur divides the black *Bildungsroman* along the culture and gender lines of the African American and the African West Indian, of males and females. She analyzes the childhood experience of a people with a common slave history and the creative adoption of the traditional European *Bildungsroman* by black writers. She also makes comparisons between these writers from the two regions. LeSeur views George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985) as examples of the male and female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. Her book is a good overview of the black *Bildungsroman* as a whole. However, LeSeur fails to develop further her discussion of the *Bildungsroman* in a single culture and gender perspective. In my study of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, which emphasizes a specific region and one gender perspective, I attempt to explore in depth of what the previous studies neglected.

By chronologically reviewing some important critical works on the *Bildungsroman*, we can find that in the late twentieth century the genre exceeds the previous white, male and bourgeois scope. As the earlier instances of the European *Bildungsroman* become classics, the *Bildungsroman* genre experiences a revival in the postcolonial literary world. In the process of decolonization, Caribbean writers

frequently adopt the genre and rework it within the Caribbean context. They exhibit colonial and postcolonial experiences through their young protagonists' development, bringing out the issue of identity formation within a different historical era. The Caribbean *Bildungsroman* aims, as LeSeur states, to "recall childhood roots and to discover the truth about self and home" (1). Often, these authors write about a child "who is born into an isolated community and grows up in a world influenced by European administrators" (2). She states further the characteristics of the Caribbean

*Bildungsroman*:

What happens to these children is the very subtle protest the authors project in their novels. Recent history can be seen through these records of childhood, and history is written into everyone's life. The impact of change, the clash of cultures, and the molding of communities are felt through these fictions . . . Some writers live through multiple childhoods, their own and those of their protagonists. (2)

The elements of history, social changes and cultural clashes are interwoven into the childhood of the Caribbean writers, which are illustrated in their novels of the *Bildungsroman* form.

Male writers are the pioneers of Caribbean literature and, in this regard, they are also the pioneers in the use and adoption of the *Bildungsroman* genre. According to LeSeur's list, the earliest Caribbean *Bildungsroman* is Tom Redcam's *Becka's Buckra Baby* (1903). Nevertheless, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* is widely accepted as the earliest male *Bildungsroman*. Once published, the novel "won immediate international recognition and provided an important boost to the Caribbean novel, then still in its infancy" (Booker and Juraga 12). Michael Anthony is another male writer who is known for his frequent writing about the childhood experience of young boys. Not until 1970 when Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* was published

did the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* appear. Though prior to Hodge, there were novels written by women writers from the region, Caribbean women's literature still remained unnoticed. Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* "initiate[d] a new era in Caribbean women's literature" and "marked the coming-of-age of the Caribbean women's novel" (Booker and Juraga 17). After 1970, many women writers follow in the footsteps of Hodge in having a *Bildungsroman* as the first or one of the most celebrated texts in their oeuvre. The 1980s saw a flourishing of female writers and the female *Bildungsroman* in the Caribbean. Three novels in my study are from this fertile period.

I will now discuss the reasons for the revival of the *Bildungsroman* in the Caribbean. Firstly, identity is a recurrent theme in Caribbean literature. According to J. Michael Dash, Caribbean identity has been an "acute and abiding issue" (785) since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492. Slavery and indentureship produced diverse cultural and social entities. The prolonged periods of colonization compelled the Caribbean societies to be the "other" with respect to the Western forces (785). After Columbus's discovery of the New World, a large number of Africans were transported to the Caribbean and enslaved on the plantations. Exiled from the African motherland, the black slaves who composed a majority of the Caribbean population were rootless in the New World. With the decline of the plantation economy and the abolition of slavery, Indians and Chinese came to the Caribbean as indentured laborers who reinforced the cultural and racial heterogeneity of the region. Modern migration to the European and American metropolis makes the region appear to be unstable and impermanent. As a result, the Caribbean is usually

defined by “its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity; its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism, etc.” Such a portrait of the Caribbean renders a negative profile of the region, which obstructs the global study of Caribbean societies (Benitez-Rojo 109). The Caribbean writers try to excavate and express a sense of identity that originates from a shared culture, history and ancestry. The Caribbean people under colonialism are caught between the colonizer’s European culture and the hybrid culture of the colonized. The search for identity is complex in the Caribbean. As a novel form, the *Bildungsroman* thematically deals with the construction of identity. It is the right form for the Caribbean writers to articulate their earnest quest for viable identities.

Secondly, after World War II, the Caribbean region underwent a process of decolonization. The Caribbean women writers use the *Bildungsroman* form to illustrate this historical period of the region’s development through the young protagonist’s development from childhood to early adulthood. When the genre was first adopted by the Caribbean writers, the Caribbean societies were struggling for national autonomy and independence. The establishment of new nations and the acknowledgement of national identity were more prominent than ever for Caribbean societies. Written shortly after independence, these novels trace the colonial experience of the authors’ childhood and reflect the quest of an individual and the struggle of the society during the process of decolonization. According to Richard F. Patteson, the *Bildungsroman* featuring a young person’s development has become a

vehicle for literature to explore the “difficult passage from colonial dependency to postcolonial autonomy” (8). By adopting the *Bildungsroman* form, the Caribbean writers illustrate that the passage of young women’s growing up and identity formation is intertwined with their societies’ passage of decolonization.

Thirdly, during the process of decolonization, the Western feminist movement as another major social movement which emerged from the 1960s promotes Caribbean women writers’ writing and their adoption of the *Bildungsroman* form. Under the influence of the feminist movement, more women participate in social, economic and political activities, struggling for equal rights to men. In the literature of the 1970s, the *Bildungsroman* became a dominant form for the outpouring of women’s novels (Payant 23). Issues of young women’s development in a patriarchal society are popular concerns of women writers. These social trends contribute to the flourishing of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, in which the young protagonists search for an identity within their complex social environment under colonialism. As Elaine Savory points out, “Since the 1980s, when the women’s movement in the Caribbean became influential and organized, women’s writing in the Caribbean has grown from a trickle to a flood of excellent varied work from both inside and outside the region” (742).

Caribbean literature as a whole has aroused great interest among the critics of postcolonial studies. However, little attention has been paid to the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, especially the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. Emerging relatively later than the male writers’ works, the female *Bildungsroman* by women writers appeared mainly in the 1980s. Under the influence of the social movements of



decolonization and feminism, the female *Bildungsroman* presents a distinct Caribbean experience that is of interest to the world.

How these writers use the European genre of the *Bildungsroman* to express the colonial Caribbean experience is an intriguing and salient issue to be explored. The Caribbean writers received colonial education in their childhood and went to European countries for their university education in their early adulthood. European culture and ideology are introduced by European education and classic literary works. Influenced by famous writers such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, the Caribbean writers are familiar with the European genre of the *Bildungsroman*. Nevertheless, the familiar form of the *Bildungsroman* has its particular traits which seem to differ greatly from the Caribbean experience. To rightly express the growing up experience in the colonial Caribbean context, these writers rework and reconceptualize the genre to accommodate Caribbean characteristics.

As modern representatives of the *Bildungsroman* genre, the novels in my study also embody some characteristics of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. In each novel, there are traces of the writer's own childhood experience, which makes the novel autobiographical or semi-autobiographical; the protagonists go through formal colonial education and informal education which are crucial to their development; and most protagonists choose to leave home.

In what ways does the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* differ from the traditional *Bildungsroman*? To answer this question, we will look at several perspectives. Firstly, the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* and the traditional *Bildungsroman* present different

social norms and life goals of different societies. The traditional *Bildungsroman* is overwhelmingly male, white and middle-class, while the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* is largely female, black and deals with a colonized subject. The traditional *Bildungsroman* focuses on the bourgeois life goal of achieving personal success and celebrates the social values and norms of the Victorian bourgeois class, reinforcing the social order. In contrast, the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* deals with the experience of enduring colonial hegemony and the struggle for identity. The Caribbean *Bildungsroman* presents the life and culture of the colonized Caribbean people and their struggle for freedom and independence. Thus, after a reconceptualization, the European novel form offers the colonized subject a space to imagine a unified identity within the colonized context.

Secondly, the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* differs from the traditional *Bildungsroman* in terms of life journey and the ending. In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the journey of the protagonist starts early and lasts for a longer period, usually from adolescence to the age of earlier twenties or thirties, ending in marriage and having children. The protagonist achieves professional and life success and a unified identity. In contrast, the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* usually depicts the protagonist's growing up from childhood to adolescence or the threshold of adulthood, which is a relatively shorter period of a person's development. As noted above, the protagonist's maturation often represents the country's development. Therefore, having a younger protagonist might suggest the relative infancy of the country in its process towards independence. The individual's quest for identity is more political as

it represents the nation's struggle for national identity and independence.

Thirdly, there is a difference in gender roles. In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the male character goes on a journey away from home when he finds constraints in his home and in his formal education. His direct experience in the city is his real education, which prepares him for a career and social integration (Buckley 17). The female character in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, however, is “generally unable to leave home for an independent life in the city.” Her option is limited to the domestic sphere, which is to consolidate her female nurturing roles of taking care of others (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 8). In the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, the female protagonist is able to leave home like her male counterpart. However, the journey away from home occurs only at the end of the novel when she has gone through a critical stage of development. Male characters like G. in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and female characters like Annie John in *Annie John* and Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey* are able to leave their homes/countries at the end of the novels. Their leaving is an act of migration to the metropolitan or the colonial center. Social integration and domesticity are not their options. They still cannot precisely locate their places in society compared to the protagonists in the traditional *Bildungsroman*.

In addition to the above mentioned differences, the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* exhibits another particular feature that adapts and differs from the traditional *Bildungsroman*. The Caribbean *Bildungsroman* emerges in the process of decolonization, which politicizes the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. This is because in the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, politics is always involved in the

protagonist's life. As Savory states:

Politics is as important in Caribbean women's writing as in the male tradition, but it is complexly made up of intersections of important strands of politics: for the most part working towards decolonization, against racism and poverty, and in terms of developing and protecting Caribbean identities and cultures as much as being concerned with feminism. (743)

In the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, issues of class, race and colonialism complicate young women's development. As the protagonist matures, she is aware of racism and poverty around her. She seeks for a personal identity as a young woman. She is usually concerned about the country's colonial situation. Her development is presented to parallel the country's development. To a certain extent, the young protagonist's search for identity represents her nation's progress towards independence.

In this thesis I would like to explore the issue of female bonding and identity formation in the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* through a close examination of works by four women writers from the region. These writers are Zee Edgell from Belize, Jamaica Kincaid from Antigua, Merle Hodge from Trinidad and Michelle Cliff from Jamaica. Diverse as they are in race, life and writing,<sup>2</sup> the universal experience of childhood on colonial Caribbean islands binds them closely. The four novels, Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982), Kincaid's *Annie John*, Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Cliff's *Abeng* (1984), depict four girls' development from innocent childhood to the stage of complicated puberty, demonstrating the pains of growing up in the Caribbean during the era of colonial domination.

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<sup>2</sup> Of the four writers, Cliff is a light-skinned mulatto, while the other three writers are of Afro-Caribbean origins. Kincaid and Cliff are now settled in the U.S., while Hodge and Edgell remain in their home countries of Trinidad and Belize.

Among the writers I selected, Jamaica Kincaid is arguably the most distinguished woman writer of the Caribbean region. Kincaid's works are frequently reviewed by literary critics, while the lack of study on the other three writers is evident. Similar to Kincaid, however, Edgell, Hodge and Cliff adopt the *Bildungsroman* form and explore the search for identity from a female perspective. As successors of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the four writers also fall into Patteson's category of "the third wave"<sup>3</sup> of West Indian writers. This generation of writers is, as Patteson asserts, "a large and swelling contingent of younger, postindependence writers from all over the West Indies whose novels and stories have been appearing since the early 1970s" (3). Most notably, the majority of writers in this category are female, which changes the male-dominated situation in the Caribbean literary world. Kincaid observes this shift and tells it in an interview, "West-Indian writing until very recently was all men and then, for some reason, it is now mostly women" (Ferguson 164). Many of "the third wave" women writers frequently adopt the *Bildungsroman* literary form to articulate the long-silenced female quest for identity. The appearance of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* not only regenerates the traditional *Bildungsroman*, but also popularizes Caribbean women writers as a new literary force.

By studying these women writers' works, I examine the young female protagonists' development as well as the factors that promote or complicate their identity formation. I argue that in these novels the protagonists' maturation and

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<sup>3</sup> Patteson categorizes three waves of West Indian writing. According to him, the first wave crested before World War II and included artists like Claude McKay and Jean Rhys, as well as the writers of the Trinidad literary "awakening" of the 1930s and 1940s. The second wave came during the quarter century following the end of the war, including writers like V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Michael Anthony and Wilson Harris. He considers the second wave a golden age. Their successors formed the third wave.

identity formation involve a process of negotiating relationships with other females or, to put it another way, female bonding plays a vital part in the protagonists' identity formation.

In approaching the issue of female bonding, I am indebted to critics like Laura Niesen de Abruña and Katherine B. Payant. De Abruña is one of the critics who examines female bonding in women's literature. According to de Abruña, female bonding as a subject of study begins with the publication of Ronnie Scharfman's article "Mirroring and Mothering" in 1981. As she states, "Since then [1981], critics have been inspired to examine female bonding in literature written by women and to analyze the ways women's literature uses images of the mirror and reflection to signify female bonding" ("Ambivalence" 245). Still little has been done on this subject when it comes to the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. When mentioned, it mainly deals with the mother-daughter relationship, or with the grandmother-granddaughter relationship as a tiny part of the discussion.

Katherine B. Payant further explores the notion of female bonding. She notes in her book *Becoming and Bonding: Contemporary Feminism and Popular Fiction by American Women Writers* (1993) that, in the 1980s, bonds between women became a new emphasis for women writers. She gives a comprehensive review of female bonding previously discussed by critics. Moreover, she discusses texts which feature female bonding, including mother-daughter relationships, bonds with other female relatives (mainly sisterly bonding), and friendship between women. I agree with her categorization of female bonding, which is applicable to many women's novels. Since

female bonding is conventionally analyzed through mother-daughter relationships, Payant's interpretation enriches the connotation of female bonding. Hence, Payant's "bonding framework" could be a reference for comprehending the gender relationships in the Caribbean women's novels.

However, it is not feasible to completely adopt Payant's method in the analysis of female bonding in the Caribbean context, because her analysis on female bonding is based on feminism and the influence of the feminist movement on American women writers' novels. In my study, I mainly apply sociological works on the Caribbean region to analyze in detail the phenomenon of female bonding. Although the feminist movement has influenced most parts of the world, it is not as prevalent in the Caribbean as it is in the United States. In my study, Cliff is a feminist writer, whereas the other three writers, Kincaid, Edgell and Hodge, do not agree that they are feminists or their novels are feminist writings. Thus, I would say that it is inadequate to employ feminist ideology as a major means to analyze female bonding in Caribbean women writers' works. Furthermore, in the Caribbean, women's strong bonds can be traced back into history. Even with the change of societies through hundreds of years, women's bonds are not waning. Therefore, sociological studies of the region's family structure, such as Christine Barrow's *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and Perspectives* (1996), can best illustrate female bonding in those women writers' novels.

Also, unlike Payant's perspective of sisterly bonds as bonds between female relatives, I illustrate, in my analysis of the bonds with other female relatives, that

“female relatives” refer to “othermothers” instead of sisters. “Othermothers” are primarily grandmothers, aunts or other women, who assist biological mothers to bring up children. “Othermothers” play an important role in black female communities and “traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (Troester qtd. in Collins 267). This concept is reinforced by Angelita Reyes, who indicates that Among Caribbean, Latin American, and African societies “there has always been the other mother” (14). In my study of female bonding in the Caribbean, “othermothers” share the mothering responsibilities to nurture children. They can be a female bridge between the biological mother and the daughter like those in *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John*, or be substitutes of the biological mother like those in *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Abeng*.

In my research on the Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, I have found that the matrilineal tie is more important than the patrilineal tie in the maturation of children. Psychoanalysis has provided theoretical frameworks for the mother-daughter relationship. Nancy Chodorow is one of the most frequently cited psychoanalysts. Chodorow holds that “in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does” (244). She also points out that all children begin life with a primary identification with the mother, because the mother is the early caregiver (246). However, the mother identifies more with the daughter than with the son, which leads to the daughter’s dependency and femininity and the son’s differentiation and masculinity (248). Therefore, through mutual identification, the mother-daughter relationship is able to be



maintained for a more enduring period. The mother-daughter relationship is prominent in many women writers' works. For example, in the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* highlights the female protagonist's relationship with her mother. The mother-daughter relationship is complex. Each kind of relationship the protagonist develops with other people is related to her love/hate feelings towards her mother. Many critics have applied psychoanalysis to their critical reading of *Annie John*. Kincaid's other works such as *At the Bottom of the River* (1984) and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) also feature the mother-daughter relationship. Her works reflect not only a "maternal fixation" in Caribbean women's fiction (Rody 109), but also the social fact that "[t]he relationship between a mother and child constitutes the core of Caribbean family structure" (Barrow 404). Besides Kincaid, many Caribbean novelists portray the mother-child relationship in their novels. Prior to the boom of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* in the 1980s, male writers such as George Lamming had in his debut novel *In the Castle of My Skin* depicted a harmonious relationship between the male protagonist and his nurturing mother. That is to say, in the Caribbean mothers are fundamental figures in the children's development. As for the novels with female protagonists, the previous scholarship neglects the significance of female protagonists' bonds with other females. This is perhaps one of the major reasons that little critical work has been done on the subject of bonds with female relatives and female friends. To put psychoanalysis aside, the mother-daughter relationship is merely one specific relationship between women. In reality, other forms of female relationship also play a role as important as the

mother-daughter relationship in a young girl's development. In the novels of female development, female bonding that is presented by biological mothers, grandmothers, aunts and friends influences the young protagonists in their development towards maturity and their identity formation. The four novels mainly cover the protagonists' pre-pubertal years, in which love of the opposite sex is not dealt with by the writers and fathers appear to be peripheral. Instead of male figures, female figures – biological mothers, “othermothers” and girlfriends – play significant roles in the protagonists' development. Thus, gender relationships which are characterized by female bonding are my primary focus in analyzing the four novels.

The family structure of the Caribbean is arguably matrifocal, because women play a central role in the domestic domain. The importance of mother figures in the family can be traced back to African culture and slave history. African tradition enables a man to have several wives and each wife has her own hut. Children usually live with their mothers, which results in a close bond between mother and children. Besides, during the slavery period, slaves in the Caribbean were “concentrated on vast plantations” and were able to maintain their African lifestyle and tradition. These historical factors contribute to the familial construction of the Caribbean (Lawrence 4). Also, in traditional African culture women are apt to function as “othermothers” and help the biological mother to nurture children. More often than not, grandmothers or aunts will play the mothering role to help the biological mother. In the Caribbean, the relationship between children and their (maternal) grandmother is also close. The grandmother is often referred to as “Mama” and could function in place of the mother

(Barrow 404). The writers of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* point out that the history of slavery and African ancestry has been erased by the British education. Therefore, it is necessary to recover the lost ancestral link so as to understand the Caribbean present and future, and to recuperate an identity (145). Grandmothers are seen as the bearers of culture. They are important links to the lost African ancestry. Thus, the strong bond between grandmother and grandchild will help the child to recognize her African ancestry, to trace her roots and to establish her identity. In *Annie John* and *Crick Crack, Monkey*, the grandmothers conduct traditional African cultural practices, from which the protagonists get a sense of their roots and identity. In *Beka Lamb* and *Abeng*, the grandmothers also exhibit their preserving of black culture. In these four novels, there are both maternal and paternal grandmothers. Each plays a different role in the protagonist's development. The matrilineal ancestry offers an origin for the protagonists, through which they understand their present selves and find their identities.

Further, female friendship as part of female bonding is essential to the protagonists' development. Historically, female friendship remains relatively little discussed by critics because women are culturally portrayed as rivals. They are seen to be easily jealous and compete with each other for men. This popular attitude, however, cannot negate the actual existence of female friendship. Tess Cosslett claims that female friendship is "often of special significance in the works of women writers, involving as it does issues of female solidarity and female self-definition" (1). As early as in the Victorian era, female friendship had become a subject which was delineated

in the novels of women writers, such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. These writers present the views that friendship between women reinforces femininity, and enables them to enjoy multiple attachment and share religious fervor (Marcus 2). Also, female friendship is recognized as a “basic element of a middle class organized around marriage, family, and Christian belief,” and a “social bond comparable to kinship and conjugal love” (Marcus 25-29). Therefore, female friendship is an indispensable part of a woman’s life. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the feminist movement “produced new interest in the bonds of friendship between women.” In the 1980s’ women’s literature, female friendship is another important theme related to female bonding (Payant 78). In the four novels the protagonists are young girls who show no interest in heterosexual love. Friends of the same sex contribute to their understanding of the world and their identity formation. As Rita Felski claims, “The figure of a female friend or lover invariably plays a symbolically important role in the protagonist’s development. . . . the recognition of the other woman serves a symbolic function as an affirmation of self, of gendered identity” (138). Through the contact with other girls, the protagonists in these novels develop a consciousness of their female body and female self.

In the Caribbean society, men are traditionally in a dominating position. However, in the domestic domain and in the nurturance of children, men are subordinate to women. Men as husbands and fathers, who provide financial support to the family, are often shown to be peripheral or absent in children’s development:

In contrast to the enduring and preoccupying role of motherhood, that of father is much less demanding. His major duty is financial, seeing that money is available for

food and clothing and the necessities required for school. Concomitantly, the father-child relationship is formal and distant and in many cases non-existent and apparently unnecessary to the child's existence. (Barrow 405)

Subsequently, young children are encircled in female bonding, both familial and non-familial.

My contention is that in view of the matrifocal family structure and the patriarchal colonial social condition, female bonding is essential in the young female protagonists' life and development. The protagonists' relationships with other females influence their identity formation. Female bonding, however, is not necessarily a successful medium for effective identity formation, considering the complex social conditions of the Caribbean during colonialism. In this thesis, I present two ways of how female bonding is important and influential in the protagonists' development and maturation.

The four novels are categorized by two types of female bonding, through which the protagonists are on different paths of identity formation. One form of female bonding, that shown in Chapter Two on *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John*, encourages autonomy and helps the protagonists to form their identities. In this chapter, Marilyn Friedman and Diana T. Meyers's theoretical analysis of autonomy will be applied to my discussion of female bonding. I will explore how the protagonists strive to achieve autonomy and establish viable identities through their relationships with other females. A second form, however, that presented in Chapter Three on *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Abeng*, fails to nurture the protagonists and offer them a coherent identity. Homi K. Bhabha's insight on hybridity will be used to the discussion of the racial and cultural heterogeneity which affect female relationships. I argue that female bonding

in these two works is jeopardized by the hybrid society in terms of class and racial stratification. The protagonists' sense of identity is divided as they come into contact with two irreconcilable environments. Therefore, they fail to achieve integration of the two worlds and establish coherent and viable identities.

This study shows, through an analysis of female bonding in relation to young women's development and identity formation, that female bonding is not always as "positive and powerful" as it is interpreted previously (de Abruña, "Ambivalence" 245). In the colonial era, it can be negative and disempowering when it cannot transcend differences of race and class. More generally, my thesis provides a possible vision for a broader study of female bonding in women's literature. Also, my focus on a single culture, region and gender perspective of the *Bildungsroman* provides an example of an in-depth study of the now reviving genre.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Beka Lamb and Annie John: Gender and Autonomy in Identity Formation*

In this chapter, I explore the development of the female self through the female protagonists' negotiation of relationships with other females and quest for autonomy and identity. I argue that autonomy is possible for the two female protagonists in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* because female bonding plays a positively nurturing and helpful role in the girls' maturation. The two female protagonists, Edgell's Beka Lamb and Kincaid's Annie John, are able to achieve autonomy and construct their individual identities through female bonding. In addition, the two girls see reflected in their relationships with other females a larger social context of political struggles between the colonized Caribbean people and the European colonizer. Thus, the two protagonists' growing up process of acquiring autonomy and identity parallels their countries' struggles for national autonomy and identity.

In the form of the *Bildungsroman*, Edgell and Kincaid depict the adolescent experiences of their young female protagonists. Adolescence is a period during which "the development of autonomy typically accelerates because of rapid physical and cognitive changes, expanding social relationships, and additional rights and responsibilities" (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 175). In their adolescence, the two protagonists' emerging awareness of establishing personal identities urges them to act

as individuals. The development of autonomy in this period promotes the sense of identity. Autonomy means self-determination. If an individual can often determine what she chooses and does, she is an autonomous person (Friedman 4). Also, an individual's identity is implicated in autonomy, because "autonomous action is action that reflects who someone is" (Friedman 10). Hence, a person needs to be sure about her identity and then she is able to act with self-determination. Diana T. Meyers also states, "Autonomous people are in control of their own lives inasmuch as they do what they really want to do" (26). In other words, autonomy requires a person to be true to her self and do what she really wants and desires.

Some critics deny women's autonomy because of women's gender and social roles. According to Simone de Beauvoir, feminine socialization requires that women are "overly conformist, strongly identified with others' interests yet either unconcerned with social issues or wrongheadedly active in politics, and economically parasitic" (qtd. in Meyers 157). This account indicates that women are subordinate and altruistic. Women's social roles as wife and mother make them depend on men and care about others' interests. They always neglect their own interests and cannot exercise control over their own lives. Hence, autonomy is hardly accessible to women. However, critics like Meyers and Friedman hold that autonomy is "genuinely possible" and "valuable" for women (Friedman 53). Meyers summarizes three levels of autonomy: minimal autonomy, full autonomy and medial autonomy. She indicates that there may not be sharp lines between different levels of autonomy. Nevertheless, she is apt to accept that women's autonomy is more limited and precarious (170). She illustrates that



social psychological studies done by Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow indicate that women are “more other-directed than men,” which means women tend to care about others’ interests. Their theories explain that women are adaptable to the traditional feminine role through feminine socialization. As Chodorow notes, at a young age, girls attach to mothers and experience strong emotional bonds, while boys must separate from mothers and identify with fathers so as to establish masculinity. This difference makes girls and boys develop different personalities and social roles (qtd. in Meyers 153-54). Therefore, women are “most likely to rank in the area of medial autonomy closest to minimal autonomy and are more likely than men to be minimally autonomous” (Meyers 170). Meyers states that a person who has minimal autonomy “possesses at least some disposition to consult his or her self and at least some ability to act on his or her own beliefs, desires, and so forth” (170).<sup>4</sup> I would say that the autonomy developed by the two protagonists in *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John* is one of minimal autonomy. In the colonial Caribbean, women are doubly colonized by patriarchy and imperialism, which “has proven to be a durable description of the status of women in colonialism” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 206). Caribbean women are oppressed by the white colonizer and by colonized black men. They are considered as subordinate, and their autonomy is not encouraged by society. Besides, the two protagonists are young girls, who identify and attach to their maternal figures and experience feminine socialization. Through the process of their maturation, there are different forces that restrict their autonomy. Thus, the two young protagonists who live

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<sup>4</sup> Meyers points out that a fully autonomous person possesses a complete repertory of well developed and well coordinated autonomy skills coupled with many and varied independent competencies. Medially autonomous people range along a spectrum between minimal autonomy and full autonomy.

in the patriarchal colonial Caribbean can hardly achieve a full sense of autonomy. By negotiating relationships with other females, the two girls are able to behave according to their deeper wants and beliefs. They develop and exercise autonomy to a minimal degree. In *Beka Lamb*, the protagonist Beka pursues autonomy and identity by solving her problems of lying and failure at school. Beka undergoes a positive change with the support of her family. Her development of autonomy and identity is dependent on female bonding. In *Annie John*, the protagonist Annie pursues autonomy by separating from other females, especially her dominating mother, who embodies colonial culture. It implies that Annie's pursuit of autonomy and identity is restricted by colonialism. Hence, the two protagonists are not fully independent and free in their pursuit of autonomy and identity. They develop minimal autonomy, which also shows the restrictions of colonial society on women.

Many writers such as Zee Edgell, Merle Hodge, Jamaica Kincaid, Paule Marshall and Jean Rhys have showed in their works that in the tense social and political climates of the Caribbean, human relationships become insecure and personal identities are uncertain. Female bonding helps the protagonists to survive, and is particularly important to the women characters (de Abruña, "Women Writers" 86-87). This feature is well demonstrated in the development novels like *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John*. In the two novels, the female protagonists develop strong bonds with both maternal figures and girlfriends. When mothers fail to help and nurture the child, grandmothers will take the responsibility. When maternal relationships cannot satisfy the needs of the protagonists, female friends will be the alternative. These women

form a female community that enlightens the protagonists on their understanding of the self and the world. Through their negotiations with these female figures, the two protagonists develop autonomy and establish their individual identities.

In *Beka Lamb*, Beka's quest for autonomy is a gendered process, which is based on female bonding. Beka's development of autonomy is "partially or fully dependent upon an adolescent's relationship with others or a response to others" (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 176). Her maturation is greatly dependent on the female bonds she develops with her mother Lilla, her grandmother Ivy and her friend Toycie. These women influence Beka's life in three dimensions. Her mother Lilla helps her to overcome her lying habit and to go back to school, through which Beka is able to achieve self-development. However, Lilla's submission to her husband and the colonial order demonstrates female subordination in the patriarchal colonial society. Therefore, Lilla is not a strong role model for Beka. Beka's grandmother resists colonial hegemony and advocates the country's progressive struggles. She educates Beka about the issues of racial difference, national autonomy and female development. Beka's friend Toycie wants to change her life through her own efforts. However, she fails to survive after being rejected by the representatives of the patriarchal colonial society. Her experience makes Beka aware of the importance of matrilineal bonding and the inequality of the biased social hierarchy. Each woman represents a facet of Beka's quest for autonomy and identity. Lilla, married to a man who is willing to keep the colonial order, cannot free herself from patriarchal or colonial dominance. The quest for autonomy and identity is weak and restricted on this front. Toycie, as a

victim of the colonial society, cannot change her life by believing in the illusion of a good future promised by either the colonial or patriarchal order. This facet proves to be illusory and impractical. Lilla and Toycie's lives demonstrate the limitation of women's development in colonial society. Beka's quest for autonomy and identity would be greatly limited if she follows the lives of Lilla or Toycie. In contrast, Beka's grandmother is independent and insistent on her beliefs and actions. She is the most effective role model for Beka in developing autonomy and a viable identity. Through negotiating relationships with these women, Beka is aware of her failure at school, her determination to change, and her quest for identity. Eventually, she experiences a transformation and pursues a sense of autonomy and identity.

In this novel, the mother-daughter relationship develops positively from conflict to understanding and acceptance. Beka's mother Lilla changes her way of treating Beka's shortcomings from criticism to sympathy and support. As a result, the potential conflict between the mother and the daughter is eliminated. At the beginning, due to Beka's constant lying behavior, Lilla considers her daughter a difficult child characterized by "insolence," "laziness" and "ingratitude" (18), and she complains a lot to her husband, Bill Lamb, about Beka. Thus, Beka is often punished by her father who either beats her or calls her a "phoney" (19). On one occasion, after Beka is beaten and gets hurt on the corner of her mouth, Lilla feels remorseful and uncomfortable. She says to her husband, "It was all my fault, Bill. I can't understand why I complained so much to you about Beka. She had such a pretty smile, Bill, such a pretty smile. That was the nicest thing about her face" (19). Though Lilla hates

Beka's frequent lies, she does not want to punish her daughter in the way her husband does. The only way she expresses her disapproval of Beka is to complain to Beka's father or Granny. However, after this beating event, Lilla reduces her complaint about Beka by trying to "keep her annoyance at Beka's shortcomings mostly to herself" (19). Beka, in the position of wrongdoing, only reflects on her mistakes without a sense of hatred towards her mother's complaints or her father's punishment. Lilla gives Beka a notebook as a gift and tells Beka to write when she wants to lie. By doing so, Beka can make her lies into stories. Writing will replace lying as her habit. Moreover, Beka is able to establish self-esteem and confidence because she is able to become a trustworthy person by telling the truth.

Further, Lilla begins to protect Beka from her father's disapproval. When Bill Lamb disagrees with Beka about "hotcombing" her hair, Lilla protests that straight hair will save Beka's time in the morning. When Bill feels disappointed with Beka, Lilla will say something in favor of Beka. She gives Bill "a lot of excuses and reasons why [Beka is] developing so late" (24). As a mother, Lilla identifies with Beka in the patriarchal institution, and she does not want Beka to suffer. When Lilla was young, her father stopped financing her schooling because she told her father about her feeling out of place at the convent school. Therefore, she understands Beka's failure at school and helps Beka to get Bill's permission to return to school. All these strengthen the mother-daughter bond. With maternal understanding and support, Beka is able to act with self-determination and make herself a changed person. It is also a process from innocence to maturity. Shortly after Beka returns to school she wins a contest medal,

which has been unprecedented for a Creole girl like Beka. It shows that Beka has undergone a positive transformation and become what her mother calls “a person with ‘high mind’” (1).

Beka’s lying habit may have some positive implications, as Simon Gikandi observes, “denotes more than a reluctance to tell the truth – it is part of Beka’s drive to invent an alternative reality beyond the assimilative tendencies that repress selfhood” (223). However, Beka needs to overcome the lying habit and to rebuild her relationship with her family. She knows that her lying habit is most detested by her parents and her failure at school is also a result of this habit. On the day when her lie about passing the school term is discovered, Beka notices the change of atmosphere in her family. She realizes that “[f]or most of her life, the members of her family had surrounded her tightly, like sepals around a bud. But today that security had fallen away, and for a while she felt very lonely” (27). Her family means a lot to Beka. As John W. Santrock states, “identity formation is enhanced by family relationships that are both individuated, encouraging adolescents to develop their own point of view, and connected, providing a secure base from which to explore the social world” (155). Familial relationship not only provides Beka a secure base but also encourages her individuality. She feels insecure and lonely when she discovers the change in her family. She realizes the importance of her family. To win her family back, Beka takes action to make herself a changed person. She accepts her mother’s attempts to help her overcome her lying habit. Thus she will not be motherless or be a victim of patriarchal colonial society like Toychie. Beka also accepts her father’s punishment of cutting

down her tree. Her father tells Beka “you are growing wild like the bougainvillea that’s breaking down Miss Boysie’ fence. All flash and no substance” (24). Cutting down the tree is a metaphor of Beka’s breaking from the innocent past self. In addition, Beka’s education is suspended by her father because of her lying and failure at school. She has to get her father’s permission to return to school. Hence, she takes action and proves to be a different person. Beka’s change consolidates her relationship with her family. Therefore, she is able to develop autonomy and individual identity.

Going back to school is a valuable opportunity for Beka to demonstrate her self-determination and transformation. However, she has to get consent from her father. Beka’s change towards knowing who she is and obtaining self-government is restricted by patriarchal power, because Beka’s father, Bill Lamb, is a representative of patriarchal power. Though Bill Lamb claims more than once that he is only the breadwinner and has “no say” (20) in the family, he well demonstrates his patriarchal power by fighting with his mother over politics, showing his disapproval of Beka, beating Beka and cutting down her tree as punishment. He decides whether Beka can return to school again. Thus, Beka, as a young woman in the patriarchal society cannot be fully autonomous though she changes and makes efforts to have some control over her life, such as going back to school and winning a contest medal.

After her worst lie, Beka begins to reflect on her life from the past to the future. She thinks of the difficulties of doing household chores when her mother is ill. Hence, she understands that if she can not finish her schooling, her dream of becoming a politician would not be realized, and she will finally become a housewife who is busy

with household chores. She feels guilty for her failure and lying. Friedman argues that a person's autonomy is grounded in a person's concerns about "her parents, her ethnic group, her race, her community, or her nation" because these are "inherited traits or involuntary relationships" that a person reflectively reconsiders or values (11). Beka's reflection on her past and future shows that she is concerned about her parents who work hard for the family, her community which struggle for better pay and living conditions, and her nation which is still under colonial dominance. To be independent and autonomous, Beka has to depart from her past and make efforts to achieve something valuable in her future life. Returning to school and completing her education, she will be able to escape from the traditional woman's role as a housewife.

In Beka's family, Beka's nurturance is mostly indebted to her mother and grandmother. Her mother helps Beka to get rid of her lying habit, and her grandmother discusses life with Beka and encourages her to participate in her party rally. Both women see the importance of Beka's development through education. They try to persuade Bill Lamb to let Beka return to school. In my reading of *Beka Lamb*, however, I have found that the mother is not the center of Beka's female bonds. Instead, the role of the grandmother is more dominant and important in Beka's development. Beka and Granny Ivy share the same attic, which signifies a closer link between them. When the novel begins with Beka's winning of the essay contest and her change, Granny Ivy thinks that she "deserved some credit for the shift Beka was making from the washing bowl underneath the house bottom to books in a classroom overlooking the Caribbean Sea" (2). When Beka's mother is ill, Granny Ivy does the



household chores so that Beka can have time to study. She “nearly always ‘took up’ for Beka” (19) when Lilla complains about Beka’s shortcomings. She warns Beka of possible pitfalls in relationships with men through Toycie’s relationship with Eimilo. As she tells Beka, “Toycie was trying to raise her colour, and would wind up with a baby instead of a diploma, if she wasn’t careful” (47). Furthermore, there are many heart to heart conversations between the grandmother and the granddaughter on political events, on Beka’s future plans and on Granny’s past, which help Beka to better understand life and her future. Granny Ivy is an optimistic person who “always meant everything for the best” (170). She does not give up hope, and she survives though she had the same problem as Toycie when she was young. Her spirit encourages Beka to be strong and autonomous.

Beka is able to possess a sense of autonomy under the influence of Granny Ivy’s strong personality and her active participation in politics. Being a founder of the People’s Independence Party, Granny Ivy is an advocate of progressive political activities. However, her son Bill Lamb is a conservative, who has accepted the existing colonial hegemony. He wants the present situation in his country to remain unchanged for the benefit of his business. Her daughter-in-law Lilla submits to her husband’s political views. The family is “both politically aware and politically divided” (Salick 108), and is permeated by frequent political debates. Growing up in such a family, Beka is sensitive to politics and is interested in the present political situation in her country. Beka’s intimate tie with her grandmother indicates that her political standpoint is grandmother-oriented, which means that she welcomes the country’s

autonomy and independence. Granny Ivy holds firm her own beliefs whenever she argues with her son or her daughter-in-law. She encourages Beka to come to her party rally so that Beka can know the party's struggle for the country's national autonomy and independence. Beka's political sensitivity is revealed when she discovers that Toycie's guitar is labeled "made in Spain" (36). She then suggests changing the label. Seeing the guitar's label, Beka sees a power relationship between Belize and her neighbor Guatemala and the colonial power Spain. She tells Toycie "Guatemala claims Belize from Britain through rights inherited from Spain, and Spain got rights from the Pope, and who are we going to get rights from?" (36). Finally, they decide to change "Spain" into "Belize," which shows their expectation of an autonomous and independent country.

With her mother and grandmother's understanding and help, Beka is inspired to take up her responsibility for household chores and schoolwork. There is a connection between autonomy and responsibility. As Joel Feinberg states, "responsibility is a contributing cause of the development of autonomy" (42). Assigning responsibilities or tasks is one way to promote a child's development of identity and independence (42). Both Beka's mother and grandmother help Beka to realize the responsibilities of doing household chores and going to school. These two things will make her a changed and valuable person. In the past, Beka had no enthusiasm in doing those things. Now, she cleans the attic thoroughly so that her grandmother will not clean it again. She puts things in order after use so that her little brothers will not stumble over them. Most importantly, she admits her lie and tells the truth. Cleaning the attic is only

a start to making herself a changed person. By taking the responsibility of fulfilling her duty at home, she feels that “she had handled the job like a woman and in Belize, to be able to work like a woman was an honourable thing” (27). This new feeling derives from her quest for autonomy, and shows her recognition of her gender identity. She makes up her mind to get another chance to finish her schooling, because she wants to envision a life plan of becoming a politician rather than a housewife. That is a sense of responsibility for the country’s development, resulting mostly from her grandmother’s influence and her concerns for her country. When Beka undergoes transformation, she is acting with self-determination. Therefore, she is able to become autonomous and to form an authentic identity.

Toycie, Beka’s friend, also has great influence on Beka. Beka’s progress happens synchronously with Toycie’s fall. If Toycie is Beka’s alter ego, then her story is a counter-narrative of Beka’s. The difference between Beka and Toycie does not merely lie in age. Beka has a happy middle-class family, consisting of a grandmother, parents and siblings, while Toycie is orphaned and raised by her poor virginal aunt. We know from the beginning that Toycie is bright, considerate and excellent at school, while Beka fails in her exams and lies habitually. Nevertheless, Toycie falls as a result of her romance with Emilio, and dies in the end. Beka gets another chance to return to school and to prove her value. The friendship between the two girls with so many differences illustrates that they have the most important common trait, which is the same social role as women. In the patriarchal colonial Caribbean, women are subordinate to men and to colonial hegemony. Although Beka and Toycie were born in

different families with different social statuses, as women they may have similar experiences. Beka is aware of this fact after Toycie's death, as she reflects in her mind that "her life would probably break down, maybe in Toycie's way" (147). Nevertheless, unlike Toycie, Beka's family provides her with love, nurturance and a good life. Previously, she almost loses what she has by lying and failing in school, which is just a different way of ruining her life and her future. By seeing Toycie's fall, Beka understands the importance of female bonding and familial support. She needs a transformation and a rebirth to survive. To some extent, Toycie falls so that Beka can renew her life by starting all over again because Beka learns and matures from Toycie's degradation.

Toycie's fall begins with her romance with upper-class Emilio. Brought up by a poor and childless aunt, Toycie lacks adequate maternal nurturance and knowledge about sexuality. She fails to see the class, race and gender biases which are beyond the romance between her and her boyfriend. Emilio, the young patriarchal figure, destroys Toycie's life by impregnating Toycie in the irresponsible romance. When Toycie gets pregnant, the upper-class boyfriend rejects her because she is black and poor, and the colonial school expels her because of its rigid dogma. However, her upper-class boyfriend Emilio still remains in school and gets no punishment. Toycie feels helpless like an outcast. Though her aunt and Beka's family try to help her, she alienates herself from these people. As a result, she is alone and has no power to resist and survive. Toycie loses the opportunity to graduate from school and change her life as she dreamed. Without the hope of life, she goes mad and dies in the hurricane. Toycie's

death in the natural disaster even intensifies her powerlessness in controlling her life. The friendship between Beka and Toycie makes Toycie's experience vivid to Beka. Beka learns about the inequalities of race, class and gender in the patriarchal colonial society. She realizes the dangers of heterosexual relationships and even rejects the idea of marriage. Fortunately, she has solid female bonds with her mother and grandmother, who are the backbone in her development. With good maternal nurturance and support, Beka would not repeat Toycie's tragedy and be able to depart from her past self. Thus, she can achieve a sense of personal autonomy and identity. And, most probably, she is able to challenge the patriarchal colonial system through her transformation and empowerment.

Beka's maturation reflects colonial Belize's struggle for national identity and autonomy. The story is set in the social backdrop of political movements. Beka lives in a rising middle-class family that is sensitive to politics. She is influenced by her family and is well informed of the country's present situation. Beka represents her country literally, as she says, "Sometimes, I feel bruk down just like my country" (115). When she is in trouble with her own problems of lying and failure at school, the country is also in trouble with the neighbor country and the colonial government. Beka goes through a transformation as she overcomes her lying habit and gains success at school. When she wins the medal for the essay contest, her uncle tells her, "Belize people are only just beginning! Soon we'll all be able to vote instead of only the big property owners, then we may get self-government and after that, who knows?" (167). Beka feels that "she had made a beginning too" (167). The essay is about the history of the

convent school, which is also the colonial history of Belize. By completing the essay, Beka knows about the past and colonial history. She is able to see her role in society by connecting the past and the present. Thus, Beka's development towards knowing who she is manifests the country's struggle with colonial hegemony. Winning the contest medal is a milestone for Beka, which implies that she is able to establish her identity and be self-governed through her efforts. Meanwhile, the country is struggling for rights to vote and for national autonomy and identity.

While in *Beka Lamb* the quest for autonomy and identity is realized through Beka's connections with other people, especially with her mother and grandmother, in *Annie John*, Annie's quest for autonomy and identity is a process of detaching from other people, mainly from her mother and her friends. Unlike *Beka Lamb*, in which Beka's grandmother, father and friend Toyocie share the world of Beka and her mother, *Annie John* foregrounds an exclusive mother-daughter relationship. The first-person narrative provides an overwhelming illustration of Annie's complex love and hatred towards her mother. In *Beka Lamb*, the mother-daughter relationship is straightforward, while in *Annie John* the relationship is characterized by ambivalence and contradiction.

Annie's relationship with her mother, Mrs. John, develops from harmonious love to conflicting love and hatred. The mother-daughter relationship becomes complex as Annie grows up and seeks autonomy and an individual identity. Mrs. John nurtures and controls Annie because as a mother she wants to supervise her daughter and have some control over her, whereas, as a woman she wants her daughter to be

independent and autonomous. As a daughter, Annie wants to attach herself to and identify with her mother, whereas, as a young woman she wants autonomy and freedom. Thus, when Annie enters puberty, she detects distance between her and her mother when she wants to attach to her mother. Meanwhile, she feels constrained by her mother when she wants to act autonomously.

Annie's emotional change towards her mother begins at the age of twelve, when her mother begins to instruct her to develop independence. Annie gradually notices that her previously loving and nurturing mother begins to emotionally alienate but physically control her. She cannot figure out what kind of a mother she has. Thus, she develops ambivalent love/hate feelings towards her mother. When Annie reaches twelve, Mrs. John says to her, "It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me" (26). Mrs. John is trying to inform Annie that she is an individual being and should have a distinctive identity. Woodward asserts, "Clothes carry considerable weighting in the representation of identity" (75). In the past, Annie appeared to be a replica of her mother because she wore the same clothes as her mother. Now she is twelve, an age of development, she is no longer a baby or a little girl in her mother's eyes. She is growing up to be an individual female, instead of her mother's replica. Mrs. John suggests Annie wear her own different dress which can show her individuality. The refusal to dress alike shocks Annie because she is not ready to separate from her mother. Afterwards, Annie is refused again when she asks to look through her mother's trunk. The trunk which Mrs. John took from Dominica contains things of Annie's even before she was born. Looking through the

trunk had been a “tremendous pleasure” (21) for Annie. When she and her mother looked through stuff in the trunk, Mrs. John used to tell Annie stories about her growth. Annie feels that she is so important and is living in the paradise of her mother’s entire affection and attention. However, at twelve, Annie’s request to enjoying this childhood pleasure of looking through the trunk is rejected by her mother. For Annie, her mother’s refusals make her feel alienated, and she thinks that her paradise has collapsed; whereas, for Mrs. John, Annie is old enough to leave this childhood activity behind and become independent. Her refusals will help Annie to separate from her childhood and begin a new phase of life.

On the other hand, Mrs. John keeps a close eye on Annie and restricts her from growing wild. Mrs. John embodies colonial culture, and she wants to control Annie with colonial ideology. In this sense, she restricts Annie’s individuation and the development of autonomy. In Mrs. John’s mind, good manners and the appreciation of music are prerequisites to become a young lady. Without good manners a girl is likely to be a “slut” (102). Therefore, she instructs Annie’s daily habits and sends her to learn manners and piano. She is proud of Annie for her good performance at school. However, she does not spare her disappointment when Annie misbehaves at school. Mrs. John’s nurturance and control over her daughter make her a double-faced mother. She “embodies the ambivalence of colonial female identity; she is a figure at once of oppression and of potentially liberating origin” (Rody 127).

Though Kincaid’s depiction of Mrs. John does not fall into the “theme of the mother as monster” (Palmer 113) of some women’s writing, Annie regards her mother



as a “serpent” (52) and later a “crocodile” (84), which are equivalent to the images of monsters. By considering her mother as a “monster” of different types, Annie shows her hatred as well as her awareness of her mother’s power. Shelley Phillips claims, “childhood ambivalence about the mother as the nurturer and the controller and the depriver is so deeply embedded, it cannot be brought out in the open and examined rationally. When the daughter is heading toward the independence and responsibilities of adulthood, this ambivalence seethes below the surface” (49). From childhood to adolescence, there is a change in the daughter’s understanding of the mother’s role. In her earlier childhood, Annie regards her mother who takes care of her as a nurturer. In her adolescence, however, Annie begins to exercise autonomy, and she sees her mothers as a controller more than a nurturer.

As Annie matures, she senses that she no longer lives in the paradise of her mother’s entire affection and attention. By seeing her mother and father having sex, Annie becomes aware that she has to share her mother’s love with her father. Her father, who is once a pitiful person alongside the mother-daughter bond, has replaced her as her mother’s focus. This is also a source of Annie’s hatred towards her mother. However, Annie cherishes the past intimate and harmonious relationship between her and her mother. In the autobiographical essay written on the first day of her new school, Annie tells the story of going swimming with her mother, and her fear of noticing her mother’s disappearance and her joy at her mother’s return and promise of never leaving her alone. She then writes that in her dreams of the same scene, her mother joined by her father never comes back to her. She concludes that when she tells

her mother of her dream, her mother holds her in her arm and assures her that they will never separate. Annie presents a loving mother and a happy ending for her story. However, in reality, when she tells her mother of her dream, or her “nightmare,” she is greeted with “a turned back and a warning against eating certain kinds of fruit in an unripe state just before going to bed” (45). This cool response is something that Annie fears and cannot bear to share with other people. Instead of writing about this negative moment between her and her mother, Annie ends the essay with the scenario of childhood harmony and affection with her mother. Annie now realizes that the intimacy between her and her mother can only exist in the past and in fiction. As a result, Annie’s heart is filled with feelings of hatred and alienation towards her mother as well as innermost love. Her relationship with her mother is full of ambivalence and complexity.

Upon entering adolescence, Annie is more aware of exercising autonomy. She challenges her mother’s authority by pursuing autonomy, which creates tension between them. Tension between the mother and the daughter is not necessarily a bad thing in the daughter’s development. As Phillips notes:

Tension between mothers and daughters allows daughters to define their own boundaries more clearly. Through fighting with her mother about what she wants and believes, an adolescent daughter learns about herself and how to cast off childhood. She learns how to define her differences with her childish self. She learns how to define her difference from her mother. It is the mother who pushes her to become an individual. (52)

Mrs. John’s dominance over Annie also pushes Annie to fight with her, to separate from her, and to “cast off” her childhood. Lying to her mother is one way for Annie to challenge her mother and exercise autonomy. Charles Ford states, “Lying becomes an

important, perhaps essential, mechanism by which children can test the limits of their own ego boundaries in order to define themselves and establish autonomy” (72). Unlike Beka who lies habitually and randomly, Annie tells lies to achieve desirable effects. Some lies are discovered, but others are not. She lies to her mother on several occasions to do what she wants, which can be allegorically read as her consciousness of resisting the dominant power that her mother imposes on her. The event of Annie’s first lie symbolizes her first step towards autonomy. In other words, Annie has done something in accordance with her desire. Her desire to understand death indicates her development. At first, she is afraid of the dead, whereas, later, she goes to funerals without her parents’ permission. Annie tells her mother a lie after she goes to a girl’s funeral and forgets to pick up the fish that her mother needs for supper. She does not want her mother to know that she is interested in the dead, because she knows that people are afraid of the dead. Annie’s awe and interest in death are related to her relationship with her mother. Understanding death at the beginning of the novel indicates Annie’s later emotional change towards her mother. When she is young and has a harmonious relationship with her mother, she dreads her mother’s death. However, when she enters adolescence and develops hatred towards her mother, she wishes her to die. Annie’s first lie is disclosed by her mother and she is punished by being made to eat alone and to go to bed without her mother’s kisses. Nevertheless, Annie still gets her mother’s kisses at bedtime, which means she is forgiven and that she is still in the “paradise” of her mother’s affections. Hence, Annie’s first attempt to challenge her mother’s authority is successful. This lie is an early sign of her emerging

consciousness of seeking autonomy.

At the age of twelve, Annie lies to her mother after she is terminated from the “young-lady” classes because of her misdeeds. When her mother knows the truth, Annie observes that her mother’s back “turned on [her] in disgust” (28). This event widens the gap between Annie and her mother. This lie, however, shows Annie’s rejection of the European prototype of ladyship, and her resistance to her mother’s European cultural indoctrination. Annie demonstrates her autonomy by lying to her mother and doing what she likes. Later, Annie lies to her mother to get opportunities to play with the Red Girl because she knows her mother dislikes the Red Girl. Annie is attracted to the Red Girl for the way she is: dirty and undisciplined by her mother. The Red Girl is free from domination, while Annie feels that she is “kept prisoner” (62) under her mother’s “watchful gaze” (62). The Red Girl empowers Annie to resist and separate from her mother. In addition, Annie plays marbles against her mother’s will and hides the marbles from her mother’s interrogation. As a result, through lying Annie acquires freedom and power to act autonomously.

Lying creates opportunities for Annie to practice autonomy. She behaves against her mother’s expectations because she does not want to be dominated by her mother. Ford also claims that “the adolescents’ struggles about their own separation from the control and protection of parents often reactivate behaviors such as secrecy and deceit in the effort to become an autonomous person” (77). Annie detaches from her mother by lying and not telling her mother her mind. Under the cover of lying, Annie does what she really wants and desires. Autonomy requires a person to have control over his

or her life. She cannot be her true self and obtain autonomy without a separation from her mother. By departing from her mother and acting autonomously, Annie is trying to form her own identity.

In addition, Annie challenges her mother when she is blamed by her for greeting the boys on the street like a slut. Annie greets the boys in the way she thinks proper, but her mother thinks it a disgrace. Therefore, when she is blamed, she says to her mother “like mother like daughter” (102). The quarrel widens the gap between mother and daughter. However, the quarrel helps Annie reflect on the nature of her future and discover her self, as Annie says, “I could only sit on my bed and wonder what would become of me now” (103). She asks her father to make a trunk for her, which symbolizes that she will leave home like her mother once did. Nevertheless, her refusal of her mother’s trunk implies her rejection of her mother’s way of life, which is a shift from one patriarchal family to another via marriage. As Phillips states, “Adolescent daughters’ plans for the future either involve doing what their mothers have or haven’t done” (54). Annie’s choice of a new trunk shows that Annie will lead a different life though she follows her mother’s step of leaving home. It is also a demonstration of her complicated love and hatred towards her mother. With love, she wants to identify with her mother; with hatred, she wants to differentiate. By leaving home, Annie could be truly independent and free from her mother’s dominance, which will help her to establish identity and acquire autonomy. The days before Annie’s leaving, she is mysteriously ill. During her illness, she not only physically grows a lot, but also undergoes a mental maturation.

Annie's illness symbolizes her ambivalent and perplexed feeling towards her mother and the world. She is irresponsible to her mother's care and the treatments she receives. At that time, Annie's grandmother comes and cures Annie physically and mentally. Annie's grandmother is a catalyst of Annie's development. She cures Annie with *obeah* practice.<sup>5</sup> The powerful practice of the *obeah* shows a symbolic link between Annie's grandmother and African ancestry. Annie's recovery under her grandmother's care implies that Annie is able to continue her life and have a sense of identity through an attachment to her grandmother. Her grandmother links her to her roots, though this link becomes fragmented and symbolic through hundreds of years of uprootedness. Woodward claims that "the sense that we have roots, we have origins and a past that it would be possible to uncover, to give us some sense of the place that we occupy along the life course continuum" is the key component of identity (24). Annie gets a sense of the past and origin by attaching to her grandmother. Annie traces her origin from Antigua (her mother's home) to Dominica (her grandmother's home), and to Africa where her ancestors came. For the descendants of black slaves, their ancestors are uprooted from Africa and forced into exile. Africa becomes an "imaginary homeland" where they cannot truly return. They are compelled to re-establish their roots in the New World. However, this reestablishment is fragmented. To construct an individual identity, Annie needs to trace her roots. By turning to her grandmother, Annie is able to understand a communal past of uprootedness and to establish her identity. Once Annie has a sure sense of identity, she is more capable of

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<sup>5</sup> The *obeah* is the practice of a kind of sorcery, witchcraft, or folk medicine originating in West Africa and mainly practised in the English-speaking areas of the Caribbean (Oxford English Dictionary).

practicing autonomy. Thus, her development of identity and autonomy is dependent on her grandmother.

Annie's illness is a turning point in her development. It signifies a rebirth for Annie. She is empowered by her mysterious, almost "mythical" grandmother during her illness. When she is recovered, she has "towered over her [mother]" (128). This implies that her mother's dominance may not reach her, and she has more freedom to practice autonomy. Besides, Annie appears to be more powerful and influential at school. She develops a new accent, and allows "no room for doubt" (129) when speaking to her classmates. She makes her presence and absence importantly felt by others. Annie's maturity and authenticity make other girls wish to get sick like her. Her change after the illness demonstrates that she is able to break from her past and her mother. She is ready for the journey away from home.

In addition to matrilineal bonding, Annie develops a sense of autonomy and identity through her relationships with other girls. Annie's relationships with different girls reflect her relationship with her mother at different stages of her development. Unlike Beka Lamb who attaches to her mother while developing an intimate relationship with her friend Toycie, Annie detaches from her mother through attachment to her friends. Beka consolidates her bonds with her mother and grandmother through witnessing Toycie's degradation. When Annie attaches to other girls, she finds comfort, which is a feeling that is missing in the relationship between her and her mother. Hence, Annie's girlfriends promote separation between Annie and her mother. Nevertheless, when Annie detects some traits of the girls that remind her

of her mother, she deliberately abandons the girls and avoids them. The abandonment of the girls is a manifestation of her hatred of her mother, which helps her to survive in the relationship with her mother. Although she hates her mother, there is always a biological link and love between them. Phillips asserts that “daughters want to transform their relationships with their mothers, not abandon them” (51) when they separate from their mothers and become individuals. Through her relationships with other girls, Annie transforms her relationship with her mother from attachment to detachment.

The first girl Annie loves is Sonia. Annie attaches to Sonia despite her friends’ ignorance and contempt for Sonia. However, she estranges herself from Sonia after Sonia becomes motherless. Annie’s affection and alienation of Sonia indicate her emerging sense of autonomy and her harmonious relationship with her mother before twelve. When she loves Sonia, she steals her mother’s money and buys a sweet for her, and she then “pull[s] at the hair on [Sonia’s] arms and legs – gently at first, and then awfully hard, holding it up taut with the tips of [her] fingers until she cried out” (7). By giving Sonia sweets and causing her physical pain, Annie enjoys the pleasure of being a dominator. However, when Sonia’s mother dies, Annie stops loving her. The death of a mother is something that Annie cannot accept at the time when she is living in the paradise of deep maternal love and is afraid of her mother’s disappearance or death. Hence she alienates the girl.

Later, Annie knows Gwen at her new school, where Annie enjoys the feeling of being surrounded by other girls. She says, “[M]y heart filled with just-sprung-up love,



and I wished then and there to spend the rest of my life only with them” (45). In the past, she would only wish to spend her life with her mother. Now she knows that it is impossible to live with her mother forever. She finds Gwen with whom she has so much in common. Gwen is neat and feminine, who meets the complete approval of Mrs. John. It is a time when Annie psychologically separates from her mother. Gwen has become a substitute for Mrs. John and become Annie’s love. As Annie asserts, “when I was younger I had been afraid of my mother’s dying, but [...] since I had met Gwen this didn’t matter so much” (51). They vow to “love each other always” (53). However, they are not firm about their words. Annie indicates that the vow “had a hollow ring, and when we looked at each other we couldn’t sustain the gaze” (53). The vow lacks credibility and thus suggests future separation between the two girls. One reason is that Gwen meets her mother’s complete approval. When Annie first knows Gwen, she thinks everything about Gwen is beautiful. As she matures, however, her feeling for Gwen changes in parallel with her increasing disagreement with her mother. She knows that she is different from Gwen despite the similarities they once share. When they become friends, Annie and Gwen exchange things that are “most private and secret: things we had overheard our parents say, dreams we had had the night before, the things we were really afraid of; but especially we told of our love for each other” (48). However, Annie does not tell Gwen of her true feeling for her mother. As Annie asserts, “I never told her about my changed feeling for my mother. I could see in what high regard Gwen held me, and I couldn’t bear for her to see the great thing I had had once and then lost without an explanation” (48). Like the situation in writing

the conclusion for her autobiographical essay, Annie keeps a secret of her inharmonious relationship with her mother. By doing so, Annie demonstrates her autonomy in composing her life story.

When Annie reaches fifteen, she and her mother grow “two faces” at home, and she begins to alienate Gwen at school. The tension between Annie and her mother influences Annie’s relationship with Gwen. Annie discovers that she and Gwen have different philosophies of life. While Gwen is talking about marrying Annie to her brother so that they may live together, Annie is thinking about going to “Somewhere, Belgium,” a place where Charlotte Brontë, the author of her favorite novel, *Jane Eyre*, had stayed, and where she will not see her mother but only receive her letters. Annie hopes to escape from her mother and her oppressive system. However, her daydream of wandering in Belgium indicates that going to a European city is not her “rightful place” (Simmons 77). Gwen’s speech of marriage brings Annie back into reality and reminds her of her parents. Her father is a source of her hatred to her mother because her father is not only much older than her mother, but also represents the old patriarchal system. As Annie develops autonomy and identity, she is no longer her mother’s replica. Therefore, she determines not to be bound in wedlock like her mother. As she says in the last chapter, “I plan not only never to marry an old man but certainly never to marry at all” (132). Annie sees the great difference between her and Gwen from the conflict between her and her mother. By the time Annie is leaving for England, she finds that Gwen has “degenerated into complete silliness” (137), and is engaged to a boy. Annie’s separation from Gwen illustrates that she is going to live

another life which is different from her mother's, this latter being the life of a traditional Caribbean woman as a wife and mother.

Annie's favorite girl is the Red Girl, who walks bare-footed, wears dirty dresses, and smells. The Red Girl is Annie's complete opposite. Compared with herself, Annie thinks that the Red Girl is an "angel" (58) living in heaven because the Red Girl's mother does not force her to behave with manners. Without a proper name, the Red Girl's earthiness indicates that she is free from colonial dominance, and she is able to resist the colonizer's culture. At that time, Annie has reached the stage of rebellion. Combined with her hatred towards her mother, she is fed up with her mother's regulations concerned with doing everything with propriety. Even her previous lover Gwen becomes a boring companion to her. Therefore, she is very fond of the Red Girl. By secretly meeting with the Red Girl, Annie experiences rebellious pleasure against her mother's "watchful gaze." The Red Girl waits for Annie at the lighthouse, even when Annie cannot go out to meet her. The Red Girl's loyalty makes Annie feel important. Together with the Red Girl, Annie is empowered to resist colonial dominance embodied by her mother.

These girlfriends play important roles in Annie's development. They contribute to Annie's construction of identity and exercise of autonomy. Annie is powerless in front of her mother. Her behavior is restricted and regulated by her mother. Nevertheless, in front of the girls, she is free to act according to her desires. In her relationships with other girls, Annie develops a female consciousness that is different from the one she mimics or learns from her mother in her earlier years. She displays

her brightness at school and gains her teachers and classmates' affection. She picks her dearest friends who can love her and be loved by her. She feels important because they offer their love and loyalty to her. She is always in control and has the power to make them depressed or happy. It is always she who befriends the girls and then detaches from them. Annie develops individuality and exercises autonomy through her relationships with her girlfriends, which prompts her separation from her mother and her identity formation.

Like Beka, Annie's friendships with her girlfriends end in separation. Separation is painful for the young protagonists, but it helps them to understand the world and become mature. Beka separates from her friend Toycie because Toycie dies as a victim of the patriarchal colonial society. This separation is essential for Beka, which helps her to be independent and be aware of the importance of familial bonding. Thus, Beka is able to achieve power and autonomy through the supportive maternal bond. Annie figures out her relationship with her mother through the separation from her different friends. The separation from the Red Girl is a forced one because the Red Girl is sent away to live with her grandmother, while Sonia and Gwen are deliberately alienated by Annie. The forced separation from the Red Girl and the voluntary separation from Gwen demonstrate Annie's complex emotion of separating from her mother. Separation from both her friends and her mother marks an advance in Annie's maturation.

The changes in Annie's relationships with her mother and her friends illustrate that Annie is pursuing a sense of autonomy and forming her identity. Friedman states,

“Autonomy increases the risk of disruption in interpersonal relationships” (100). As Annie matures, the harmonious mother-daughter relationship breaks down, and her affection for Sonia and Gwen gradually disappears. All these relationships are disrupted because Annie is trying to establish her identity and govern her life. When Annie leaves Antigua, she declares, “My name is Annie John” (130). Many critics such as Laura Niesen de Abruña agree that this declaration signifies Annie’s certainty about her distinct identity. Through negotiating relationships with other females, Annie achieves autonomy and identity.

Beneath the veil of the mother-daughter relationship, *Annie John* is saturated with political significance. Similar to *Beka Lamb*, *Annie John* also presents a link between the protagonist and her country. Beka is concerned with the country’s political situation. It is presumed that she will participate in the country’s political progress by wishing to become a politician in the future. Accordingly, Beka represents her country literally. In *Annie John*, the relationship between an individual and her country is demonstrated through Annie’s relationship with her mother. Kincaid says in an interview that Annie’s relationship with her mother manifests a larger social relationship between colonial Antigua and the mother country – England:

It dawned on me that in figuring out the relationship between the girl and her mother, and observing the power of the mother, and eventually her waning authority, that it was leading me to a fictional view of the larger relationship between where I come from and England. I must have consciously viewed my personal relationship as a sort of prototype of the larger, social relationship that I witnessed. (Birbalsingh 144)

Hence, Annie’s relationship with her mother is a metaphor of the relationship between colonial Antigua and England. Annie metaphorically represents her country. Mrs. John’s control over Annie and her hope to indoctrinate Annie with colonial culture

manifest the control of colonial power over the colonized people. Furthermore, as Annie matures, Mrs. John's alienation mirrors "the colonial society's refusal to recognize the mature humanity of those descended from slaves" (Simmons 77). When Annie resists and alienates her mother, metaphorically the colony is resisting the mother country.

The chapter "Columbus in Chains" demonstrates Annie's hatred towards oppression and her consciousness to overthrow the domination over her. When Annie looks at the picture of "Columbus in Chains" in her history class, she relates Columbus' situation to her mother's comment on her grandfather's situation. In the picture, Columbus is not a triumphant discoverer. Instead, he is "fettered in chains" (77) and "brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by" (78). This picture reminds Annie of her mother's comment on her grandfather after reading a letter from Dominica. She writes down her mother's words under the picture, "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (78). Annie relates the two men's situations together because Columbus and Annie's grandfather are representatives of patriarchal power and are both agents of oppression. Historically, Columbus, the white patriarch, discovers the New World, which leads to the colonization of the Caribbean. Thousands of black people are exiled from Africa and enslaved on the Caribbean plantations. For hundreds of years, black people on the Caribbean have suffered from colonial exploitation and oppression. Personally, Annie's grandfather forces Annie's mother into exile at a young age. Mrs. John has to run away from her Dominican home and her father's patriarchal oppression. Annie's

lineage of Columbus and her grandfather shows that she recognizes the dominator and the oppressor are imperfect. She realizes that the powerful will become the weak some day. It implies a decaying process of the once powerful institution of colonialism.

Set in colonial Belize and Antigua, the two novels not only present a different concept of personal development within the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, but also reflect the larger social development of decolonization in the late twentieth-century Caribbean. Belize and Antigua both became independent in 1981. Written shortly after the independence, both *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John* look back at the colonial era which formed the context for the two girls' development. It is quite reasonable that the two young protagonists' development parallels their respective country's struggle for national identity and autonomy.

In this chapter, gender relationships have been seen to reflect sociopolitical struggles, which complicate the protagonists' development and identity formation. Positive and powerful female bonding ensures success in the quest for autonomy and identity. In the next chapter, gender relationships reflect the social hierarchies of race and class. I will examine how the external forces of colonial hierarchies jeopardize female bonding and make identity formation more problematic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Crick Crack, Monkey and Abeng: Class, Race and Gender in Identity Formation*

In this chapter, I explore identity formation in relation to jeopardized female bonding in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*. In these two novels, female bonding is jeopardized by the hybrid society in terms of class and racial stratification, which dismantles the two protagonists' identity formation. As they negotiate their relations with different females, the protagonists Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Clare Savage in *Abeng* experience displacement and feel split between two worlds which are defined and divided by the social forces of class and race. Their identification with each world is incomplete. Therefore, they fail to find a sense of belonging and a viable identity.

In the Caribbean, identity is hybrid because of the rootlessness and the heterogeneity of the Caribbean people's origins. As Stuart Hall points out, "it is impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples" (282), and "their true cultures, the places they really come from, the traditions that really formed them, are somewhere else" (283). The Afro-Caribbean people have undergone enslavement and colonization. Identity is traumatic as they assimilate and adapt to the New World. In the two texts of this chapter, the protagonists' failure in achieving a coherent identity reflects the hybrid nature of Caribbean identity. Hybridity is created in the process of colonization and is especially evident in the Caribbean region. As Bill Ashcroft,



Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin state in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, “hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (118). Creolization and miscegenation illustrate the linguistic, racial and cultural hybridity in the Caribbean. In relation to identity, Homi K. Bhabha gives a comprehensive analysis of hybridity. Bhabha points out:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (159-60)

Hybridity reveals the uncertainties of colonial power and undermines its pure authority. The colonial subject may question the colonial assumptions of domination and authority. However, in the two novels, the two young girls, Tee and Clare, are torn by the unsolved questions about an identity that is imposed by colonial authority and an identity that is discriminated by colonial authority.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Abeng*, the quest for identity is a process of seeking a sense of belonging and integrity. The concept of belonging is related to the concept of home. According to Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, home and belonging are “semantically interdependent. Our home is where we belong, territorially, existentially, and culturally, where our own community is, where our family and loved ones reside, where we can identify our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world” (vii). They also point out that belonging is “a significant determinant of identity” (vii). However, as Hodge says in an interview, children in the

Caribbean are “socialized” and “shared” by “a network of households,” and the notion of home may not be as important as it is in the Western context (Balutansky 655). This perception of home may produce problems about identity and belonging. As is shown in the two novels, the protagonists experience socialization in different homes that belong to different classes/cultures and races. They feel uncertain about their sense of belonging and identity. The colonial assertion of “white/British superiority” and “black/African inferiority” (Kuper 113) is embedded in the young children’s minds through education and everyday practices. The protagonists Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Clare in *Abeng* are torn in the complex intersection of class and race as they stay in different homes. According to Maria Helena Lima, “[g]rowing up in a society of extreme diversity and grave fragmentation of both European and African cultures does not allow for any coherent sense of self” (863). In this diversified and divided cultural environment, Tee and Clare do not know which side they belong to. Their migrating status results in their floating sense of belonging and unstable identities. To construct an authentic and integrated identity, they need to figure out their places of belonging.

Their sense of identity is dislocated and split because of their experiences at different homes which are stratified by class and race due to colonialism. They long for a “mother” with whom they can identify, and a culture to which they belong. However, when they are trying to establish a female bond with another woman, they encounter barriers of class and racial differentiation and prejudices. In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee’s bonding with her working-class aunt Tantie is weakened as she

acknowledges that her connection with Tantie reveals her inferiority in social status. When she moves to the middle-class Beatrice's home, she feels even more inferior as a result of prejudice and alienation. She cannot achieve female bonding with Beatrice or her daughters because she cannot really fit in with the middle-class community. In *Abeng*, the fair-skinned Clare's relationships with her dark mother and grandmother are disrupted by racial division. Her friendship with a black girl Zoe cannot last long because of class and racial differences. The unstable relationships result in the two protagonists' exilic status. Displacement and alienation accompany them when they move from one home to another. Even the closure of the two novels does not offer resolutions for both protagonists. In the end, Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey* leaves for England, while Clare in *Abeng* is sent to live with a stranger. In the complex social stratification of the Caribbean, Tee and Clare cannot find a place to fit in and form coherent identities.

As noted in Chapter One, the notion of the mother can be multiple in the black culture tradition. Besides a biological mother, children are usually taken care of by "othermothers." In this chapter, I will discuss the influence of "othermothers" on the protagonists' development and identity formation. Without a biological mother, Tee is taken care of in turn by her paternal aunt Tantie, her grandmother Ma and her maternal aunt Beatrice. Tee travels among the homes of her three "othermothers." Similarly, in *Abeng* Clare migrates between her parents' home, her maternal grandmother's home and other people's homes. She is taken care of and nurtured by "othermothers" because her biological mother rejects her. These "othermothers" bear the responsibility

of taking care of the protagonists, but they are in different social and cultural communities. They regulate the protagonists' behaviors with the values which match their class and racial status. Thus, the protagonists are confused about their identities. They lose the sense of security, nurturance and stable identity as they migrate from one place to another.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee's sense of belonging is divided because of the class, race and cultural differences of her surrogate mothers. Although these women are colonized subjects, they are divided into two distinct social classes according to their different lifestyles, skin colors and economic status in colonial Trinidad. As descendants of former slaves, Tee's paternal aunt Tantie and grandmother are black, poor and earthy. They speak Creole and live in the Afro-Caribbean way. In contrast, Tee's maternal aunt, Beatrice, possesses lighter skin color and belongs to the wealthier middle class. Her family speaks Standard English and their life is dominated by white colonial cultural ideology. When Tee stays with Tantie and Ma, Afro-Caribbean culture remains close to her, while she stays with Beatrice, her connection with blackness is undermined by the imposed white European culture. As a result, Tee is confused by the juxtaposition of these differences between her "othermothers," and about her identity that dichotomized by the two systems.

The mother-child bond is prevalent in the Caribbean. Children consider the mother as the central figure in their lives. A woman is often attached to her children whether she is married or not. Tantie is poor, unmarried and has no child of her own. However, she lives a comfortable life by adopting other children. She takes Tee and

her brother Todden home after the death of their mother and the departure of their father. She also adopts Mikey and Doolarie. Tantie leads a typical Trinidadian woman's life. She is the head of the family and the children are nurtured as part of the black community. All the children live harmoniously with Tantie and "the Uncles" (4). Tee gets a surrogate mother who can nurture her. Thus, she is not left homeless and orphaned. Tee and her brother are living under the "wings" of her aunt Tantie, who sets a positive model of black Creole culture for Tee.

Tee feels at home with her paternal working-class aunt Tantie and her grandmother, Ma, who is a market woman. She is nurtured, protected and encouraged by Tantie and Ma. At Tantie's home, Tee experiences happy, sincere and affectionate interpersonal relationships, which are helpful for Tee in constructing a black identity and a sense of belonging. As Tee's first surrogate mother, Tantie takes the responsibility of bringing up Tee and her little brother. Tantie is straightforward and true to herself. As Tee describes, "Tantie's company was loud and hilarious and the intermittent squawk and flurry of mirth made me think of the fowl-run when something fell into the mist of the fat hens" (4). Tantie does not restrain her emotions or hide her distaste for the hypocritical and biased middle-class Auntie Beatrice. She calls Beatrice "the bitch" (10). She knows that in her home and community Tee will develop positively and establish an authentic identity. Though Beatrice can provide better living standards, her hypocrisy and bourgeois ideology may not help Tee to construct an authentic identity. Therefore, Tantie fights with Beatrice over the guardianship of Tee and her brother.

As mother figures, Tee's two aunts fall into the "good mother and bad mother binary" (Gustafson 26). Tantie, as a surrogate mother, is a "good mother" (26). According to Gustafson, the good mother "acknowledges a child's need for love, caring, and nurturance and puts that understanding into everyday practice" (26). Though Tantie is poor, she provides Tee with daily necessities, as well as love, caring and nurturance. She tries every means to send Tee to school to receive an education. She at times sends Tee to the shop by herself "on little errands – a pound of sugar, a piece of pig-tail" (40), which is an "exhilarating adventure" (40) for Tee. By going to the shop alone, Tee gets a chance to be independent and to know the community. Tee knows Tantie's strong personality and authority by witnessing Tantie debating with the shop owner Ling over honesty. Also, at school, Tee is told by Mr. Thomas that Tantie "would have given the Governor a cussing if he'd looked at her too hard" (59). And "even the headmaster was a little afraid of her" (59). Hence, Tee is not afraid when her teacher lashes her on her hands for her triumphant expression after being caught stealing fruits on Mr. Brathwaite's property. In this way, Tee identifies with Tantie who is strong and brave in her girlhood, which helps her to construct a viable identity. However, as a working-class black woman, Tantie is marginalized in colonial Trinidadian society. As a colonized subject, she is exploited economically and politically. The African culture she values and embodies is oppressed by the white colonizer and despised by the middle-class blacks like Beatrice. The traditional assertion of "black/African inferiority" haunts her throughout her life. Thus, Tee potentially "develops her initial sense of insecurity and inferiority while living with

Tantie” (Booker and Juraga 56).

The imaginary Helen well demonstrates Tee’s sense of inferiority and displacement in Tantie’s community. Tee invents the white girl Helen to be her double when she is in her Third Standard at school. At that time, Tee still lives with Tantie. However, she has been indoctrinated with colonial culture in school. The character of Helen reflects the impact of colonial education on Tee. She is taught that “Glory and The Mother Country and Up-There and Over-There had all one and the same geographical location” (30). Therefore, she believes that her father will meet her dead mother and the baby in the mother country. She is also shaped by what she encounters in English books, “[T]he familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen, [... who] went about in socks and shoes from morning until night and called things by their proper names” (61). For Tee, these images from the English books are “Reality and Rightness” (61) and are only “to be found Abroad” (61). Tee begins to consider the differences between the reality she lives in and the fictional world that she learns from books. She imagines that Helen, like her, lives with her aunt and uncle and loves to visit her Granny. However, Helen lives a European life with material abundance and satisfaction, which Tee does not have. Helen’s life is unreachable, fictional and therefore she cannot be real in Tee’s life. Tee reveals her inferiority and unstable sense of identity by thinking that she is only Helen’s “shadow hovering about in incompleteness” (62). Helen’s appearance indicates Tee’s dissatisfaction with her life and her unconscious wish to enter the European world. Her sense of belonging at

Tantie's is dismantled by what she learns at school.

Like Tantie, Tee's paternal grandmother, Ma, nurtures Tee with her black values. Tee gets a sense of belonging in her grandmother's country home. Tee describes her grandmother as "a strong, bony woman who did not smile unnecessarily, her lower jaw set forward at an angle that did not brook opposition or argument" (13). This gives an impression of a person with strong and firm personality. The market woman Ma well maintains the black cultural heritage, which is seen through her contacts with nature and with the children. She collects herbs, fruits and nuts for market day. She takes the children to the river after the rain, which is "like a ritual following upon the river" (18). Ma is "full of maxims for our edification" (15) and is "equal to all the vagaries of childhood" (15). Tee learns her cultural heritage through her grandmother's storytelling and her way of life. She spends a happy and disciplined period of time at Ma's home. Like the grandmother in *Annie John*, Ma links Tee to her black roots by introducing a strong female ancestor to Tee. Ma tells Tee that "her [own] grandmother was a tall straight proud woman who lived to an old old age and her eyes were still bright like water and her back straight like bamboo" (19). The most important thing about Ma's grandmother is that she insisted on being called by her "true-true name" (19) instead of the name given by other people. Ma thinks that Tee has the spirit of her grandmother and is "growing into her grandmother again" (19). Therefore, she wants to pass her grandmother's name to Tee. For Ma, to add her grandmother's name to Tee is to empower Tee to construct her identity. As Kath Woodward states, "Naming is a vital part of identity" (25). The name of Ma's grandmother's embodies a strong spirit,



which can remind Tee of her black roots. Ma remembers her grandmother's name before she dies and hopes that Tantie will convey it to Tee. Ma does not know that Tee has rejected her black values in Beatrice's middle-class society. Tantie, however, is aware of Tee's change and, as a result, she has not "even bothered to remember [the name]" (110). Ma's wish is not realized. The failure of giving Tee her grandmother's name demonstrates that Ma who is the most powerful incarnation of the Afro-Trinidad culture is also ineffective in guiding Tee towards self-knowledge and establishing her own identity. When Tee stays in middle-class Auntie Beatrice's home, she is unable to go to her grandmother's home. Thus, Tee's bond with her grandmother is also jeopardized by class division.

When Tee gets a scholarship to St. Ann's, she moves to Beatrice's home, which is the turning point in her development and identity formation. Tee transfers from the working-class community to the middle-class community. At Beatrice's home, Tee is further displaced and alienated. Beatrice is a "bad mother" figure. Gustafson defines the bad mother as a woman who is "imagined to ignore, trivialize, or reject her child's need for love, caring, and nurturance both as an intellectual understanding and as a lived practice" (28). Beatrice is completely the opposite of Tantie. She dominates Tee but ignores Tee's feelings. With her adopted white colonial values, she destroys Tee's original values and confidence in being black. She tries to erase Tee's "niggeryness" by throwing away her clothes made by Tantie, and rejects Tee's request for returning to Tantie's on some occasions. Thus, Tee's attachment to Afro-Trinidadian culture is undermined. Beatrice's racial discrimination and hypocrisy cannot create intimacy and

understanding between her and Tee. Tee observes:

But beginning to be quite as redoubtable as their [Auntie Beatrice and her daughters'] contempt was Auntie Beatrice's attention. I squirmed under her benignancy. There was no reason why her face should open out into a smile whenever she laid eyes on me, or why she should smile continuously while talking to me whatever the nature of the statement. (81)

Beatrice is weak and hypocritical compared with Tantie. She believes that she is the descendant of a white ancestress. Though she is black, she is possessed by white colonial values and she thinks that the white ancestress is the more important part of her heritage. Hence, she constantly apes white colonial values and is extremely sensitive in keeping the link with "white/British superiority," including speech, dressing and her family's social connections. She puts the white ancestress' old photo in the living room to highlight her white lineage. Beatrice loses her original identity by assimilating white colonial values. She is a false role model for her daughters and Tee. Her failure as a nurturing mother is well demonstrated by her relationship with her daughters. She applies racial bias to the treatment of her daughters. She prefers and spoils her light-skinned daughter Carol because she thinks that Carol resembles her white ancestress, and she blames her darker daughter Jessica on her husband. Beatrice regulates her daughters with the false values she adopts from white colonizer. Her relationship with her daughters is full of disagreement and tension. Her daughters disobey her, and she has no control over them and receives no respect. Her husband always retreats to the background and disapproves silently. Therefore, Beatrice wants to find comfort from Tee, who is excellent at school and submissive to her. Her ostensible affection and intimacy towards Tee reveals her hypocrisy and her weakness in the family. As Tee detects, "She kept her arm around me as if to protect me from the

madness all around. And, I thought, to protect herself from the madness all around” (72). Thus, Tee cannot establish a close bond with Beatrice, nor can she identify with this aunt and get a sense of belonging from her.

Feeling out of place, Tee longs to return to Tantie’s home, where she thinks she belongs. Woodward states, “The idea of home also contributes to the desire to stabilize identity and the expression of longing for home can also be translated as a need to secure the sense of who we are when our spatial location can be seen as compromising that security” (49). At Tantie’s home, inferior as the status is, Tee feels secure and happy about being black. At Beatrice’s home she feels deeper inferiority, displacement and loneliness, and has no sense of belonging. Tee hates Beatrice’s dominance over her. However, she fails to resist. As she says, “I submitted to this, however great my distaste, for with Auntie Beatrice I was disarmed beyond all resistance, in an uncomfortable, alien way” (84). After Tee resists Beatrice by telling her that she still wants to go back to Tantie, she notices that “the air had changed. Everything seemed to be a different colour from before” (94). Beatrice is disappointed at Tee’s persistence in her “niggery” origin. Thus, she changes her attitude towards Tee and shows her dissatisfaction and contempt for her. It deepens Tee’s sense of displacement and she wants to “shrink, to disappear” (97).

Though Tee feels displaced at Beatrice’s home, she is greatly influenced by Beatrice’s adopted white colonial values. Tee begins to take what Beatrice tells her for granted. She thinks that she “should be thoroughly ashamed” of her black skin and she “must represent the rock-bottom of the family’s fall from grace” (82). She even thinks

that the white ancestress in the photograph disapproves of her with an angry frown and a pursed mouth. This illustrates Tee's deep sense of displacement. She cannot fit into and be really accepted by Beatrice's world because of her black skin and her attachment to Tantie. Thus, she feels isolated, helpless, and ambivalent about her identity. Tee yearns for Tantie, but she also begins to reject Tantie's way of life under the influence of Beatrice's values. As a result, Tee alienates herself from the black community and loses the sense of belonging she once possessed. Hodge says in an interview that Tee is "in a situation where she finds herself wanting to or having to reject her relatives. And this is not a situation that, perhaps, a child can resolve" (Balutansky 654). Tee cannot resolve the situation. Even though she struggles to reject her dear Tantie, she is burdened with shame and guilt. Tee feels embarrassed when reflecting on her past Carnival experience with Tantie. She denies Tantie's lifestyle and her way of bringing her up. She says:

At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up properly. What Auntie Beatrice said so often was quite true: how could a woman with no sense of right and wrong take it upon herself to bring up children, God knew the reason why He hadn't given her any of her own. And I was ashamed and distressed to find myself thinking of Tantie in this way. (97)

The denial of Tantie implies that Tee is denying her past self. When she cannot find her place in the new home, she denies her past and wants to erase it and begin again.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee does not have an intimate girlfriend who can help her to have a sense of belonging and construct an authentic identity. The important girls who appear in Tee's life are: Helen, her imaginary girlfriend, and Carol, Jessica and Bernadette, who are Auntie Beatrice's daughters and Tee's antagonists. These girls are not in reality Tee's girlfriends. However, Tee's relationships with these girls reflect

her displaced situation and her dilemma of rejecting and accepting a value system which is advocated by a class of people.

Tee understands the social hierarchies of class and race through her interactions with her cousins at home and school. With a close link to “white/British superiority” in terms of light skin color and middle-class social status, Tee’s cousins appear to be privileged and superior to Tee. They are privileged to get a good education from kindergarten to high school. Indoctrinated with white colonial values by their mother and their school, they despise and alienate Tee when Tee goes to St. Ann’s and lives in their family. They show their contempt for Tee because of her black skin and her poverty. They sneer at Tee’s clothes and speech. They do not want to be in company with Tee when they go to school. Tee is invisible to her cousins and her name is avoided by them. Carol uses “she” to refer to Tee when Tee comes to Beatrice’s home. Bernadette only tells her friend that Tee is “some lil relative Mommer found up in the country” (81). The relationship between Tee and her cousins intensifies Tee’s sense of displacement and inferiority. At school, Tee observes that the teachers judge students by their skin color and social status. The fair-skinned Carol is a favorite of the teachers, while Tee is invisible to the teachers regardless of her excellence in her studies. However, when Tee gets Tantie’s letter saying that her father is sending for them to join him in England, Tee becomes visible and important not only to Beatrice and her schoolteachers, but also to her cousins. Tee finds out that “Carol and Jessica regarded me with mute awe” (109). She also overhears Bernadette describing her to her friends: “She is our first cousin. Her mother died so she’s been living with us – and she is so

bright at school! She goes to St Ann's with Carol, you know, and she came first in the last test" (110). Tee is now recognized as a smart girl who is moving up, instead of a poor ordinary black girl. This recognition is hypocritical because it is based on Tee's relation to the mother country. As she is now connected with England, she embodies superiority. This connection seems to erase her previous inferiority. However, Tee still cannot develop a good relationship with her cousins. Tee senses her cousins' change by overhearing their conversations, but not by a direct face-to-face communication with them. This shows that the class gap still exists between them. Tee's cousins, with better social status and lighter skin color than Tee, have assimilated white colonial culture. By rejecting Tee as their cousin, they completely reject their black heritage. As colonized subjects, they cannot establish authentic identities by assimilating white colonial culture. Surrounded by her cousins, Tee has no sense of belonging and gets no way to figure out her own identity as she matures.

Tee's sense of belonging and identity becomes problematic as she matures. Tee's value system which she obtains from Tantie and the black community is greatly challenged as she goes to school and later moves to Beatrice's home. In order to be seen, Tee rejects her former life marked by black culture, and wishes to be identified with white culture, which prevails in her middle-class Auntie Beatrice's community. As a result, she struggles between the two cultural parameters of her working-class aunt Tantie and middle-class Auntie Beatrice and fails to find her place of belonging. Without a definite sense of belonging, Tee fails to form an authentic and unified identity. *Crick Crack, Monkey* provides a vivid picture of class conflict in colonial

Trinidad through Tee's development with her two aunts. The distinct division between the two aunts induces Tee's split sense of identity. Each aunt nurtures Tee with the values of her community. However, the colonial reality keeps Tantie poor and inferior, and Beatrice a mimic of the colonizer. With Tantie's inferiority and Beatrice's mimicry, both aunts cannot ensure Tee an authentic identity. Young Tee feels ambivalent and does not know which "mother" she should identify with and which class she belongs to.

Cliff's *Abeng*, written in 1984, can be considered somewhat as a response to Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* written in 1970. Cliff is frequently compared with Jean Rhys for their being white and Caribbean origin. In this study, I juxtapose Cliff's *Abeng* with Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* because *Abeng* also features a young girl's growing up with a divided self in the colonial Caribbean. While the subject of gender and identity formation through female bonding is presented in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, *Abeng* makes the issue of gender even more prominent. The gender relationships in *Crick Crack, Monkey* are affected by class differentiation. In contrast, in *Abeng*, race plays a vital part in affecting the protagonist's gender relations and gender development. Race symbolizes social values and is an attribute of social status. In Jamaica, race is a primary symbol of the status of ancestors who were either English masters or African slaves (Kuper 111-14). Race produces complexity by incorporating "ideas about descent, or ancestry, and also perceptions not only of skin colour but also of hair texture and of facial feature, which are evaluated against white and black stereotypes" (Kuper 125). Based on the censuses of the Jamaican population, Kuper

summarizes, “Jamaica is a society whose people are of predominantly African stock, but with a significant and growing proportion of people who are of recently mixed ancestry” (130). Cliff’s protagonist Clare is born out of this complexity and mixture of races. Her racial feature as a colored white makes her an embodiment of both the white European colonizer (paternal ancestry) and the black colonized (maternal ancestry). Clare is posited between two worlds as she searches for a coherent identity. In *Abeng* Cliff attempts to reverse the hierarchy of racial values of “black/African inferiority” and “white/British superiority” in the Caribbean. In her novel, she presents “black/African superiority” and “white/British inferiority” by illustrating a greater favoring of Afro-Caribbean culture through her protagonist’s identity seeking. As Sika Alaine Dagbovie states, Clare “resist[s] racial labels while staying especially connected to “blackness” (93). Fair as she is, Clare yearns for identification with her black maternal family instead of her white paternal ancestry. Thus, Afro-Caribbean culture is seen to be superior and white colonial culture is seen as inferior in its ability to nurture and nourish. Nevertheless, Cliff continues to present division, stratification and prejudice, which obstructs Clare’s movement towards establishing a coherent and authentic identity.

In *Abeng*, the protagonist Clare is born a mulatto. Though she possesses fair skin color, which mirrors her white father and embodies a privileged race and class, she longs to be dark and to identify with her dark, mulatto mother. Unlike Tee who rejects her black roots, Clare is rejected by her maternal family who embodies the African heritage. Clare struggles to assert her identity as “both dark and light” (36) by rejecting



her parents' attempts to erase her blackness and assure her an all-white identity. However, at the threshold of adolescence, Clare is too young to figure out the class and racial problems around her. She fails to find a sense of belonging from each of her dual ancestries, and her identity is split.

Clare is confused about her identity because of her dual heritage, which is a representation of the social split in colonial Jamaica. Clare feels “split into two parts – white and not white, town and country, scholarship and privilege, Boy and Kitty” (119). Clare's sense of identity is divided by these opposing elements in her life. Her white father Boy Savage represents white colonial culture, while her dark mother Kitty Freeman, her grandmother Miss Mattie and her black girlfriend Zoe represent black Afro-Caribbean culture. Being born a fair-skinned girl, Clare does not identify with her dark mother Kitty. The different racial features imply a loose mother-daughter relationship between Clare and her mother. As Kitty's marriage to Boy Savage was opposed by her mother Miss Mattie, Clare's whiteness does not make her grandmother happy. Clare's only source of nurturance comes from her black girlfriend Zoe, who is a close friend and also a surrogate mother. Zoe enlightens Clare on the realities of class and racial differences. However, their friendship is fragile, as it exists merely in Miss Mattie's country and is terminated by Miss Mattie. Female bonding in this novel is jeopardized and ineffective in the protagonist's development. In her family, Clare is considered her father's child and should be nurtured by her white father. However, as a white patriarchal figure, Boy cannot replace Kitty and Miss Mattie in playing the mothering role. Moreover, Boy denies her daughter's black heritage, which makes his

all-white theory inauthentic to Clare. As a result, Boy fails to nurture Clare as to her development and her understanding of her identity and the world. According to Belinda Edmondson, “the Afrocentric dynamic permeates all classes and races of Anglophone Caribbean society regardless of its particular configurations within those groups” (180). Even though Clare is born in a middle-class family, and is nearly white, she considers herself colored and wants to be attached to the black heritage. Her appearance embodies two racial features of parents. She is “both dark and light. Pale and deeply colored” (36). However, she does not know how to position herself between a dark mother and a white father just as she cannot decide which parent she could turn to if she needs help. As she grows up, she understands the cultural and racial divisions in her family and in society. The dilemma of choosing between white and black heritages results in Clare’s split identity and lack of a sense of belonging.

As mentioned before, home ensures a person’s sense of security and identity. Clare is deprived of a sense of security and identity as a result of her frequent migration from her parents’ home to other people’s homes. She spends her school vacations in her grandmother’s country home, and at other times, she lives in relatives’ homes in town when “things were not ‘going well’ between her mother and father” (36). Clare suffers from displacement in other homes. In her dark grandmother’s community, she is displaced because her skin color demonstrates class and racial superiority. Therefore, she is not really accepted by her grandmother and her community. When Clare stays at Miss Beatrice’s home, she still suffers from displacement. She has to hide her sympathy with the black people in front of this white

racist. Clare is eager to return to her parents' home. She thinks the home in Kingston is "the place of her existence" (119).

However, the home in Kingston does not offer her a stable sense of belonging. At this home, Clare lacks a sense of security and identity because of the racial and cultural distinctions between her parents. Kitty is a dark-skinned mulatto, who marries white Boy Savage. Kitty identifies herself with the Afro-Caribbean culture and feels close to the black community. Boy is a racist and has no pity for the poor black people. Kitty lives with Boy in both conflict and submission. When Clare is born a white daughter, Kitty delivers Clare to her husband. She assumes that "a light-skinned child was by common law, or traditional practice, the child of the whitest parent. This parent would pass this light-skinned daughter on to a white husband, so she would have lighter and lighter babies" (129). From birth, Clare is passed over to her father and gets no sense of belonging from her mother.

Unlike the nurturing mothers in *Annie John* and *Beka Lamb*, Kitty distances herself from her two daughters, especially the light-skinned Clare. She is an absent mother in Clare's world. She does not share much intimacy with Clare, or initiate Clare about growing up, or discipline Clare's behavior. Kitty's absence makes her a "bad mother" to Clare. As Gustafson points out, "the bad mother is the absent mother – absent emotionally or absent physically from her children" (28). Kitty restrains her emotions and ignores Clare's yearning for maternal love and nurturance. Her passion goes to her husband and the country people:

Kitty held herself back from any contact which was intimate – with her daughters, friends, family. She seemed to save all her ability to touch for the man she was

married to . . . She complained that his presence in her life as her husband had essentially been an error – but she seemed to have no desire to change the situation. . . . While she saved all her physical and emotional passion for Boy, she saved most of her tenderness for people she barely knew. . . . The country people of Jamaica touched her in a deep place – these were her people, and she never questioned her devotion to them. (51-52)

Besides, Kitty is physically absent from Clare. The few intimate moments Clare cherishes are when “they were alone” (53) in the bush or bathing together in their swimming suits. Most of the time, Clare is left to Boy or Miss Mattie during school vacations. Even when Clare undergoes a crisis and is exiled from her grandmother’s home for killing her grandmother’s bull, Kitty offers no consolation but agrees with Boy’s decision to send Clare to an old white woman. Kitty’s absence and withdrawal makes Clare fail to know her maternal history and black culture. As Brenda F. Berrian claims, women writers usually present “mothers as vehicles of culture and history. Once this function is removed from biological mothers, the daughters become confused about their history and place in it” (200). Cliff depicts a mother who does not take the responsibility of informing her daughter about her culture and history. Like her mother, Kitty keeps silent about her childhood and her family history. Clare is never told the past of her maternal family and the history of Jamaican black people. Thus, she is confused about her history and her place in Jamaica.

Rejected by her mother, Clare tries to acquire a sense of belonging from her father. However, her father’s claim of a white identity for Clare does not solve Clare’s ambivalence. Boy Savage, the descendant of a former slave owner, is proud of his white heritage though he is not pure white in lineage. Boy takes Clare to the ancestral relic, Paradise Plantation, and tells Clare about the “distinguished ancestor” (24) of his

great-grandfather, who came to the island from Britain to serve as a justice and created great wealth from his plantations. Boy wants to impress his daughter with the white mythology of his family's splendid past in relation to wealth and status. Instead, Clare is struck by the untold history of the torture of slaves on the plantation and the burning of slaves just before the abolition of slavery. She is concerned with the suffering of the black people throughout the history of colonialism. To Clare, the story of the "distinguished ancestor" and Boy's white lineage accounts for the colonial guilt of exploiting and burning black slaves. In that sense, Clare becomes an agent of black slaves, who suffer and resist the white colonizer. The image of the *abeng*<sup>6</sup> used by Cliff as the title of this novel emphasizes Clare's identification with the colonized and her resistance to the colonizer.

Boy decisively declares that Clare is white. In their conversation about Jews, Boy tells Clare that she is white because she is his daughter. Nevertheless, he also contradicts his logic by insisting that a half-Jew is a Jew, which means to Clare that a half-colored is colored. Therefore, Clare doubts the all-white identity her father ensures her, and she wonders "how she could be white with a colored mother, brown legs, and ashy knees" (73). The colored physical markers tell her that she is not completely white. Thus, a white identity is problematic and inauthentic to her. With a resistance to her father's white arrogance, Clare is unwilling to acknowledge her white identity and cannot develop a sense of belonging on her father's side. As Woodward claims, "People need a sense of place and belonging and this is often translated into

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<sup>6</sup> See Cliff's Novel *Abeng*: *Abeng* is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the canefields in the West Indies. The *abeng* has another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another.

the desire for roots and some sense of authentic origins, a start to the story so that we can move forward through having laid claim to a myth of origin” (137). Kitty is silent about her past, while Boy simply informs Clare of a fragmented and proud white family history. Both parents fail to pass authentic roots to Clare. Clare’s quest for belonging and identity is not satisfactorily met.

Clare is aware of her twin heritage of being both white and black. However, her mother’s rejection and her father’s denial of her colored features make her feel uncertain about her identity and place in the culturally and racially divided family and society. In order to understand and deal with the racial problems around her, Clare studies the history of the Jews in the Holocaust. She cannot get explicit explanations about the history of the Jews’ sufferings from her father and her schoolteacher. She reads about the Holocaust secretly by herself and she is “reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life” (72). As Sophia Lehmann asserts, “Colonialism and the Holocaust have jointly conspired to create a legacy of global displacement, in which people are robbed of their homeland and the language in which their culture has been formed” (101). With her dual heritage, Clare represents both the colonizer and the colonized, which results in her sense of displacement on each side. In her displacement, she is more identified as a colonized subject because she deals with her black heritage with more preference and yearning. Hence, she feels attached to the black slaves and their history. By studying the Holocaust, Clare is able to understand the unknown history of black slaves in the past. She learns that “just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a

white one” (77).

In addition, studying the Holocaust reflects Clare’s yearning for maternal love and identification. Clare is moved by two Holocaust novels, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *I Am Alive*, in which two different mother-daughter relationships accompany the two heroines’ lives. Clare observes that she identifies with the heroines in age and gender. Therefore, she is concerned with their different fates and their relationships with their mothers. With Anne Frank’s death and Kitty Hart’s survivor, Clare wonders if there are any links between Anne’s death and her mother’s coldness, and Kitty’s survival and her mother’s devotion. Clare finds similar remoteness between Anne’s mother and her own mother Kitty Freeman. Clare wants to survive, which indicates her yearning for her mother’s care. Nevertheless, she knows that her mother is devoted to “her father and his theories and whiteness and her sister and her needs” (80). This episode functions as a hint of Clare’s final death in *Abeng*’s sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*. Alfred Hornung points out, “the personal fate of the protagonist is related to historical episodes about the island, both mediated with reference to the Jamaican landscape” (91). For Cliff, the landscape of Jamaica is “redolent of [her] grandmother and mother, it is a deeply personal connection” (Cliff, “Clare Savage” 266). Therefore, Cliff designates her protagonist Clare, in her young adulthood in *No Telephone to Heaven*, to be burned into her grandmother’s ground, which is to complete identification with her mother and grandmother.

Like Tee, Clare has close contact with black culture when she stays at her grandmother’s country home. Tee has a harmonious relationship with her grandmother

and other children. She feels at home in the countryside, where she gets a sense of belonging. Tee's grandmother guides Tee to know her roots. On the contrary, Clare is shut out of her grandmother's world, and she feels hurt and inferior in front of her male cousins. She spends her time in loneliness until Zoe appears. Clare's grandmother, Miss Mattie, is "both Black and white" (54). Of her twin heritage, Miss Mattie favors her black father. Her love "for her father and her love for her church ruled her existence. When Mas Samuel passed on, her devotion to the church expanded into the space which was left" (134). In the community of St. Elizabeth, Miss Mattie is a powerful woman and the spiritual leader. When Clare stays in St. Elizabeth with her grandmother, she helps Miss Mattie to prepare for Sunday's religious ritual. When everything is ready, Clare is "no longer needed" and returns only when "her grandmother's church was over and the congregation had left" (14). It illustrates that Clare does not belong to this community. Because of her white appearance, she is racially and culturally rejected by her grandmother and is displaced in her grandmother's community. Though she lives occasionally with her grandmother, she cannot really get close to her grandmother's world.

Miss Mattie's power not only shows in working and leading the religious ritual, but also exists in her influence on the community. She is generous and kind to the people around her:

Miss Mattie was known all around St. Elizabeth for her goodness. In her life she had taken in the children of other women as her own grew, . . . Miss Mattie shared her home with homeless children and shared her family's food with people who had nothing but enamel cups and bowls, . . . If anyone dared to question it within a sixty-mile radius, that person would be met with a stern challenge from almost anyone – as though they had insulted Massa God himself. (137)



Miss Mattie's kindness to the poor people shows that she is attached to her black heritage. However, to her mixed daughter and granddaughter, she is remote. Miss Mattie, in Kitty's memory, did not reflect much intimacy towards her. Even during Kitty's acute illness, Miss Mattie sends a neighbor's daughter, a dull girl named Clary to accompany Kitty to the hospital. When Kitty gets back, her experience at the hospital is never talked about. Kitty's good memory of Clary's devotion at the hospital is also a good memory of her mother's absence at a critical moment of her life. This memory reveals the remoteness between Kitty and Miss Mattie. The remoteness continues to follow Kitty and Clare, though Kitty names Clare after Clary to remember the dark girl. Hence, the maternal link is remote and Clare cannot develop attachment to her grandmother. As a grandmother, Miss Mattie only cares about Clare's "wandering about alone" (62) because Clare has reached twelve, the age of "developing" (62). She finds Clare a playmate, Zoe, the daughter of a black woman who rents her land. As such, Clare is able to stay away from men and develop femininity with the company of a black girl. However, Clare displays masculinity by taking the gun and killing Miss Mattie's bull accidentally. Miss Mattie cannot tolerate Clare's misdeed. In her mind, Clare's masculine act manifests her white ancestor's cruelty during slavery. In her childhood, Miss Mattie worked as a cane-cutter on the plantations decades after slavery was abolished. She was beaten to work hard and was given little pay. She experienced the pains and sufferings like the former slaves. Clare's whiteness and her killing act remind Miss Mattie of her unspoken historical pains. She punishes Clare psychologically by blaming Clare for what she does and

preventing Clare from meeting her friend Zoe. Moreover, she expels Clare from her home. Thus, Clare's quest for belonging in St. Elizabeth is a failure. Her relationship with her dark grandmother ends in alienation.

Zoe is an important link in Clare's bonds with her matrilineal family. Clare's life is shaped by Miss Mattie and Zoe, through whom Clare gets to know her maternal past. The friendship between the two girls starts when Miss Mattie offers it to Zoe, which implies Miss Mattie's status and power in St. Elizabeth. As a race of "red" (54),<sup>7</sup> Miss Mattie favors her black heritage, and is kind to the black people. However, in St. Elizabeth, she is the landowner and superior to the black people. To get a playmate for Clare also indicates that Miss Mattie, as an "othermother", cannot fulfill her role to nurture Clare. She needs someone else to assist her as Clare is "developing" (62). Zoe is the same age as Clare but she is well nurtured by her mother on female development and the differences between her and Clare, namely, class and racial differences. Zoe functions as a surrogate mother, from whom Clare gets to know about "monthlies" (106), and the class and racial differences in society. Zoe's appearance relieves Clare's loneliness and displacement at the countryside. They are aware of the differences between them. Those differences, however, do not bother them too much because "[t]hey had childhood – they had make-believe. They had a landscape which was wild and real and filled with places in which their imagination could move" (95). Their friendship develops well in their school vacations at the countryside "where there were no electric lights, where water was sought from a natural source, where people walked

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<sup>7</sup> The Caribbean society is generally categorized into three races: white, brown and black. Red is used in this novel to replace the color of brown, which refers to the mixed heritage and skin color of Miss Mattie's family. They are different from the Arawak, Carib, or Amerindian populations found on the Caribbean islands.

barefoot more often than not. This place was where Zoe's mother worked for her living and where Kitty Freeman came alive" (95). Only in their young age and the earthy environment can their friendship be possible. These are the foundations of their intimacy, but also the determinants of their short-lived friendship.

Through Zoe, Clare traces her mother's past. For Clare, "Zoe would be the first girl she would know from Kitty's home. Kitty had told her about the friendships she had with girls in her childhood – how these were the friends she remembered" (95). Clare's love for Zoe reflects her desire to identify with her mother, and her yearning for maternal love. The friendship and intimacy between Clare and Zoe substitute for Clare's absent maternal nurturance. For Clare, a black girlfriend means that she is getting closer to her mother's heart and past. However, their short-lived friendship also illustrates that Kitty is still inaccessible.

The accident of killing her grandmother's bull is a turning point in Clare's development. When Clare takes the gun and goes to hunt the wild pig with Zoe, she does not think about the consequences of this hunting event. By taking the gun, Clare is trying to make herself visible to her mother and grandmother. As she tells Zoe, "Me jus' want to do something so dem will know we is smaddy" (118). Whereas, Zoe disagrees with Clare and tells Clare the severity of this act:

Wunna know, wunna is truly town gal. Wunna a go back to Kingston soon now. Wunna no realize me have to stay here. Wunna no know what people dem would say if two gal dem shoot Massa Cudjoe. Dem would talk and me would have fe tek on all de contention. Dem will say da me t'ink me is buckra boy, going pon de hill a hunt fe one pig. Or dat me let buckra gal lead me into wickedness. Or dey will say me t'ink me is Guinea warrior, not gal pickney. But wunna never reckon with dat. Wunna jus' go ahead with wunna sint'ing. Country people dem don't forget not-t'ing – fe me pickney would be traced if dem mama did do such a t'ing. (117-18)

Zoe is well informed by her mother of the differences between her and Clare. She also sees that their futures are different. She understands that “without a doubt their lives would never be close once they reached womanhood” (118). Hence, Zoe is aware that she and Clare will face different situations after killing the wild pig. She knows that she will be the one to be blamed and punished if they kill the pig. Hunting and killing a wild animal is considered a masculine act. The community cannot accept such an act conducted by two girls. Therefore, Zoe tries to persuade Clare to give up the hunting. Though Clare quits her original plan, she accidentally kills her grandmother’s bull by shooting at a cane-cutter who sees her and Zoe naked on the shore. Clare’s feeling is complex when she is shooting, “Did Clare shoot from fear or did she shoot from shame? Did she shoot to protect Zoe or to protect herself? Or because she was angry that this man had strolled casually into their closeness? Or because she was angry that Zoe made her stop the hunt and told her things she didn’t want to hear?” (124). All these questions in Clare’s mind, if asked, may get positive answers in understanding her shooting. However, her grandmother and her parents never ask the reason or offer their understanding and forgiveness. She suffers from loneliness and alienation. Killing the bull makes Clare an outcast in her grandmother’s community and “a problem child” (149) in her parents’ eyes. It also symbolizes the ending of Clare’s friendship with Zoe. The powerless Clare can do nothing to retrieve the loss.

When Clare is exiled from her grandmother’s home, she is completely rejected by her black heritage, and she has no place of belonging. Both Miss Mattie and Kitty think that Clare’s act results from the “whiteness” and “arrogance” (148) of her

father's family. They are sure that Clare does not belong to them. The exile from her grandmother's home does not result in Clare's return to her own home. Kitty agrees with Boy to send Clare to live with an old Savage family friend, a white racist woman named Beatrice Phillips. I would say that by naming the white woman Beatrice, Cliff is making a reference to Hodge's Aunt Beatrice. Similar to Hodge's Beatrice, Cliff's Beatrice is a representative of white culture. Aunt Beatrice's life is unhappy because she apes white colonial culture so as to disguise her dark skin color and be close to the "white superiority." Though Cliff's Beatrice has superior status for being white and rich, she also leads a miserable life as a widow with all her children dead. Moreover, both women are unfriendly to black people. Similar to Aunt Beatrice in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Miss Beatrice in *Abeng* does not offer Clare a sense of belonging. Clare is sent to Miss Beatrice to erase her blackness. Kitty tells Clare that Miss Beatrice will teach her to be a lady. Clare will recognize her white identity and act according to her age, gender and skin color. Thus, Clare is pushed to the white side and has to cope with Beatrice's racism. Though Clare is light-skinned, she feels more attached to her matrilineal black heritage. Rejected by the black maternal family which she feels close to, she reluctantly negotiates her place in the white alien world of Beatrice's home. As an "othermother," Miss Beatrice and her extreme racism do not make Clare feel at home. Clare even has to hide her preference and sympathy towards the blacks. The novel ends with Clare's dream about Zoe and her first menstruation at Miss Beatrice's home. Clare keeps it to herself, which implies that her growing process is motherless and displaced.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Abeng*, Tee and Clare confront the conflict of identifying themselves with white or black culture. In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, identity formation is a matter of class identification. Tee's conflict lies in her identification with a particular class, which is shown by her contradiction of rejecting her working-class aunt (black heritage) and assimilating to her middle-class aunt's white culture. In *Abeng*, it is a matter of racial identification. Clare embodies the privileged race and class because of her middle-class status and her near-white physical appearance. However, she wants to be identified with her colored matrilineal heritage. In their negotiations with different females and "othermothers," Tee and Clare become aware of class and racial differences and experience prejudices and displacement. In both novels, gender relationships are complicated and jeopardized by the stratification of class and race. Female bonding plays a negative and disempowering role in the protagonists' development and identity formation. The two protagonists seek a sense of belonging from different mother figures at different homes. However, their relationships with other females are negatively influenced by class and racial differentiation and prejudices. Each female and each home fail to offer the protagonists a secure sense of belonging and a stable identity. As they grow into adolescence, the protagonists are expected to deny and reject black culture and to identify with the white one. Tee rejects her black values with shame, while Clare cherishes the blackness in her. Neither of them can fully reject their blackness and establish an identity designated by white culture. They struggle between white and black cultures, and cannot find a place of belonging in each culture. As a result, they fail to construct

authentic and stable identities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

The application of the *Bildungsroman* form to female experience in colonial and postcolonial conditions gives birth to the new canon of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. The Caribbean women writers in my study present young girls' growing up with endeavors to understand themselves, their relationships within the female community and their places in the decolonizing societies.

This thesis is a study of the relatively new and unexplored genre of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. It has sought to examine young women's development and identity formation by exploring how gender relationships intersect with colonial experience, and shed insight into a special dynamic of female relationships in the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*. Also, this thesis demonstrates that young women's identity formation is largely dependent on female bonding in the complexity of mixed races and cultures, and of colonial dominance and social hierarchies.

The question of identity, as Patteson points out, "recurs quite frequently in contemporary West Indian fiction, but it appears in many permutations and is inevitably linked with and dependent upon other conceptual constructs" (7). Sociopolitical forces and familial relationships influence the protagonist's development. Taking Edgell's *Beka Lamb* as an example, Patteson indicates that some novels foreground the "personal and sociopolitical dimensions of Caribbean identity, exploring the individual's place in the family, the immediate community, and the



whole society” (7). In the four novels I am discussing, sociopolitical forces are presented in various ways and affect individuals in homes, schools and communities. Female bonding, however, plays a significant role in the young protagonists’ perception of the forces and influences their ways of dealing with the forces.

In Chapter Two on *Beka Lamb* and *Annie John*, through an analysis of women’s autonomy in the colonial society, I explored the effectiveness of female bonding and examined how the protagonists were empowered by strong grandmothers and became aware of their quest for autonomy and identity by negotiating relationships with mothers and female friends through connection or separation.

In addition to personal relationships, Edgell and Kincaid present a sociopolitical link between the individual and the collective: Annie’s relationship with her mother reflects Antigua’s relationship with Britain, while Beka’s relationship with her family reflects her family’s relationship with her country, Belize. This link influences and complicates the personal relationships. With nurturing and effective female bonding, the two female protagonists find balance among the different forces of gender, interpersonal and sociopolitical relationships, achieving autonomy and identity as they mature.

In Chapter Three on *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Abeng*, I explored the negative and disempowering female bonding by an examination of the key elements that the colonial society generated. Besides Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Adam Kuper were introduced in my discussion to illustrate the hybridity of Caribbean identity and how the social stratification of class, race and gender jeopardized female bonding and

thus obstructed identity formation. I argued that female bonding under colonial social situation was riddled with the marks of oppression, domination and resistance, and thus became negative and disempowering. Accordingly, the protagonists could hardly manage successful bonds with other females. The two novels showed how the female self struggled with division as the protagonists negotiated relationships with other females who were distinguished by class, race and culture.

By presenting the two girls' conflicted position in their relationships with other females, Hodge and Cliff draw our attention to the deeply rooted social divisions of class and race that result from colonialism. Female bonding directly conveys the message of social stratification to the young protagonists and fails to inspire coherent identities for them. As a result, the two female protagonists fail to establish unified identities.

The study of the four novels demonstrates the importance of female bonding and the impact of colonialism, which are the two main factors influencing young women's development and identity formation in the colonial Caribbean. In each novel, the negotiations with female relationships and colonial legacy accompany the protagonist's development. By analyzing the four novels with two contrasting results, this study shows that female bonding alone has limited efficacy in assuring successful identity formation within the complex interplay of familial and sociopolitical forces. By adopting and reworking the *Bildungsroman* to depict the Caribbean experience, the four writers illustrate the complexity of a young woman's identity formation in the colonial Caribbean.

In this thesis, woman-to-woman relationships are foregrounded as important in analyzing the issues that the protagonists face in their development and their search for identities. This is not to say that there are no woman-to-man relationships in the young female protagonists' lives. As mentioned in the preceding chapters, men in the Caribbean are peripheral in family lives, and in these novels male figures like fathers are always in the background. Through a detailed analysis of female relationships in the four novels, we discover that the four novels indeed suggest the view that woman-to-woman relationships are more central when it comes to a girl's pre-pubertal identity formation.

The four novels do occasionally depict the female protagonists' relationships with male figures. For example, in *Annie John*, we witness Annie's relationship with her father and her childhood companion Mineu. In *Beka Lamb*, there is Beka's relationship with her father, her younger brothers and Toycie's boyfriend. In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee interacts often with Mikey, an adopted son of Tantie's. In *Abeng*, we witness Clare's relationship with her father and her male cousins. In these various relationships with male figures, the protagonists witness the instability and insecurity in heterosexual relationships, even as they come to realize the possible reality of gender inequality. In my thesis, however, I focus primarily on the protagonists' relationships with other women. Further in-depth studies on the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, from the perspective of female-to-male gender relationships, should be undertaken.

The hybridity of the Caribbean society is well reflected in Caribbean literature,

which provides many perspectives for the study on identity formation. For future studies of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, other themes like storytelling, religious practice (western religion vs. African obeah or ritual practices), and linguistic hybridity (Standard English vs. Creole and pidgin), which have been accorded little attention can be further explored.

This study of the female Caribbean *Bildungsroman* contributes to the recognition of the Caribbean tradition of matrilineal and female relationships. It helps to balance the traditional view that women's development and identity formation are dependent on their relationships with men. Even though the relationship between men and women plays a vital role in women's development in other female Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, or in the female *Bildungsroman* in general, female bonding is an important subject that needs further discussion in women's literature. I combine psychoanalysis and sociological studies to analyze female bonding and gender relationships, which will provide another vision for more collaborative studies of sociology and literature.

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