

GRUPE D'ÉTUDES LINGUISTIQUES ET LITTÉRAIRES  
G. E. L. L



# LANGUES ET LITTÉRATURES

REVUE DU GROUPE D'ÉTUDES  
LINGUISTIQUES ET LITTÉRAIRES

N°15  
Janvier 2011

UNIVERSITE GASTON BERGER DE SAINT-LOUIS  
B.P. 234, SAINT-LOUIS, SENEGAL  
ISSN 0850-5543

## LANGUES ET LITTERATURES

Revue du Groupe d'Etudes Linguistiques et Littéraires (G.E.L.L.)

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**Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*: Merging Postcolonial and Multicultural Discourses**

Babacar DIENG<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

*This article scrutinizes the feminist, postcolonial and multicultural discourses circulating in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, a bildungsroman in which Clare Savage, a light-skinned young Jamaican girl who can be considered as Cliff's alter ego, casts a very critical glance on the contradictions of Jamaican postcolonial society. The child narrator reveals the patriarchal structure and intolerance of the Jamaican society and deplors the divisiveness inherited from colonialist impositions. The narrative, like its title suggests, calls Jamaicans to transcend their differences and celebrate their rich hybrid heritage. *Abeng* is an African conch shell blown to call the slaves to the canefields, and it was also used by the maroon armies to pass messages*

History and culture occupy important places in black diasporic literary imagination. These concerns with history and culture probably results from the common experience of oppression and displacement and the need for these people to liberate themselves from the past and reclaim their heritage. After centuries of life under enslavement, colonialism, displacement, indentured servitude and other forms of oppressive systems, the people of the black diaspora needed to redefine their relationship with the past so as to better understand their present and project a future. Paul Sharrad relevantly notes that engagement with history constitutes at the same time “a pre-condition and a problem for the Caribbean writer,” whose history seems to have been “erased by the imperialist extermination of the indigenous population, the uprooting of slaves and indentured labourers from their languages and cultures, and the control of all written records” (94). Nana-Wilson Tagoe, a great expert in West Indian literature similarly notes particular concern with history and identity in the West Indian literary imagination in his landmark book entitled *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*. He states that the works of West Indian writers reveal a great preoccupation with history and identity. For him, this preoccupation with history and identity is not

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simply characteristic of West Indian male writers because women writers also have entered this debate. However, he considers that the latter's texts depart in some ways from male tradition as they focus more on specific preoccupations related to gender and denunciation of patriarchal oppression. Wilson-Tagoe corroborates this view by explaining that women writers understand better the significance of the creolizing process and the labor and economics of the region because of their sexual exploitation during slavery. In addition, he explains that West Indian women writers confer new meanings to "custom, tradition, myth, ritual and belief" in their works (224-225). We share Tagoe's views on West Indian writers in general and women writers in particular. History is so much present in the works of West Indian writers that it is even compared to a "disease." Several works of West Indian writers – George Lamming (*In the Castle of My Skin*), Wilson Harris (*The Palace of the Peacock*), V S Naipaul (*The Loss of the Eldorado*), Simone Schwartz (*The Bridge of Beyond*), Merle Hodge (*Crick, Crack, Monkey*), Jamaica Kincaid (*Lucy*) and Michelle Cliff (*Abeng*) — instantiate this preoccupation with issues of history and identity. They all attempt in one way or another to come to terms with a still tyrannical and sometimes traumatizing past.

Though they share similar concerns, these West Indian narratives express relationships with history and identity. For example, white Creole Jamaican writers such as Jean Rhys and Michelle Cliff also "explore their relationship to the region and its history in their writing," but they are more concerned with the process of creolization of their society (Tagoe 225). Their representations of creolization and issues related to it probably reflect their lived experiences as their positions greatly differ. For instance, Jean Rhys' *Wide Saragasso Sea* has been criticized, on the one hand, for reflecting "the white creoles' terrified consciousness of the emergence of black power," and on the other, it has been dismissed for being irrelevant in the West Indian context because it does not use an Afrocentrist approach (Edmondson 181). The narrative of our focus, Cliff's *Abeng*, has been lauded on the contrary for its focus and efforts to critically present the creolization and the ordering of society resulting from historical factors such as colonialism in Jamaica. Being a light-skinned mulatta who grew up in Jamaican postcolonial society, Michelle Cliff is much preoccupied with issues of identity and color because they are integral parts of her own experience. The title of her previous book, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980) expresses with eloquence her predicament as a young girl growing up in Jamaica and her ideological positioning

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against colonial assimilation. All her works form part of a continuum as Meryl F. Schwartz and Michelle note:

...her career as a writer began as a process of trying to reclaim the self through memory, dreams, and history. This project informs Cliff's first book, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1981), a characteristically fragmented and lyrical text that Cliff describes as "halfway between poetry and prose (595).

*Abeng* is very Afrocentrist and multicultural at the same time. The text celebrates the Jamaican folk culture and history as it relates to its hybrid sources, with a focus on Africa. It interweaves within the fabric of the story celebratory motifs such as country Jamaican culture, obeah, and remnants of Dahomeyan culture, folk language and songs. *Abeng* is also very feminist as the text denounces Jamaican patriarchal and homophobic society and unearths the glorious buried history of resistant female figures such as Mama Ali. The novel's accentuation of cultural markers probably explains why most critical studies of the narrative scrutinize the work's cultural representation to such an extent that the postcolonial dimension of the text has been ignored. Though an Afrocentric hymn, the text also celebrates the diversity of Jamaica: a space where the Caribs, the Indians, the whites, and the Africans mixed like a salad in a bowl. The rich and hybrid nature of Jamaican society is beautifully conveyed by the motif of the grafting of the mango trees and the colorful varieties of the fruit in the opening pages of the narrative. This article illustrates how Michelle Cliff fuses the postcolonial and multicultural discourses in *Abeng* (1984). It first analyzes the novel's postcolonial discourse and shows how *Abeng* reveals how the colonial ideological discourses operated, reconstructs aspects of the colonized's experience ignored in recorded history, and celebrates at the same time the legacy of history. Then, it scrutinizes the novel's multicultural discourse to argue that the narrative invites Jamaican to transcend the contradictions inherent to the colonial legacy and to celebrate their diversity.

If we borrow Young's definition in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Postcolonialism can be defined as an attempt to come to terms with the history of colonialism. This history includes of slavery, deaths from oppression, forced migrations, destruction and superimposition of other cultures. It reconsiders history from the perspective of the dominated and defines the contemporary its social and cultural impacts. For Young, postcolonialism is concerned with colonial history only to the extent that it has determined the



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configurations and power structures of the present and its main objective is to liberate the present from the clutches of the past. Robert Young also notes in *Colonial Desire* that feminist discourse has appropriated postcolonial discourse in their denunciation of patriarchal hegemony (162). In Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, the appropriation of the postcolonial discourse for feminist ends is clearly perceivable. *Abeng* is very critical of the construction of gender in Jamaican society. Through Clare's experience at her grandmother's home, the narrator reveals how she is constructed to be a woman. For example, Clare was not supposed to witness the slaughtering of the hog, but the boys who are the same age watched and even took part in it. Clare also shows the clear line that separates her from the boys. This feminist discourse echoes Simone de Beauvoir's and John Stuart's Mill's denunciations of gender roles perpetuating the subjection of women on the pretense of their sensibility and weakness. Clare is also very critical towards her mother's silencing. The young girl deplors Kitty's submissive stance towards Boy Savage. She always complies with Boy's decisions and lacks voice. Finally, the text also represents the homophobia and intolerance of the Jamaican society through the disguised murders of homosexuals such as Clare's uncle and Clifton.

However, beyond the timid representation of sexism and intolerance, one perceives a more articulate concern about the "burdens of history," or the effects of the colonial legacy on independent Jamaican society. Fanonian theory argues that "colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on dialectic significance today" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 170). Fanon's theory serves as a useful basis for understanding postcolonial works, particularly the ones written after the sixties. Indeed, Fanonian theory seems to constitute a motif that postcolonial writers self-consciously textualize in their creative works and thus represents a key index in the reading of their works. West Indian postcolonial texts have been preoccupied with denouncing this process of erasure of the native people's past and showing its manifestations. In most of them, the natives seem to be unaware of the colonial impact because it has been subtly diffused. For example, the narrator describes Jamaica as an island ignorant of its own history because it had been erased by the colonial power. The narrative emphasizes the Jamaicans' ignorance of their true history through the repetition of the phrase "did not know" on pages 20 and 21 in the narrative segment referring to the workers in the

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Tabernacle. Indeed, the narrative explains that these people did not know about the glorious kingdoms — Kingdom of the Ashanti and of the Dahomey — their ancestors had come from. Neither did they know about the great armies their ancestors commanded, the universities they had, the systems of laws they devised, the history they had written, the poetry they had written, the trade they conducted or the art they had created. They ignored the Maroons' history of resistance against domination. All the valorizing and glorious aspects of Jamaican history as it relates to Indians and Africans had been carefully erased by colonialism from the slate. Cliff's historical reconstruction battles against the theory of the historylessness of the colonized people developed by the colonizer.

From the narrative's perspective, the erasure of the Jamaican past results mostly from the colonial education. School is in *Abeng* the locus of this distortion and destruction of the oppressed people's past. Following the steps of George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, Michelle Cliff denounces, through the reflections of the child protagonist coming of age, how colonial discursive practices were circulated through ISAs such as the family and the school. As Clare Savage notes, she heard about England through her father and the teachers' lessons, and they taught her that England was a place of high civilization—the mother country. She had also read in her history book “that Jamaica was the “prizest” possession of the Crown, and she had been told that there was a special bond between this still wild island and that perfect place across the sea” (36). These lines echo Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*; the only difference is that Lamming's text is set in Trinidad or Little England and Michelle Cliff's novel is set in Jamaica- “the prizest possession.” The colonizer not only created the myth of England, but he also convinced the colonized of his inculture, thus creating in his mind an inferiority complex. Boy Savage, among other characters in *Abeng*, represents a perfect example of the alienated Jamaican whose mind has been totally affected by the disease of colonialism. Even his name connotes imitation of British ways. His name, Boy, was “a common enough nickname among a certain class of Jamaicans, an imitation of England, like so many aspects of their lives” (*Abeng* 22). Though of mixed race and married to a woman of Indian and black origins, Boy Savage does not want to acknowledge his African heritage he was taught to despise. Like the members of the Savage family, he loves to think that he rather has Indian and Spanish blood. They said their ancestor's mistress, from whom they descended was a dark Guatemalan because they “wanted to forget about Africa” (*Abeng* 30). As Jewelle

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Gomez relevantly notes then: “Boy' Savage, nurtures the white roots of his family, taking pride in his near-white color and dismissing the influence of Africa on his blood-line” (5-6). Even though Clare's mother is aware of Boy's negative perception of race and intolerance, she hardly challenges them. With the exception of one instance, she is very submissive and leaves Clare to Boy's brainwashing. Clare develops her own critical consciousness towards the contradictions in her father's position on racial belonging.

The narrative further enhances the alienation and assimilation of Jamaicans through the portrait of the community living in Harlem as seen by Americans. Americans did not like the ways of Jamaicans because they seemed to think they were British. Indeed, the Americans thought that Black people from Jamaica, Grenada, Tobago, and so on, imitated “the things the English brought to the islands.” The West Indians played cricket on weekends and “flew the Union Jack over their ships and real estate offices” (86).

The erasure of Jamaican history and the dissemination of the myth of the mother country and brainwashing of the natives was perpetuated through a British- oriented educational system. As Cliff explains in an interview, most of the teachers in her school were either “white women or light-skinned women who believed in white supremacy and English supremacy- the Empire. The Jamaicans were somehow to feel ashamed of Jamaica, and the English were horrendously superior” (Adisa 277). Cliff does not fail to represent these realities in *Abeng*. The narrative shows that the school books used in the Jamaican educational system were directly imported from the metropolis. Jamaican history was cleaned of all its diverse content and only focused on its relation to Britain. It focalized “the history of course as it pertained to England—the names of the admirals who secured the island from the Spanish, the treaties which had made the island officially British, the hurricanes and earthquakes which had stirred its terrain and caused failure of cash crops, the introduction of rubber planting after sugar failed, the importation of “coolie” labor after the slaves were freed—all these things were dated and briefly described” (*Abeng* 84). In addition, the narrative illustrates the western orientation of syllabuses and their lack of adequacy with Jamaican realities. “Probably” the narrator says “there were a million children who could recite “Daffodils” and a million who had never seen the flower, only the drawing and she did not know why the poet had been so stunned” (85).

Mr. Powell—the nationalist teacher and former member of Garvey's UNIA who had lived in the US during the Harlem

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Renaissance—attempts to counter the machine of colonialism and cultural assimilation and tries to shape the national consciousness of his students by exposing them to the poetry of prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance movement. He made his students read the poems of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay, along with the works of British poets such as Tennyson, Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth (89). His aim is mainly to valorize black culture and place it on the same footing as the western one. *Abeng*, therefore, represents colonial discursive practices and portrays the strategies devised by the rising intelligentsia to counter the process of cultural assimilation in Jamaican colonial schools.

In *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*, Robert J. C. Young explains that postcolonialism was not only “designed to undo the ideological heritage of colonialism,” but it also “pays tribute to the great historical achievements of resistance to the colonial power” (65). As a historian, Cliff has “always been struck by the misrepresentation of history and [has] tried to correct received versions of history, especially the history of resistance” (Adisa 280). In her creative work, Cliff returns to the pre-colonial heritage to unearth that buried past. The text retrieves traces of the Caribs’s and Arawaks’s presence in Jamaican society, situates the British arrival, and challenges chronicles on the introduction and abolition of enslavement. In the process, it adopts an Afrocentrist approach to revalorize art forms emanating from Africa. It shows that the island women’s talents in embroidery and appliqué ornamenting derive from art forms invented far back “by the Fon of Dahomey, who had been among their ancestors” (59). Furthermore, the text revisits the experience of slavery to pay homage to the resistance of the Maroons, a valorous troop of African warriors led by Nanny and Cudjoe. Through the portrait of Nanny—the obeah woman—and the rebellious maroons, the text fuses two discourses: the feminist and counter-hegemonic ones. The historical representation of the movement of resistance serves the dual purpose of eulogizing native heroes who fought the colonial power and rewriting aspects of history not recorded in books. However, the text strives to offer a credible version both showing the heroism of the maroons and the treatise of some of them. *Abeng* is a representative postcolonial text because it constitutes a site of “historical resistance to colonial occupation and imperial control” and radically challenges “the political and conceptual structures of the systems on which domination had been based” (Young 60).

Central to the denunciation of British imperialism and the exploitation of labor during slavery is the metaphor of the salt taste of

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the white ancestor's plantation walls. As the young narrator imagines the walls of the plantations constitutes the records on which the history of exploitation of the slaves' labor is inscribed (32). The text also denounces the sexual exploitation of the West Indian women during the times of slavery. Besides serving as labor in the plantation, the slave women were often subjects to sexual exploitation. For example, the slavewomen in Justice Puisne's plantation were often sexually exploited by the master and the creole or quashee slavedrivers, and they consulted Mma Ali who taught them how 'to keep their bodies as their own' (35). This sexual exploitation of female bodies during slavery is also present in the works of African American women writers such as Toni Morrison and Sherley Anne Williams. Cliff's text follows the methodology of historical analysis to deconstruct official versions of history and offer alternative ones correcting misrepresentations. For example, the text negates the historical justification of the abolition of slavery by arguing that slavery was abolished as a result of the Jamaicans' resistance and the attraction of the new palm oil markets in West Africa. It argues that the abolition of slavery was motivated by the shifting economic interests of the British imperial power during the Victorian age. As the sarcastic voice of the narrator notes, "the end of slavery was a decision on the part of Her Majesty's government, after decades of consideration and decades of guerilla warfare. And of course the growing desire for West African palm oil [...] Clear and to the point- the perfect Victorian marriage of economy and altruism" (27).

Quoting Bhabha, Young explains that postcolonial critique is not trapped in the past, its theoretical practices seek to challenge "the legacies of the past" as well (66). Cliff's postcolonial text deals with the aftermaths of the colonial presence through the Savage family. The choice of the name is not gratuitous too, for it ironically deconstructs the colonizer's claim of possessing a superior civilization. Boy Savage carries in his genes "the arrogance," and "logical distrust" the savages felt for anyone different from them (29). He is a remnant of the colonizer's mentality. Although Boy Savage is a mulatto, his ideology is similar to the colonizer's. Like the colonizer, Boy considers his western origins as a sign of superiority and affirms the preeminence of western civilization. For example, he considers that the country women's practice of breastfeeding their babies in public exemplifies their primitivism. The text uses the precocious narrator's inquisitive mind as a means to deconstruct the validity of Boy's theories of whiteness. Not only does Clare ask Boy questions reveal the limitations of his ideology, but also Clare associates her father's ideology to the white supremacist theories that led to the extermination of the Jews

during the Holocaust. Clare is more drawn to her Afrocentric mother who stands as a binary opposite of her husband in the text. These words reveal Clare's preference: "Those mornings and afternoons with her mother in the bush make Clare think- wish- that they were on a desert island together- away from her father and his theories and whiteness and her sister and her needs. That they would survive on this island with just the fallen fruit her mother gathered and she wanted this" (80).

The character of Clare is clearly not a tragic mulatta, but rather serves an important function in the text's postcolonial perspective. Far from revealing a double consciousness, a split between her African origins and her western ties, the main protagonist clearly bends towards her local culture and is very aware of the colonial legacy. Through Clare's consciousness, the text illustrates how colonialism established a hierarchy based on color and class in Jamaica. According to the text the elite was mainly comprised of light-skinned natives who "worked in colonial offices, taught in private schools, supervised Bauxite excavations, bought retirement homes on the North Coast, or were regular guests at Round Hill Hotel- and who made the island look whiter than it actually was" (54). This social stratification is a direct result of colonialism which associates whiteness with purity and power to such an extent that the colonized internalized it and continued to perpetuate in the post-colonial period. As Lamming observes in reference to colonial experience, it is "a live experience in the consciousness of these people. And just because the so-called colonial experience is over and its institutions may have been transferred into something else, it is a fallacy to think that the human lived situations are automatically transferred into something else, too. The experience is a continuing psychic experience that has to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation ends" (Kent 92).

As a matter of fact, the colonial experience has so much branded the white race's superiority into the Jamaicans' minds that long after the end of enslavement and domination, they still submit to the dichotomies established by this experience. This social stratification, according to color and shade as the coming of age narrator observes, is pervasive in the Jamaican society of the 1950s. It continues to be perpetuated by the people. Clare was aware that the worst thing that could happen to someone in her society was being dark. She knew that she should guard from family her feelings about the friendship of her dark-skinned friend Zoe because "she had been carefully instructed" by her father primarily and others also about race and lightening" (127). The irreconcilable differences between Clare and Zoe resulting from the legacy of colonialism illustrate the persistence of the colonial

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structural heritage in independent Jamaican society. Gomez sums up these differences when she states:

The two ten-year-olds meet each other on uncertain ground. One is dark, the other light. One is poor, the other middle-class. British colonialism has given them a place in society at opposite ends of the spectrum. Although they develop a deep love for each other they can never totally escape the differences wedged between them (5).

Clare knew that even if her father did not openly say so, he expected her to have a white husband. He indeed “expected her to preserve his green eyes and light skin—those things she had been born with. And she had the duty to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all—and make the skin now gold, become pale and subject to visible sun burn” (127). This division according to race and shading is subtly perpetuated in school where privileges were accorded to light-skinned students like Clare. The incident of Doreen’s epileptic fit gave Clare a clue to the difference between herself and the dark-skinned scholarship students: they neither belonged to the same class nor had the same color. Teachers maintain this ordering in school and taught the light-skinned students to look down on the darker and poorer ones. As the text reads, Ladies, Clare had been taught, did not speak in a familiar manner to people beneath their station. Those with congenial defects of poverty-or color” (98).

*Abeng* battles this colonial legacy through the complex characterization of Clare’s family. This characterization serves two functions in the text: achieve a postcolonial critique and advocate multiculturalism. Multiculturalism and hybridity, as Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism*, are often considered as relatively liberal philosophies because they convey lessons of tolerance (xiv). This lesson of tolerance is indeed central in *Abeng*. In this respect, Cliff joins the voice of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott who attempt to resolve the cultural contradictions of the region through literary representation. Lionnet Françoise partly perceives this dimension of the text when she notes that “the story she tells is meant to inform and educate Jamaicans and non- Jamaicans alike, and she does to great lengths demystify the past in order to imagine, invent and rewrite a different collective and personal history for the protagonist” (25). Lionnet also explains that Cliff digs “underneath the colonial process of subject formation” (the diverse components of the hybrid Jamaican culture) to show “that the multicultural subject is always a site of contradictions” (33). The

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contradictions of the hybrid Caribbean society are reproduced in the family of Clare the genealogy of which reflects the mixture of cultures and races resulting from the colonial experience. Lionnet considers that the mango is “a heterogeneous signifier, which can readily be opposed on the symbolic level of rigid classificatory practices of the colonial system” (46).

Lionnet read *Abeng* with perspicacity. Indeed, through the central metaphor of the mango season, Cliff’s celebrates the diversity and richness of Jamaican society. The large variety of mango fruits flooding the landscape are reminiscent of the different color shades resulting from the hybrid nature of Jamaican people resulting from the different races that came into contact throughout history. The tone of the narrative is quite celebratory as the following lines reveal:

There was a splendid profusion of fruit. The slender cylinders of St-Juliennes hung from a grafted branch of mango tree in a backyard in town. Round and pink Bombays seemed to be everywhere-- brimming calabashes in the middle of dining tables, pouring out of crates and tumbling into sidewalks. Small and orange number elevens filled with the market baskets at Crossroad, the baskets carried on the heads of women traveling the country. Green and spotted Black mangoes dotted the ground at bus stops, schoolyards, country stores-- these were only gathered, not sold. The fruit was all over and each variety was unto itself--with its own taste, its own distinction of shade and highlight, its own occasion and use (3).

Cliff’s narrative even seems to suggest that Jamaicans are not aware of this richness, this historical gift. The very same Bombays that are “only gathered and not sold” are seen by Jamaicans by Jamaicans walking through Harlem or Notting Hill Gate, Brooklyn or Landbroke Grove “nesting in a bed of green excelsior showing through a display window, priced out of reach” (*Abeng* 4). The narrative seems thus to suggest through this image that this natural richness of Jamaican society is not valued at its right price in the country.

Cliff clearly establishes a parallel between the historical process of creolization or hybridity of Jamaican society and the grafting of the mango tree. The grafting process mixes many varieties within a single body. It epitomizes the mixed genealogy of the Savages, the Freemans of most Jamaican families, a genealogy made of European, Indian and African elements. The tree is thus the Jamaican nation and its variety of races. Through the hybrid Savage/ Freeman families or the grafted mango trees, the text posits the erroneousness of holding on to the



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colonial ordering based on skin tone. Furthermore, the binary opposition between Boy Savage and Kitty Freeman serves as a means of denouncing all forms of cultural extremism; both Boy Savage and Kitty Freeman remain trapped in the past, and the text condemns both postures (128). Consequently, *Abeng* calls for compromise, and advocates diversity and tolerance. Clare Savage who has gained consciousness of this hybrid nature of her society at a young age represents hopes of changes.

*Abeng* combines a two-layered postcolonial discourse with a multicultural one in its representation of mid-century Jamaican society. Like in most West Indian narratives written by women, the postcolonial text includes a feminist one. Indeed, through the tale of Clare Savage's coming of age, Michelle Cliff denounces the constructive roles assigned to women and the marginal role of Jamaican women. She also textualizes the homophobia of the Jamaicans through the mysterious deaths of transgressive persons such as Clare's uncle and Clifton. However, the overarching and dominant motif of the narrative is no doubt the critique of the colonial machine of Great Britain. *Abeng* deplores the historical amnesia of the Jamaicans who don't know their history because colonialism has erased it through ISAs such as the school and taught them to venerate Great Britain, its culture and its history. Cliff's narrative partly unearths that history through its celebration of the African past and reminding the hybrid nature of Jamaican society that witnessed the contact of several races and groups: Africans, British, Indians, etc... Cliff's work deplores the divisiveness characteristic of the hybrid Jamaican society which continues to be structured around race and color long even after the end of colonialism. The hybridity of Jamaica and the common lineage of all Jamaicans regardless of race is suggested through the metaphor of the grafted mango tree which parallels the nature of the families in the text. The Savages and the Freemans are products of cross fertilization, the families are sites of mixtures of white, black, Indian, etc... Cliff builds a network of images around the mango. The variety of mangoes produced by the grafted trees illustrates the diversity of races that mix in Jamaica. The opening celebratory description of the mango season, a hallmark of Jamaica, constitutes a call to Jamaicans. Cliff invites them to go beyond the contradictions inherent to colonial legacy and embrace each other. In that respect, the multicultural discourse of the novel informs the form of the text.

**Langues et Littératures, Saint-Louis, n°15, janvier 2011**

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