

(Re) i-magining identity: plural subjectivities
in Beryl Gilroy's Frangipani House and
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Abstract

This thesis uses the concepts, definitions, theories, and poetry of black women, in particular highlighting those of Africaribbean women, to look at the construction of identity in two novels by two women of the Caribbean diaspora; Frangipani House by Beryl Gilroy and No Telephone to

Heaven by Michelle Cliff. Black women's self-articulations counter the dichotomies of self/other, black/white, the West/Third World, and oppressor/oppressed that underlie dominant Western stereotypes of black womanhood. Attending to black women's voices opens up the complex, shifting matrix of social and political relations that constitute the lives of the people populating Gilroy's and Cliffs novels. The plural and migratory subjectivities that surface not only counter the Cartesian concept of identity, but also differ from a generalized post-structuralist subjectivity by drawing on the specificities of women whose histories are anchored in West Africa, the Middle Passage, and slavery. The plural subjectivities of women such as Mama King and Clare Savage (the "protagonists" of the two novels) reveal the intersections of self and community, past and present, ancestors and inheritors, imagination and reality, and the political and the spiritual. Central to this thesis is a close look at Gilroy's and Cliffs re-writing of English and English Literature through an analysis of each author's particular use of language, her narrative strategies, and the structure of her novel. In this thesis, then, I highlight the intersections of language and subjectivity, and by looking at memory, the community and the self, develop the idea that a black woman's identity is multiply situated and shifting, and that a multiplicity of voices constructs her story. In other words, her story is always already plural.

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