



The Living Dead In Colonial and Neo-Colonial Worlds **Fanon's Mass Attack on the Ego in Cliff, Kincaid and Aidoo**

A. C. Warner

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

persephone571@aol.com

Abstract: Samira Kawash deals with the importance of the translation of the effects of a mass attack on the ego into psychological terms, in Fanon's study of a patient who believed he was stalked by a vampire. I use these observations to examine apparitions in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, and argue that appearances in these works of creatures that have meanings similar to that of zombis (in that they represent the practice of appropriating the bodies for the use of others) show a comparative mass attack on the ego in physical terms.

Samira Kawash delineates the importance of the appearance of a vampire in a case study by Fanon in the colonial context. "For Fanon, the colonized is rendered static, hemmed in both corporeally and existentially. Thus fixed, deprived of temporarily and historicity, the colonized become, at the limit, but another element of the landscape" (246). What Fanon terms a mass attack on the ego, the effect of the cultural and social forces of the colonial society culminating in a negation of the colonized individual's sense of identity (250), appears transcribed into a physical form in the malady of Fanon's patient who thinks he has been savaged by a vampire and is not alive and not dead (for victims of vampires can, of course, become vampires). Kawash notes that "if living depersonalization names the attack on the ego characteristic of life under colonialism, then the corresponding name

for a corporeal manifestation might be *living death*" (Kawash 247). An examination of the figures that can represent the living dead, or bodies of colonial subjects, in terms of zombis, vampires and creatures that fall into similar definitions (bodies not alive and not dead, such as the head of the Gorgon and ghosts) in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* show each author's analysis of the colonial or neo colonial word at hand in terms of Fanon and also how the difficulties of those colonial subjects that suffer mass attacks on the ego can be surmounted.

The utility of a reading of Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* with Fanon's concept of the mass attack on the ego in mind is especially apparent in light of criticism of the novel: The novel's protagonist (Sissie), has been

A.C. Warner is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Department of African American Studies. Her dissertation will focus on Black Arts Movement and post-BAM women playwrights.

called racist, and her denigration of the German “natives” has been compared to Conrad’s dehumanized African natives (Hoeller). While Hildegard Hoeller constructively points out that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is, in itself, the heart of darkness of Aidoo’s novel (and that *Killjoy* critiques the racist codes in *Heart of Darkness* through its use of Conrad’s conceptual schema), he does not touch on how the very (apparent) superiority on Sissie’s part reflects the colonial depersonalization described by Fanon. The images that characterize this depersonalization in *Killjoy* are often vampires, zombies and a zombified state; they carry the same meaning that Fanon demonstrates within his patient’s fear of the vampire and his experience with its removal of his blood: a state of suspension between life and death; half alive, and yet not dead; a physical manifestation of the psychological effects of depersonalization (Kawash). Aidoo associates these signs of depersonalization with the education that European colonizers have made the medium of “rescuing” native subjects; with the corrupt officials supported by neo-colonial powers; and with the farcical hope held out by racist systems for the acceptance of the full humanity of the African. Aidoo’s critique of the cultural and political apparatuses of the colonial world is in itself resistance to them.

Sissie articulates, in a letter to her Intended, that what they (Africans who have come to Europe to be educated) have learned is simply “how to die”: according to the “comatose intellectuals” created in Europe, “we must hurry to lose our [cultural] identity quickly in order to join the great family of man” (120-1). Here the concept of a being controlled by the will of another (a rudimentary definition of a zombi offered by Wade Davis) relates precisely to the education received by Africans (and, indeed, other Third World peoples) in Europe. This is hammered in by the use of imagery that can relate to slavery, which contextualizes this mention of “comatose

intellectuals”: the Intended speaks of the “comatose intellectuals” as “gone, gone, gone”; Sissie remembers then “the auctioneers at the church harvests with their little bells. Yes, My Love, they are indeed gone, gone, gone” (121). The conflation of what would amount to those dead to the world around them (comatose intellectuals) with slaves drives home the zombi imagery: (Haitian) zombis have been used as a metaphor for the state of being enslaved—having one’s body (and labor, physical and intellectual) used by another person (Davis 208).

Implicit in this cultural death is the abandonment of their mother countries and peoples in need of help these intellectuals might have provided (had they not chosen to remain in Europe). The absence of the Third World intellectual in his/her mother country and his/her presence in Europe is used by Aidoo in the same way that the concept of “comatose intellectuals” is used. It describes the physical manifestation of a mass attack on the ego as an educational system that tells its victims to give up their cultural heritage in favor of “universals” (121) inferring the convergence of societal forces to deny non-European peoples their cultural heritage. Just as, in Kawash’s reading of Fanon, the victim of colonialism is in a psychological state in which he knows he is human but this humanity has been denied, and this state translates into physical terms as being both not alive and not dead, the denial of the cultural heritage of Third World peoples is described by Aidoo in like physical terms. In the context of two Indians overseas (one known by Marija and the other by Sissie), the intellectual “heritage” of European culture is related in terms that invoke zombi images: people “plundered of our tongue,” whose “dead fingers” grasp a weapon they are not alive to wield effectively: The grasping of the English language is described as a return in “a dubious bargain that left us/Plundered of ... our tongue/Our life—

while our/Dead fingers clutch/English—
 a/Doubtful weapon fashioned/Elsewhere
 to give might to a/Soul that is already/
 Fled”(29). In this context, an Indian intel-
 lectual’s decision not to go home is nar-
 rated; this is, in turn, contextualized by a
 hint at organ appropriation/donation (a
 theme which reappears significantly later
 in the novel); the appropriation of a peo-
 ple’s bodies, culture and, finally, organs is a
 physical manifestation of a mass attack on
 the ego—the psychological dimension of
 which is a refusal of humanity to colonial
 subjects, all while the victims are told by
 their very bodies that they are human; here,
 Aidoo points out, the homeland, culture
 (language) and even possession of internal
 organs of these neo-colonial subjects are ne-
 gated by what colonial forces have already
 done to the world. The Indian tells her that
 he cannot go home, where his people are
 perishing, because all he would be able to
 do there is cater to the wealthy, “civilized”
 private patrons—if he is smart enough to
 further his own interests. The countries of
 the neo-colonial world, turning on the axis
 of power and wealth are described at this
 point as “zombie dynasties” (31). The influ-
 ence of the neo-colonial powers is reflected
 in the vampire images Aidoo impresses on
 the faces of the people who run the “zom-
 bie dynasties”:

From all around the Third World,
 You hear the same story;
 Rulers
 Asleep to all things at
 All times—
 Conscious only of
 Riches, which they gather in a
 Coma—
 Intravenously—

So that you wouldn’t know they
 were
 Feeding if not for the
 Occasional
 Tell-tale trickle around the mouth.
 And when they are jolted awake,
 They stare about them with
 Unsleeping eyes, just
 Sleepwalkers in a nightmare. (34)

Sleepwalkers in Cixous’ sense, with
 “the eyes of their souls put out,” these na-
 tive leaders in Third World countries reflect
 the not dead and not alive state of a ruler
 who is not a ruler in deed (inasmuch as a
 ruler does more than take in wealth “intra-
 venously”) but is put in the position of a
 ruler by the neo-colonial powers. The “tell
 tale trickle around the mouth” and the “in-
 travenous” feeding of course invoke vam-
 pire imagery—a creature fed with the
 substance of others; this is, of course, con-
 sistent with the vampire image in Fanon’s
 patient’s nightmare, but it expounds it in
 the same way that Kawash does—the rul-
 ers of these “zombie dynasties” are them-
 selves in a state of vampirical coma, neither
 alive to their peoples and themselves, or
 dead. “The vampire haunts not just this in-
 dividual patient but the colonial reality that
 constitutes the colonized as such” (Kawash
 247).

To say that Aidoo merely treats Marija
 as another “native” and thereby dehuman-
 izes her just as Conrad dehumanizes Afri-
 cans (as much of critical reception of *Killjoy*
 does [Hoeller]), then, is missing the point.
 Marija speaks for a cultural apparatus that
 would describe human culture as a univer-
 sal, eliding and erasing cultural differences
 (in the same way as Sissie points out of “co-
 matose intellectuals” [121]): she cannot tell
 the difference between Sissie and a person
 from a culture not Sissie’s. This erasure of

cultural lines is a form of mass attack, in and of itself: Sissie is both present and not present for at least several uncomfortable moments for Sissie (much like the moment in the market where she is pointed out as different, because she is black)—for Marija, she is present as an Indian, and of course, she is not. Significantly, Sissie's very use of the English language erases her individual culture in Marija's eyes: Marija thinks of the Indians, whose cultural identity she confuses with Sissie's because they have dark skin in common, "weri much as [*Sissie*] speak[s] *English*" (28; italics mine).

Within this context, Sissie notes that the absence of the gifted intellectuals from their home countries leaves "limbs and senses [to] rot/Leaving/Clean hearts to be/Transplanted into/White neighbors' breasts" (32): here, the borders of individual bodies are erased, just as cultural boundaries would be erased by European universals. This early allusion to organ donation and heart transplants evokes the later scenario detailing the transplant successes of the Christian Doctor, and Killjoy's acquaintance's response to this Kunle believes that the "cleaning of the Baas's chest of its rotten/heart and plugging in a brand new palpitating/warm kaffirheart, is the surest way to usher in/the Kaffirmillennium" (101). This, of course, compares to the rationale of educated people from Third World countries who do not return home: in "remaining here," one man argues, "someone like me serves a very useful purpose in educating [the whites] to recognize our worth" (129). Aidoo hammers in this connection between the brain drain and organ donation in a subtle detail: the man arguing that his worth is recognized by whites because of his presence among them (128) is a specialist in gastro-intestinal disorders, quickly "becoming the last word in Medical Science as far as the human abdomen is concerned... I do the Intestinal-By-Pass as a hobby" (128). The references to the swallowing up of organs, bodies, cultures by

white controlled powers are legion; Aidoo's black doctor whose specialty is to tend to those with, essentially, bad digestion underscores the point with a deliciously ironic flourish.

Jamaica Kincaid's protagonist Xuela, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, presents what can be described in terms of a mass attack on the ego through imagery that invokes the Haitian zombi. Kincaid's rendition of what constitutes a mass attack on the ego describes the event while surmounting it: Xuela's acting out of the role of the forces that would deny her human agency would consign her to expurgate the psychological shackles that threaten her. The threat appears in terms of a ghost of Xuela's self that signals the desire on the part of someone else to consume Xuela; Xuela acts out this attack while fighting it by taking on the clothes of a dead man and performing hard (exploitative) labor at a construction site.

First, it is necessary to point out how the colonial attack on the identity of the colonial subject is intertwined with Xuela's employer's attempt to consume her, in effect. The moment in the novel where Xuela relates that Lise (her employer) "wanted something from" her, and the scene where Lise informs Xuela that she is with child, sandwiches Xuela's interrogation of names in the colonial world and the function of education of colonial subjects in this world. Xuela says of her education, "I could not like what it would lead me to: a humiliation so permanent that it would replace your own skin. And your own name was eventually not the gateway to who you really were... for in a life like... mine, what is a real name?... For the name of any one person is at once her history recapitulated and abbreviated, and on declaring it, that person holds herself high or low and the person hearing it holds the declarer high or low" (79). Xuela illustrates the sense of humiliation inculcated in colonial subjects by the colonial educational

system together with how that system has shown her how to interpret her name. This colonial system has also taught Xuela how her name has been constructed, and how it is continually reconstituted by the gaze of others in the system: the person hearing the name of the declarer “holds the declarer high or low.” A sense of unreality haunts Xuela’s name: she asks, “In a life like mine, what is a *real* name?” The continual reconstruction of identity on the basis of this colonial history threatens to take from the subject a sense of reality, precisely because it is the colonial system’s version of reality that is, perforce, “real.” This passage then describes the dynamics of a mass attack on the ego at the linguistic level: Xuela claims for herself a real identity (she decides to own herself, whereas some people “choose to possess vast plains...high mountains and some people choose husbands”[174]), but the message that bombards her in the colonial world is that her name is only an item in the catalogue of conquest and the power to give positive definition to a name rests in the hands of the conquerors.

Just before this discussion of her name, Xuela notes that Lise “wanted something from me, she wanted a child that I might have...this vision she would have, of a child inside me, eventually in her arms, hung in the air like a ghost... but I would never see it, and it would go away and come back, this ghost of me with a child inside me” (77). Lise demands a self for Xuela that Xuela does not want—a self that would bear a child for Lise. After the discussion of names, Xuela describes how Lise puts her to lie in her own bed after she is ill, lies next to her, “holding [Xuela] in her arms. She said I was “with child.” *She said it in English...* she said it again and again, that I was having a child, and then she sounded quite happy” (81). As several critics have noted, English in *Autobiography* is the language of legitimacy, the language of the conqueror. That Lise uses English to force an identity on Xuela fits in with the use of

English education to delegitimize the names of the conquered, to make them “low.”

After Xuela refuses this version of herself that is not her, which would have borne a child for Lise, she goes to work at a construction site, and “bought from his wife the garments of a man who had just died... it was these clothes, the clothes of a dead man, that I wore to work every day” (98). Nicole C. Matos notes that Kincaid uses “clothing as a primary image of suppression, a means by which oppressors can disguise, inhibit and appropriate subjects’ treacherous bodies” (846). Matos, however, does not touch on Xuela’s adoption of a dead man’s clothes. I argue that Xuela’s donning of a dead man’s clothes is performative, and that by doing so, she acts out what the forces around her would have doomed her to. This acting out shows Xuela’s analytical distance from her oppression, her refusal to be swallowed by it. While attempting to settle accounts with her memory (102), Xuela takes on the garb of zombi behavior. Wade Davis points out that zombis are sometimes used as slave labor, and are often made zombis after having done something in their lives that was condemned socially. A zombi is, in and of itself, a being that wears the flesh and clothing of a dead person; if it is not technically physically dead, it is socially dead: For those who believe in zombis, “What is taken from the ground is no longer a human being” (208).

Significantly, the concept of enslavement often associated with zombis by the lore shows the relationship between colonial government and the making of zombis: “Given the colonial history, the concept of enslavement implies that the peasant fears and the zombi suffers a fate that is literally worse than death—the loss of physical liberty that is slavery, and the sacrifice of personal autonomy implied by the loss of identity” (139). I have already shown that Xuela is threatened by a ghost of herself

conjured by Lise's desire for a child; her enactment of zombi like behavior (the dead man's clothes; the hard labor) is a performance of what she feared to lose at Lise's hands and through the colonial education. Importantly, a zombi is made a zombi after the part of his soul that makes himself is stolen by a malevolent sorcerer (Davis 60); the version of Xuela that is not Xuela that Lise shows her is to Xuela what a zombi is to the individual before s/he becomes a zombi—the person's self as an alien and alienated version of the person.

Xuela observes that a "real" name can mean nothing to her, she is denied this validated (or "high") identity by definition as a colonial subject. As already noted, the condition of a zombi is identified with that of the slave; also, the state of the zombi is of an individual deprived of all social functions in his/her community, even if the person were able to recover from the stupefying drugs used to make a zombi in the first place and were to attempt to return to his/her home and life. The abysmal state that the zombi represents, in effect, is closely related to the dichotomy insisted on by colonial governments—in order for the colonial subject to be a subject, he requires an object; in order for him to be a master, he requires a slave, or an objectified person (as Cixous and Fanon have shown). Fanon observes that "Those hordes of vital statistics, those hysterical masses, *those faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies which are like nothing on earth...* that vegetable rhythm of life—all this forms a part of the colonial vocabulary" (43; italics mine).

The colonial subject defines himself and his legitimate role through the inhumanity projected onto the peoples subjected to colonial dominion as surely as the two zones of the colonial world are supported by their joint existence—the clean, well lighted city of the colonials and the dirty, dangerous ghetto of the natives (Fanon). The state of the worker without social identity that Xuela assumes, then, is

intimately connected to her lack of a "real" name in the colonial world. For Xuela, this sense of not having a "real" name is related to the denial of her subjectivity in her society; she is identified as a member of a "people," as "*part of a horde*, already demonized, mind blank to everything but human suffering" (181; my italics). As a worker on the site, she sees herself as "not a man, not a woman, not anything" (102); a zombi is essentially desexualized, or rather, becomes a being that is no longer sexual by its own volition (Davis 68).

So, while I agree on the whole with Matos's summation, in regard to the cloth theme in *Autobiography*, that "the hazards associated with affiliation with the repressive, socially constructed world of cloth remain clear throughout; by identifying too wholly with "a collection of externals" [*Autobiography* 159], characters risk annihilating their integral, organic—naked—selves" (852), Matos disregards the performative function the clothes of the dead man take in Xuela's use of them. In their Foucaultian analysis of *Autobiography*, Holcomb and Holcomb conclude that Xuela's use of pain in what appear to be S/M practices in the novel allow Xuela to act out colonial history and oppression in a subversive way: "What could be more subversive than a character with Xuela's history grasping and controlling her own pain in the context of simulating colonial oppression?... Pain in this instance is controlled by the slave; punishment is directed by the traditionally punished" (974). Likewise, Xuela's acting out of the role taken by a slave working for pennies a day, a role with thematic connections to zombihood, after being offered, in effect, a version of herself that she does not want (the pregnant "ghost" of Xuela), shows Xuela performing a role she would have been historically required to take as an expurgation of that role.

Davis notes that the Haitian fear of the zombi does not revolve around fear of attack by zombis, but instead fear of becom-

ing one. Not only are zombis explicitly mentioned in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* in relation to the mass attack on the ego effected by scientific categorization ("the darker peoples" are categorized as candidates for leprosy and the leper colony—and the state of the leper is traditionally described as that of the living dead) and popular culture that erases African American agency in their liberation, but Medusa images that relate to the fear of the zombi run through the novel. The fear of the zombi, of course, is the fear of appropriation of one's body for the uses of another; the fear of the Gorgon is essentially the fear of a part of the body taken from its original place and used without the permission of the original bearer (e.g., as Perseus's deadly weapon). These Medusa images are the end result of a physical attack by a white horde in two instances, and the result of the denial of African identity because of cultural forces in another.

In the leper colony at Carville, some of the lepers, along with a woman named Annie, who was routinely raped on a Confederate chain gang after she is captured (after John Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant's attempt to secure liberation fails), pass on oral histories. At the end of one story, the head of an escaped slave named Squire is placed on a pike outside the courthouse of the town near which he was killed. The purpose of displaying this head, of course, is to warn those who attempt to live as freely as they can in a racist world that they might meet the same fate. The speaker's parents

"took me to see it, him. His head was haloed with birds. His eyes were gone. My father and mother said nothing. They were in the silence. As was Squire. As was I."

"How did I end up here?" Annie wondered. "How in God's name did I end up here?" (65)

The appropriation of the Squire's head shows the transformation of a person into an object, in a way reminiscent of the use of Medusa's head. In the context of this transformation, Annie wonders how she ended up in this leper colony relating these stories. Annie's moment of disconcertion ("How did I end up here?") recalls Davis's descriptions of zombis who, upon being awakened from their state as zombis, did not know where they were or how they got there. The description of the use of a human as object triggers Annie's sense that she has been used as a human object—she, of course, ended up living in a liminal shack (which always seems about to slide into the swamp) outside the leper colony after being routinely raped for years for the amusement of the guards of the chain gang. This liminality is important because it can also point up the construction of Annie as the abysmal by her racist oppressors, and this ties into the abysmal status held by Haitian zombis, which are also liminal figures, straddling the states of life and death, human and nonhuman, corpse and body. Annie's social condition, as a light skinned woman of African descent, is an intensely liminal state that corresponds to the experience of Fanon's vampire-haunted patient: she is at once not a person who can be exploited, and yet she is exploited, "a light skinned woman on a leash, a thing of wonderment to some"; a white woman who watches Annie get raped remarks, "She's no more a nigger than I am. What is she?" (208).

Another Medusa image in the context of a physical mass attack on the ego takes place in Mary Ellen Pleasant's rendition of Harriet Tubman's vision before John Brown jumped the gun. "On the day in question, her mind held... a many headed serpent [that] raised himself, and the eyes of each head gazed into her eyes. The blue of Captain Brown, the brown of Newby, Green, Leary, the green of Copeland. All of a sudden, from the side of the dream came a

mob, with axes raised to sever the heads from the serpent. The severed heads looked at Harriet “all wishful like,” in her own words” (100). The many serpents can recall the living heads of the Gorgon’s hair, and their severed heads the Gorgon’s head. The vision is, of course, a warning that Brown’s premature attempt to unseat the racist hierarchy in American society will fail.

The context of a world full of snakes, in Annie’s swamp, raises a Medusa-like image as well as the question of Annie’s dissociation from herself as a victim of the mass attack of the rapes. This victimization appears in Annie’s failure to place herself in her culture by remembering the meaning of the signs of her culture—in particular a sign that her failure to recognize shows her zombi-like inability to become part of it. First, the snakes remind her of her mother’s joke about her hair: “When her hair snaked, her mother said it was going back to Africa. “Look like you going home, pickney,” she said... Then, “Tell no one I said that, *ma fille*,” speaking out of her *gens inconnu* mouth” (23). Her mother’s words key into a need to make her family and herself something more than her cultural and ethnic heritage would make them—the implication that this cultural and ethnic heritage is not enough to be proud of on its own. Just before this mention of her mother’s classification of her “snaky” hair, Annie’s dream is related, in which she observes a snake being forced to shed its skin until no skin is left, and in which she asks a man near her where the garden in which the snake’s torture is. “Are we in Eden?... Gethsemane?” She asks. The man looks disappointed and answers, “Have you lost consciousness of the Rainbow Serpent? Damballah? Aido Hwedo? Who wrapped his body around the earth to create a globe?”

That Damballah and Hwedo are mentioned is important: as Davis points out, in Vodoun belief, the God to whom the spirit returns, in its passage from the individual spirit to pure energy that rejoins the cos-

mos, is Damballah Wedo (188). The creation of a zombi prevents the spirit of the individual (the *ti bon ange*) from rejoining this cosmos (188). The fact that Annie cannot remember what seems to amount to Damballah Wedo underscores the violation of her spirit that is reminiscent of the violation of the individual whose *ti bon ange* is stolen—her specified inability to remember Damballah Wedo shows her dissociation from it. Indeed, Cliff points to images that correspond to the aspects of the Haitian zombie by providing the cultural context in which the Haitian zombi is a believed phenomenon. Mentions of the “twinned worlds of the living and the dead, the city and the cemetery” (Thompson 27), essential to the liminal figure of the zombi (which shows a passage between the worlds of the living and the dead), and of the unified cosmos, to which the spirit of the individual cannot return if captured in the process of making a zombi, appear in the novel: the Four Moments of the Sun, indicative of the “threshold” between the worlds of the living and dead, are referred to several times; and not only is Damballah Wedo, the god of the cosmos to which the zombified spirit cannot return, is invoked in relation to Annie, Annie’s very resistance to oppression is patterned in relation to Damballah Wedo.

Annie’s oppression is demonstrated precisely by her inability to remember Damballah Wedo; Annie’s resistance is demonstrated by her role in perpetuating through oral history the stories of the oppressed peoples represented by members of the leper colony. While Annie cannot remember the name of the god who represents the unity of the cosmos, she bears out in her actions a strong identification with other victims of oppression and a need to pass on their stories; in this, she is still part of a social whole. The terms of her resistance, then, recall on cultural level the cosmic wholeness represented by Damballah Wedo.

To a similar point, a zombi cannot remember its identity; its spirit is contained in a liminal place that is a zone between the living and the death, a predicament of being not dead and not alive. Annie's response to her treatment as an objectified human being is similar to signs of zombification at several points in the novel. Davis points out that a sign of the zombi is that it retains markers from its burial. For example, a girl who was buried in a coffin too short for her had her neck bent so that her corpse would fit into the coffin; when she returned as a zombi, she was recognized by the bent neck (63). Annie writes in a letter to M.E.P. that "like someone with an amputated limb, I can feel the cuff [of the leash] to this day; I respond to the tug of the chain" (208). Her treatment as an object has left psychic markers on her that correspond to the physical markers that appear as the sign of the zombi; this of course corresponds to the physical transcription of the psychological phenomenon of the mass attack on the ego that Kawash observes in Fanon's patient's fantasy that a vampire has taken his blood. To the same point, Annie experiences forgetfulness of herself at younger stages of her life—she finds pictures that she assumes are of her, but does not remember who the other people in the picture are and does not really remember whether or not the likeness she assumes is herself is, in fact, her (186); Davis documents that a zombi often cannot remember its past life (207).

What Annie does remember, however, are instances of historical oppression that are carried on through oral history, and which the history of the dominant culture threatens to forget: in the context of the question, "Have you forgotten Damballah?" the narrator poses another question: "have you forgotten the cacique who asked the Spanish as they tied him to the stake... if there were people like them in heaven? And when they assured him, yes, said, "I'd rather go to Hell. Do what you must"" (23).

The tie in through the repeated phrase, "have you forgotten" hints that forgetting the history of oppressed people is just as threatening an attack as the dissociation from Damballah. This is borne out through the novel, when Mary Ellen Pleasant (M.E.P.) is besieged by reminders of cultural amnesia and stereotype, while writing the story of her resistance to Annie in hopes of passing it on in some way.

A zombie is specifically mentioned in relation to what can be considered to be a mass attack powered by popular culture. Through nearly every medium imaginable, the culture at large contradicts the history of oppressed people as they know it throughout the novel. The first moment where this contradiction appears plainly is when M.E.P. contests the popular account with her tombstone: "She was a friend of John Brown." The response of society to this statement is every rumor that was ever perpetuated by people within a culture that oppresses African Americans and especially successful ones about Mary Ellen Pleasant.

"Wasn't she a voodoo queen?"

"A madam?"

"A mammy?" ...

"Didn't she come back as a zombie?"

"Didn't she have a penis?"

"Couldn't she work roots?" (17)

It is interesting that the question of identity on a very elemental level is brought up in the context of a mention of a zombie: on this list of rumors and gossip about M.E.P. are three categories in close association with each other that refuse M.E.P.'s autonomous sexual identity: the mammy, the zombie and the woman with a penis. The mammy is a desexualized mothering image primarily constructed by slave

holders; a zombie has no will and therefore no specific sexual desire of its own (even the American popular zombie is a creature of mere drive with no ability to specify a desired object) and the woman with the penis is again an image of confused (and therefore defused) sexuality in the eyes of this culture. The question of M.E.P.'s "working roots" in the context of the question of whether or not she had a penis creates the image of a witch figure, neither really male or female and a debased or abysmal figure in the terms of this culture. The assertion of agency on the part of a black woman, even upon her tombstone (as Cliff's account as it), calls up this backlash of questions refusing M.E.P. as a merely human agent who struggled for the freedom of her people.

The mass cultural account of the historical record threatens the people of the leper colony, who are exiled from the dominant culture and told that their disease is a result of their skin color, in effect. First, it is important to keep in mind that the definition of who is ill and with what (in the leper colony in Cliff's novel) is a scientific categorization that functions jointly with the cultural mass attack on the ego. To emphasize this point, Cliff has one character who has no physical effects of the disease—she is told that because she is a Jew and because she associated with the "bush negars" in the cause of gaining freedom, she has the disease, and it is destroying her slowly from within. She claims she feels fine and they answer "she could not... papers had been written, samples of infected organs floated in glass jars. All reached the same conclusion: The Surinamese strain flourished especially among Maroons and Jews" (182). The connection between the scientific definition of who gets leprosy and the cultural mass attack on the ego appears thus: The explanation given by the mother superior of the leper colony to visitors is first mentioned literally wedged between two mentions of *Birth of a Nation*. The United

States Public Health Service opens a movie house for the lepers, and among the movies played was "*The Birth of a Nation*, which received a curious reception. // Leprosy, the reverent mother had explained to Annie when she had first petitioned for visiting privileges, flourished among the darker races"; this is followed by a list of groups throughout the non-Western world and immediately after this list *Birth of a Nation* is mentioned again: "It is like writing history with lightning," President Wilson declared, arranging showings of Griffith's twelve-reeler to Congress and the Supreme court" (40).

As Michael Epp has demonstrated, *Birth of a Nation* self consciously reaffirms the claims implicit in minstrelsy that grant the ability to tell blackfaced actors from actual African Americans to the white audience but deprive the blackfaced actors (including African Americans) the ability to make distinctions between each other—thus presenting African Americans as people without the basic self-consciousness inherent in people (and, of course, a mass attack on the ego is constituted, according to Kawash as an insistence on the part of colonial culture that the "native" is not human). Aside from the attack made by the assumptions of minstrelsy, *Birth* represents the white racist account of history, dismissing actual history and translating, in effect, a mass attack to a historical level: what these tellers of oral history know happened, did not happen according to the film. And this, of course, occurs in the context of the leper colony—a group of people that the dominant culture has sealed off from society and are, in terms of that society, socially dead (as zombies are in Haitian society)—this, after these groups of people have been enslaved and exploited in different historical moments (and of course zombies metaphorized the state of enslavement). Cliff represents the mass attack on the ego on the part of the popular explanation of history, and adds to it the scientific attack

on peoples of color through the order of three paragraphs, which seemingly skip from subject to subject without obvious connection.

In the last instance where the popular account of history and of African American people (in minstrelsy) is present in disturbing forms in *Free Enterprise*, Cliff seems to turn the terms of a mass attack on the ego on their head by way of exposing it: M.E.P. mentions two forms that would be attributed to zombies, or victims of a racist culture, but the first only by definition and the second only by appearance. This seems to emphasize that what racists and colonialists wanted to see was what they saw, and that this went less than even skin deep. The first character with attributes that would normally be attributed to a zombi like state is a ghostly precedent of the assertions of life and liberty on the part of an oppressed people—he is only ghostly because he is yet unborn; “He was waiting on his time, when he would first be called Homeboy, then Detroit Red, then X.” His presence positively affirms M.E.P.’s assertions that hers is a history that needs to be told, that the dominant account needs to be overturned. This ghostly character, “the hologrammatical man,” is referred to by M.E.P. as “a not dead, not alive man” (142). The second use of a figure that could be given zombi-like attributes is M.E.P.’s memory of herself, escaping capture by making herself an unlikely prospect for a slave by dragging one leg, head down. While in this role, she recalls killing several white boys who accosted her asking for a little “Jump Jim Crow.”

I have already discussed the dehumanized role minstrelsy assigned to African Americans on at least one level (as Michael Epp notes); M.E.P.’s use of this role as a mask contrasts sharply with the minstrelsy show one man is attempting to put on right before her eyes as she writes. The contrast between who M.E.P. is and the racialized roles and assumptions attached to min-

strelsy shows her resistance to the popular cultural mass attack on the ego even when it seems to be still going on. Cliff insists on this contrast by having a white character have the racialized stereotype stuck in her mind by her culture and at the same time appreciating M.E.P. for who she is: “I envy Mrs. Pleasant her purpose... that awful word engraved on my brain could not be further from the truth. I hate that it is there. She is her own woman. What an extraordinary thing to be!” (96). The “awful word” is “mammy”—which takes us back to the mention of mammy along with the question of whether or not M.E.P. came back as a zombie.

M.E.P. subverts the labels placed on her by using them as a disguise. Like Xuela, Pleasant takes on a form that can be described as abysmal or zombi-like in order to escape from the South after John Brown seizes the wrong day for their revolt. While in this guise (eyes cast down, left leg dragging), she kills several white boys who accost her and demand that the “one legged nigger” give them some “Jump Jim Crow.” Just as Xuela dons the clothing of a dead man in the process of coming to the knowledge of herself, and just as our sister Killjoy speaks the King’s English so perfectly that she exposes the hand inside the educational glove of velvet that has insisted on her perfection of the Received Pronunciation, Cliff’s Pleasant takes on the disguises of Mammy and of a “poor prospect for a slave” in order to reach a physical point of comparative freedom, where she can change back into what she was: “a middle-aged African American woman.”

WORKS CITED

- Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Our Sister Killjoy*. New York: Longman, 1977.
Cliff, Michelle. *Free Enterprise*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

- Cixous, Helene. *Sorties. The Newly Born Woman*. Ed. Sandra Gilbert. Trans. Betsy Wing. *Theory and History of Literature*. Vol. 24. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Davis, Edmund Wade. *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.
- Epp, Michael. "Raising Minstrelsy: Humor, Satire and Stereotype." In *The Birth of A Nation and Bamboozled*. *Canadian Review of American Studies* 33.1(2003): 18-35.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove, 1963.
- Hoeller, Hildegard. "Ama Ata Aidoo's Heart of Darkness." *Research in African Literatures* 35.1(2004):130-147.
- Holcomb, Gary E. and Kimberly S. Holcomb. "I Made Him: Sadomasochism in Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*." *Callaloo* 25.3(2002): 969-76.
- Kawash, Samira. "Terrorism and vampires: Fanon's spectral violence of decolonization." *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Anthony C. Alessandrini. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *The Autobiography of My Mother*. New York: Penguin, 1996.
- Matos, Nicole C. "The Difference Between the Two Bundles: Body and Cloth in the Works of Jamaica Kincaid." *Callaloo* 25.3(2002): 844-56.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. National Gallery of Art, 1981.