

## 2. Roots and Routes of Development: Coming of Age in the Caribbean and Diaspora

*By breaking into the old genre, the female heroine has brought new meaning to Bildung and the Bildungsroman.*  
(Labovitz 1989: 258)

*West Indian women have reinvented the traditional male-centred form in order to portray the emerging female voice and consciousness.*  
(Wilson 2008: ix)

*What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. [...] For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*  
(Lorde 2007:112)

### 2.1 A Contested Genre

Among the most-often repeated mantras of postmodernism are most likely the ones about the death of the author and the fragmentation of the subject. While the first is seen as antithetical to identity politics, the latter in particular poses a serious threat to a novelistic genre like the *Bildungsroman*, which concerned itself originally with coherent subject and stable identity formation. Indeed, postmodernism, as Daniel Lea puts it, “constitutes a serious ideological blow to the relevance of the *bildungsroman*” (2005: 20). As a consequence, by the 1980s, the *Bildungsroman* is pronounced dead by some of its critics (cf. Miles 1974; Moretti 2000), while others argue it has only ceased to be a form valid for tracing the development and self-actualization of certain privileged or bourgeois social subjects, meaning white, male, educated, mostly middle-class individuals; at the same time, for the depiction of female development it “still offers a vital

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form” (Abel/Hirsch/Langland 1983: 13). Likewise, in analyzing contemporary U.S.-American literature, Bonnie Hoover Braendlin’s much cited article seeks to show that

the *Bildungsroman* is being resuscitated, revived not by males of the dominant culture but by societal outsiders, men and women of marginality groups. The *Bildungsroman* of these disenfranchised Americans – women, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, native Americans, homosexuals – portrays the particular identity and adjustment problems of people whose sex or color renders them unacceptable to the dominant society. (1983: 75)<sup>39</sup>

Apparently, the *Bildungsroman* continues to be an important genre to describe and investigate the formation of the individual subject in interrelation with her environment, in particular in contexts of political upheaval, emancipation, migration, exile, or other minority contexts.<sup>40</sup> The revival of the genre through “marginality groups,” as Braendlin writes, however, appears to remain locked within a binary of being ‘other’ of the “dominant” cultural form, never quite achieving a status of its own. Is the artificial resuscitation of a genre really desirable? Do we really need to expand generic features beyond recognition, to force a ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula on the texts?

The term of preference here is the *diasporic coming-of-age novel*, which seems a more appropriate terminology for what the novels considered here actually achieve. Since the 1980s, mainly Caribbean women writers, and increasingly those of Indian descent, mostly residing outside of the region, have taken to that specific literary model and re-shaped it to fit their lived experiences in ethnic minority contexts.<sup>41</sup> Feminist and postcolonial literary studies

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39 Braendlin considers the *Bildungsroman* as an important “ethnic genre” in contemporary U.S.-American literature, adapted by writers like Chicana Isabella Ríos in *Victuum* (1976) or Sandra Cisneros in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), which “asserts an identity defined by the outsiders themselves or by their own cultures [...]; it evinces a revaluation, a transvaluation, of traditional Bildung by new standards and perspectives” (1983: 75).

40 The popularity may further be explained by the realist depictions of the socio-historical and cultural particularities of the contexts of origin in which the novels of this generic rubric emerged, rendering the *Bildungsroman* valuable for cultural materialists or new historicists; cultural and literary studies preoccupied with research on migration and ethnicity found in it a valuable form to retrace individual journeys and community building in relation to or exchange with a mainstream culture. The claim for ‘authenticity’ often related to these texts is what I find problematic.

41 The 1980s saw an increase in the literary output of the form, see, for instance, Merle Hodge (Trinidad) *Crick Cack, Monkey*; Erna Brodber (Jamaica) *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*; Zee Edgell (Belize) *Beka Lamb*; Michelle Cliff (Jamaica) *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*; Grace Nichols (Guyana) *Whole of a Morning*

frequently return to a discussion of this specific fictional form in their analysis of social constructions of identities and formation of those subjects that are marginalized by dominant discourses. The by now numerous theoretical publications on the *Bildungsroman* and related generic forms (such as the novel of development or coming-of-age novel) usually include an explanation for the respective terminological preference while highlighting either its liberationist or exclusionary potential. Yet, notwithstanding their argumentations for the retention of the term *Bildungsroman*,<sup>42</sup> I question its validity for the moral, political, and social purposes of the novels included here. The interrelations of social inequalities, the emancipatory claims of women of color, and the anti-racism expressed in these books cannot sufficiently be captured by a genre that remains connected to its European heritage and “that embodies [white] male norms” (Abel/Hirsch/Langland 1983: 11). The coming-of-age novel is not limited to such conventions. It accounts for the experiences and processes related to childhood, adolescence, aging, and becoming adult without being tight to a certain age range or strictly defined stages of *Bildung* (cf. Künstler 2012).

The two publications by Esther Labovitz (1989) and Lucy Wilson (2008) are exemplary for the discussion of this likewise prominent and contested genre in literary history. With almost twenty years in-between the publication of their respective books, they prove that the *Bildungsroman* model is developing and being adapted at different times in different contexts by different writers who have added new meaning to it. Labovitz notes the absence of the female heroine from the genre during its flourishing period in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>43</sup>

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Sky; Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) *Annie John* and Lucy; Merle Collins (Grenada) *Angel*, Marlene NourbeSe Philip (Trinidad) *Harriet's Daughter*. These are just a few of the earlier examples of writers from the Anglophone Caribbean. In addition, for Latin American literature, Yolanda Doub attests a similar “veritable boom of novels of female formation since the 1980s” (Doub 2010: 5).

- 42 See, for instance, the *Proceedings of the Anglistentag 2014*, edited by Jana Gohrisch and Rainer Emig (2015), here in particular the contributions to section four on “Narrative, Identity Formation, and the Bildungsroman.” Also Stella Bolaki’s *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* (2011) and Martin Japtok’s *Growing Up Ethnic* (2005) continue to use the term. Japtok uses it heuristically and to retrace a protagonist’s development, but is cautious to not apply it “as a historically specific term denoting a number of novels written in eighteenth-century Germany” (2005: 22).
- 43 German literary scholar Karl Morgenstern considers Wieland’s *Agathon* as exemplary for the genre and even more so Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in its illustration of the natural development of a male protagonist who by the interaction of his personal disposition with external conditions obtains balance, harmony, and liberty (cf. Morgenstern 1820: 17/18); see also Jacobs (2005: 24). Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) or Charles Dicken’s *Great Expectations* (1861) are often referred to as exemplary for the genre in Anglophone literature.

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The formative phase of young adults typically depicted in the *Bildungsroman* used to be focused primarily on “male education and experience” (3).<sup>44</sup> This process and option of *Bildung*, building on Enlightenment ideals of social relations, cultural refinement, education, progress and individual achievement, integration and conformity,<sup>45</sup> did not pertain to the same degree to women, who remained locked within (middle-class) feminine ideologies of marriage and domesticity. Labovitz attributes the growing importance of the genre for women writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to women’s emancipation movements in the West when political participation became an option for the majority of women, leading to a re-definition of *Bildung* in general and later of the genre as well.<sup>46</sup>

Lucy Wilson, on the other hand, stresses the *Bildungsroman*’s incompatibility with the experiences of (national) independence and social mobility, but also with the experiences of poverty, violence, racism, and sexism or *machismo* made by “contemporary female characters from developing nations” (2008: ix). She further emphasizes the genre’s “radical transformation in the hands of

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Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) is commonly referred to as a first revisionist female bildungsroman that traces the path of a heroine’s development.

- 44 Morgenstern, one of the first to use the term in his lecture “Über das Wesen des Bildungsromans,” delivered in 1819, defines the *Bildungsroman* as a subgenre of the novel which depicts the *Bildung* of the hero from its very beginning in its progress to a certain level of completion. *Bildung*, according to Morgenstern, can be understood as the intellectual, ethical, or aesthetic formation of a (male-gendered) human being in harmonious relation with society. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, like Morgenstern, in his exclusively male-centered definition of the bildungsroman, dates the origin of this type back to late eighteenth century Germany and the publication of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. In the essay “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism” he applies the term “novel of emergence” thereby emphasizing the dynamic formation and mobility of the *bildungsheld* as well as “the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel” (Bakhtin 2010: 19; italics in original).
- 45 Concepts like harmony and universality, education and the relation between the self and the world are central to the definition of the genre and the term *Bildung* in this period. Schöneich describes the different meanings of these terms in the literature on the Bildungsroman (Dilthey, Morgenstern, and Lukács), referring either to an inner condition of the individual or the individual’s relation to the world (cf. Schöneich 1999: 28).
- 46 Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland contextualize the emergence of “fictions of female development” within increasingly politicized women’s movements, favorable economic conditions, easier access to education and the book market. “While the Bildungsroman has played out its possibilities for males, female versions of the genre still offer a vital form. [...] Although the primary assumption underlying the Bildungsroman – the evolution of a coherent self – has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction, this assumption remains cogent for women writers who now for the first time find themselves in a world increasingly responsive to their needs” (1983: 13).

West Indian women writers” (15). This she sees realized especially in the relational character of the re-invented genre as well as the extent to which it establishes a “dialogue across generational, gender and political lines” (28). Evoked in the quotes is an argument made also by Slaughter, stating that the genre needs to be regarded as “function (or practice) that articulates certain social relations” (2007: 7) and constitutes a veritable “instrument for historically marginalized people to assert their right to be included [...] and to participate [...] to make the socially unrepresentative figure representative” (157). Slaughter here confirms this study’s thesis that the genre is an ideological tool and political in its claim for the right of participation, that in its redefinition as coming-of-age novel is potentially emancipatory for marginalized or minority voices – I will return to this argument later in this chapter. While Labovitz, in referring to an explicit feminist intervention into the “old genre,” retains the terminology of *Bildungsroman* in order to write the heroine into the genre and thereby emphasizes women’s newly gained access to *Bildung* and the public sphere, Wilson argues for the necessity of another terminology to denote the revisionist attempts by women writers from the Caribbean who write against a background of colonial history and experiences of oppression. Wilson’s term the “novel of relational autonomy” (16) breaks with preceding terms in its emphasis on the communal aspect of these novels and the development of an autonomous self in (intimate) relation to others, always “in dialogue between the past and present” (21).

Another important step in the development of the genre theory along with a contestation of the assumption of a coherent self is the genre’s move towards the *negative* or *anti-Bildungsroman* and the emergence of disintegrated subjectivity. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is the tendency to analyse and interpret the genre not solely regarding the harmonious balance between the protagonist and society but rather with respect to ruptures and contradictions in the formation of identity (cf. Schöneich 1999: 29). Christoph Schöneich’s analysis of the English (male) *Bildungsroman* after 1945 stresses the importance of the modern concept of identity for the analysis of the genre since the 1970s and how the *Bildungsroman* performs the relationship between the self and the world (cf. 37). He argues that the social and psychological dimensions of identity correspond to the genre’s “central dialectics of individuality and norm, liberty and conformity” (12; my translation). It becomes clear that individuality does not always conform to social norms; that the ‘negative emergence’ of identity leads to a dialectical conflict between social and psychological forces. What turns out is the failed rather than successful integration of the protagonist into the community, termed then as an *anti-Bildungsroman* that foregrounds social

criticism and problematic aspects in subject formation, which have already come to the fore in the modernist *Bildungsroman* of the 1890s (cf. Castle 2006: 23).<sup>47</sup> The denomination remains, however, problematic, when, for instance, protagonists who are ‘marked’ as ethnic or queer do not fit presupposed normative categories promoted by the ideology of the genre. Their development and coming of age is then already pre-determined as ‘anti’ or ‘negative’ because of its perceived non-conformity. The move of the genre toward a focus on the protagonists’ alienation or disintegration is observed by Christy Rishoi, who speaks of “the quintessential outsider’s genre” (2003: 64) or by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who, with reference to Caren Kaplan, label it as “out-law genre” (Smith/Watson 2010: 59).<sup>48</sup> This outsider or outlaw is a character who ultimately fails to accomplish what society expects of her or is not rewarded with complete integration for her attempts.

Admitting that the genre tradition in Caribbean writing, the coming-of-age novel in particular, has not developed in isolation from the more conventional though ideologically tainted *Bildungsroman*, a deviation from the European precursor is indeed also discernible.<sup>49</sup> If we accept the genre’s ability (and the ability of literature in general) to participate in social discourses and intervene in hegemonic forms of knowledge production, the coming-of-age novel can act as counter-narrative that neither seeks to depict only harmonious processes of socialization nor labels non-conforming emergence of individuals as negative or ‘anti.’

A possible way out of the terminological labyrinth is the distinction of the *novel of development* as the umbrella term under which several sub-categories can be subsumed (cf. Gutjahr 2007: 11-14).<sup>50</sup> It is broad and ‘neutral’ enough to

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47 In short, as compared to its classic model, the plot structure of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century form is less teleological, it is more flexible in crossing genre boundaries, and the ending is usually more open (cf. Schöneich 1999: 12).

48 Two canonical examples are Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) or J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

49 The on-going discussion on terminological choice has produced a variety of synonymous terms or sub-forms of the type, the most common being the novel of development, of emergence, of growth, of education, of formation, of apprenticeship, of self-realization, of adolescence, of awakening, the coming-of-age novel, the *Künstlerroman*, and so forth. For plot-related genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and other sub-forms, see, for instance, Buckley (1974), Redfield (1996), Schöneich (1999), Moretti (2000), or Jacobs (2005).

50 For example, Gutjahr differentiates the *Bildungsroman* from the educational novel as the latter primarily narrates the formation and guidance of the young protagonist through a mentor figure and pedagogical instances (cf. Gutjahr 2007: 13). The protagonist’s adaptation to contemporary didactic and pedagogical concepts – usu-

accommodate both the *Bildungsroman*, as the most prominent and traditional form, as well as the *coming-of-age novel*, making clear, too, that they are not to be treated as synonyms.<sup>51</sup> For the more general features of the novel of development one may consult Rita Felski's and Mikhail Bakhtin's definitions of the genre.<sup>52</sup> The novels of the genre are indeed biographical in the sense that they narrate personal live stories, yet seldom those of a "coherent" subject as Felski suggests (cf. 1986: 138). In his study on the typology of the realist novel, Bakhtin distinguishes the *novel of emergence* as collective term along with five sub-categories.<sup>53</sup> Although the definitions are all based on the male hero only and a man's process of becoming (cf. Bakhtin 2010: 19), especially his fifth variant is interesting for its dialectic-relational and historical characteristics. In this type, "man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence" (23). Thus the novels are more context-oriented and reflect on the changing nature of the world that has ceased to be a static and "immobile orientation point" (ibid.). The protagonist comes of age or "emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself" (ibid.; italics in original). Bakhtin's explanation that the development of the self is no longer solely biographical and a "private affair" (ibid.) implies that this process and actions have an effect on the subject's surroundings and alter social and cultural conditions. He adds that the hero finds himself at the "transition point from one [epoch] to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him" (ibid.). This means that those who inhabit the fictional worlds constantly change and adapt to but also actively participate in and contribute to this transitional process. Naturally, in order to create historical time or emergence, this novelistic type juxtaposes individual, multi-generational, and communal emergence thus expanding the temporal horizon. If we understand the epochal not only in its temporal but also ideological or conceptual meaning or as relating to worldview, this model fits current conceptions of the world and identities, of

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ally unreflected and unquestioned by her- or himself – are of particular importance in this form.

- 51 Here, this approach departs from studies such as Jerome Buckley's who uses the different terms interchangeably "for the sake of convenience and variations" (Buckley 1974: vii), which is hardly a satisfying explanation.
- 52 Felski suggests four defining elements of what she terms the "novel of self-discovery" that equally apply to the novel of development for this study's purpose: *biographical*, assuming the existence of a coherent self; *dialectical*, understanding identity to be conditioned by a process of interaction between psychological and social forces; *historical*, describing identity changing over time; and *optimistic*, in the belief in a possibility of meaningful development" (1986: 138; emphasis added).
- 53 Among these sub-categories we also find the *Bildungsroman* in a narrow sense being based on humanistic ideals of education (cf. Bakhtin 2010: 22, 24).

societies and cultures that, indeed, are increasingly characterized by transformative moments and transnational and transcultural processes.

Recalling briefly the lines from Braendlin's article quoted above, there resonates an early postcolonial reading of U.S.-ethnic women's novels, one that highlights the writers successful attempts at rewriting the genre of the *Bildungsroman* (she uses the verbs to resuscitate, to revive) while disclosing structures of inequality that can be linked to the persistence of colonial and neo-imperial power relations. One focus of postcolonial literary studies has been on the adaptation of the genre in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Caribbean literature, most paradigmatically phrased by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1998) as a writing back to a Eurocentric canon. On an ideological and political level, the strategic writing back, or the "appropriation and revision of Western form" is directed against existing forms of domination and seeks to destabilize "colonial mastery and the mastery of European culture" (Marx 2004: 88-89).

An extensive work on the genre by Black writers of Caribbean descent is conducted by Geta LeSeur in *Ten is the Age of Darkness* (1995). The author draws a genealogy of what she terms the "Black *bildungsroman*" by comparing an extensive body of texts written by African Caribbean and African American authors in the time period from the 1930s to the late 1980s. With her terminological choice she not only highlights the genre's concern with race and identity politics, but also seeks to differentiate the Black *Bildungsroman* from those by white American and European writers (cf. 19). She furthermore makes a clear-cut distinction between the African Caribbean tradition (memory, nostalgia) on the one side and the African American (politics, protest) on the other, which can be contested. Accordingly, "the West Indian novelist writes a *bildungsroman* to recall childhood roots and to discover the truth about self and home, while the African American novelist tends to use personal experience in order to make a viable protest that is almost always about race, slave history, and the White establishment" (1).<sup>54</sup> This might be true for some of the earlier examples in Caribbean writing that are less political in scope or for those authors who write from exile.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, writers from the West Indies also

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54 Writers like Claude McKay or Paule Marshall, whose work forms part of both the African-American as well as the African-Caribbean literary tradition, already blur this distinction though.

55 Since many of the Caribbean authors live, write, and publish abroad, similar to a self-imposed exile, they often depict a nostalgic memory of an idyllic childhood that "retains the freshest images and the most deeply imprinted experiences" (LeSeur 1995: 26) of the Caribbean home space. Also, this is connected to the "wish to establish an authentic basis of experience [and...] to repossess or reinterpret a past that to the adult seems broken and fragmentary" (ibid.).

do use the genre for their protest both against an imposed canon – even before postcolonial theorists’ invented the concept of writing back – and against the colonial establishment, postcolonial dictatorships, or gender inequality. For example, Paule Marshall’s novels *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969) highlight “age, continual process, and female mentoring and its relationship to empowerment and subsequent articulation as significant elements of [...] women’s quests” (Dehn Kubitschek 1987: 44). The process of *Bildung* therein is more suitably described as a coming-of-age process during which the protagonists try “[t]o recover [their] wholeness [...] in a racially or culturally specific myth rather than a universalist structure” (47). In this regard the applicability of a universalist narrative form such as the *Bildungsroman* as LeSeur uses it, too, can further be questioned; debatable too is the adequacy of *Bildung* which in the novels usually goes along with deprivation and alienation.

Noteworthy in LeSeur’s analysis is her focus on gender-differential socialization processes as well as conflicting relationships among generations and genders. “The girls in the West Indies novels, and that number has increased since the late 1940s and 1950s [...] learn early about the problems of gender, color, men, and motherhood and community. [...] There is a code of conduct prescribed for a girl by the family and the ‘village,’ so she must at all times remain ‘feminine’” (5). The plots of these novels circle around the protagonists’ attempts to come to terms with their bodily selves in the context of gender and racial discrimination and non-conformity, showing also their ambition for education and wish for upward mobility in highly stratified societies. Further recurring motives and themes are, amongst others, informal education through the older generation and community, the move from the countryside to the city, or migratory journeys from the Caribbean to North America along with alienation from the Caribbean home, all of which are influential, sometimes disturbingly, on their individual emergence from girl to woman. Here, LeSeur asks an important question, “what can happen to a young girl when the natural initiation process is complicated by an imported metropolitan culture” (191)? Indeed many of the features LeSeur mentions are relevant also for the text corpus selected here; her terminology nevertheless needs to be reconsidered and broadened for this study, as she does not consider novels by Indo-Caribbean writers, who admittedly have been gaining recognition only around the time of her publication. And, she does not pay explicit attention to the aspect of diaspora.

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In their working definition of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson clearly shift focus towards the ideology inherent in the form of the *Bildungsroman*:

Contemporary postcolonial writers in particular are employing the bildungsroman form to cast their coming-of-age stories as encounters with powerful mentors at the cultural crossroads of metropole and (post)colony, where conflicting concepts of education and social value collide. [...] [E]mploying the form [they] typically reshape the story of education as one of becoming *alienated subjects* of double legacies in ways that interrogate the *form's ideology* of development, self-determination, and *incorporation of citizens* into the new world. (Smith/Watson 2010: 128; emphasis added)

They identify the coming-of-age narrative as plot driving element in the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*. In their definition the educational aspect pertains to an alienating process of becoming within colliding value systems of the old and new world. The historical emergence, in Bakhtin's sense, depicted in these novels is one of social transformation, political upheaval, racism, ethnic conflicts, as well as class and gender struggle at epochal turning points of colonial rule, anti- and post-colonialism. These coming-of-age narratives reveal the ideological underpinnings of the novel form and problematize both the incorporative function as well as the exclusionary mechanism associated with the status and practices of citizenship, which is an important addition. Another recurring thesis in postcolonial readings of Caribbean coming-of-age stories, especially those narrated from a woman's point of view, suggests that the development of the young women mirrors the emergence of larger community structures and national self-definition while being set against the historical background of independence. Her rebellion is one against an oppressive patriarchy, disclosing parallels to Caribbean societies' resistance to colonial domination of Europe or the invasion of North America, as in Merle Collins' *Angel* (1987).

## 2.2 Coming of Age as Literary Option of Decoloniality

Continuing with the issue of terminology, what so far remains under-investigated in literary theory is the extent to which fiction, genre, or aesthetic form constitute a decolonial option. This pertains not only to their representa-

tion and analysis of social constructions of identities and marginalized subjectivity, as offered for instance in coming-of-age narratives, but also to the terminological choices made by literary scholars themselves.<sup>56</sup> Audre Lorde's argument "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde 2007: 112; italics in original) has been evoked in numerous contexts mostly in connection with feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-patriarchal discourses and ties in well with the argument I wish to make. Despite "its adaptability to different cultural contexts" (Doub 2010: 1), the *Bildungsroman* is "burdened with the cultural baggage" of its history (Bolaki 2011: 20). The genre has a particular role in Caribbean literature. Caribbean adaptations used to be modelled specifically on the European form for its aesthetic value; on the global publishing market, the ethnic Caribbean version provides cultural capital and access to publishing opportunities;<sup>57</sup> the European form itself, and European literature in general, were major didactic "tools" in the colonial and postcolonial education system used for the propagation of gender and racial ideologies or moral conduct. But does it make sense to retain a certain literary form and terminology when its mechanisms cultivate normative being and therefore reproduce the same "master" or grand narratives we wish to overcome? Are there not certain conventions evoked that when squeezing minority writers of color into the genre it would mean bending them to the rules of the "master's house" to use Lorde's phrasing? Literature participates in the dissemination and preservation of culture, norms, and values. Genres, like children's books, fables, or the *Bildungsroman*, too, are embedded within certain discourses and articulate "certain social relations" (Slaughter 2007: 7). They can be turned into an ideological tool as they, too, produce and circulate certain kinds of knowledge, or illustrate a certain lived reality or normality.<sup>58</sup>

Stella Bolaki sets herself the task to unsettle the *Bildungsroman* genre, as her monograph's title promises, but, unfortunately, holds on to the term. The book, it is argued, in "exploring the category [of the *Bildungsroman*] in new settings and through new perspectives reveals its usefulness for the representa-

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56 See, for example, Roth (2014).

57 According to Slaughter, the realist bildungsroman is a key that grants ethnic authors entrance to publishing houses: "But the *Clef à Roman* is a *Bildungsroman* that, at least implicitly, recognizes itself as a commodity in a socioliterary economy – as a vehicle for the commercial publication of the author" (309).

58 Here, one might want to recall the correlation of knowledge and power Foucault, for instance, addresses in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *History of Sexuality* (1976).

tion of ethnic American and postcolonial subjectivities” (2011: 9).<sup>59</sup> Bolaki’s reading of the subversive ‘disfigured’ body in Lorde’s *Zami* (1982) and *The Cancer Journals* (1980) is particularly intriguing, but especially the latter can hardly be described as *Bildungsroman*. Bolaki admits that the term has become “notoriously slippery” (10) to which she contributes by “bending and stretching” (11) it beyond recognition so as to incorporate autobiography and life writing, short story and poetic forms, which seems arbitrary and problematic. She justifies the decision against the usage of terms like coming-of-age narrative or novel of development with a nod to the productivity of the term *Bildung*.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the subject formations depicted in the narratives Bolaki investigates are meant to “challenge the boundaries of categories such as ‘ethnic’ and ‘American’” (24) – and the *Bildungsroman* – which then is not reflected in the terminological choice she makes. On the contrary, the category or label of the ‘ethnic American’ is re-inscribed on the body (of works) and fixes it within the very paradigms it wishes to unsettle. The *Bildungsroman*, to contradict Bolaki’s claim, does not offer these authors the stage to perform their “acts of disobedience” (26), unlike the coming-of-age novel which allows hybrid identities and *mestiza* consciousness to emerge without overly emphasizing the controversial concept of *Bildung* that it then needs to either contradict or confirm. Interestingly, she explicitly uses the term coming-of-age stories:

The texts discussed here allow [...] an examination of the place of feminist discourses within debates on assimilation and cultural nationalism and of the ways through which ethnic women writers query this binary in their *coming-of-age stories*. The texts confront false dilemmas and divided loyalties, such as those between gender and ethnicity, by attempting, with different degrees of success, to *construct hybrid spaces and borderland subjectivities*. (14-15; emphasis added)

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59 She closely examines the four ‘ethnic’ American women writers Jamaica Kincaid, Maxine Hong Kingston, Audre Lorde, and Sandra Cisneros. In the “Postscript” she furthermore mentions a couple of women writers of the Caribbean diaspora who in her definition add to the *Bildungsroman* canon, such as Esmeralda Santiago, Julia Álvarez, Cristina García, and Edwidge Danticat, and who “question patterns of development central to the Anglo-American canon of the *Bildungsroman* and specific notions of American self-hood” (28). Her use of the label of the ethnic homogenizes the in fact very diverse group of writers based on their being essentially non-American.

60 The productivity she sees in the word’s phonetic proximity with building as well as in the sense of *Bildnis* (as in portrayal of identity or human kind). She also addresses the simultaneous meaning of *Bildung* as product, as in culture, education, or civilization, and process, as in cultivating, educating, or civilizing – now adding colony and colonizing and we have a violent imperial twist.

The label obviously works well to contour the literary and political work her selection of writers in fact accomplish – in a sense decolonial but definitely feminist and intersectional.

Maria H. Lima, on the other hand, argues that for Caribbean diaspora writer Jamaica Kincaid, whose work *Bolaki* also analyses, the model of the conventional *Bildungsroman* “does not fit her [Kincaid’s] protagonist’s reality and needs, for not only does her character have to reject the social order and carve a space for herself, but she still has all that justified anger to overcome/express” (2002: 864). Kincaid, just like the four writers whose fictional work I examine, charts “counternarrative[s] to ‘progressive development’ and ‘coherent identity’” (859). While this observation relates to the narrative level and content, Lima – in an earlier article – also notes the decolonial potential of what she names the Caribbean novel of development as resistance in its “destruction of boundaries” (Lima 1993: 53) and deconstruction of the former imperial literature’s dominance. Of interest is her criticism of the model: “While genre does not in itself determine that a text must be read in a certain way, it brings with it a history of reading, a set of conventions and of specific aesthetic ideologies” (36). This statement is absolutely crucial but unfortunately does not lead her to a more radical re-definition of the genre that would also affect and possibly decolonize a certain reading practice. It remains within the postcolonial paradigm of writing back which surely makes sense in the scholarly context of the 1990s in which her essay “Revolutionary Developments” was written: “While contemporary postcolonial *Bildungsromane* do not break the conventions outright [...] they explore its possibilities, thereby expanding the genre” (36), remaining nevertheless within the Western discourse of *Bildung* “that constitutes identity in terms of a relation to origin” (36), which in the Caribbean context is a complex issue.

With regard to the bourgeois connotation of the word *Bildung*, Wilson, too, wishes for “a new term, one that is free from the cultural and historical implications of the German word, a term that acknowledges the attempt of these writers” at subversion (Wilson 2008: 15).<sup>61</sup> In addition, glancing quickly at the texts of Silvera, Espinet, Danticat, and Cruz in terms of their conceptualization of *Bildung* as schooling, it can be seen that for the adolescent girls it is compulsive and often hurtful in its propagation of racist ideology. Within the institutional realm of education, Espinet’s protagonist learns about an Indian woman’s proper place in Trinidadian society from her teacher who keeps reminding her that she was one of those “hot coolie [sic.] girls who had to be brought in

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61 A criticism of the term *Bildung* itself is provided, amongst others, by Nussbaum (1997) and Slaughter (2007).

line” (143). Similarly, Silvera’s and Danticat’s main characters are racially discriminated against by classmates and made aware of their outsider status.

Rishoi, likewise, discards of the *Bildungsroman* form. She holds that the move to transfer this “grand narrative” of identity formation to any other context is nothing more than “recycling an already-established literary form that restricts the norms of male development in the first place, and has in any case proved entirely unsuitable to female narratives” (2003: 61). A break with the conventional form, she explains, is envisaged by the coming-of-age narrative as a literary practice that liberates the subject from “cultural interpellation” (61).<sup>62</sup> The coming-of-age novel by Caribbean women writers of the diaspora is significant in this respect because, as the following analytical chapters will highlight, it grapples with the formation of the subject, the interrelation of body and psyche with culture and citizenship to confront the ideological underpinnings of a normative order of society.

The two concepts of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman* undeniably have undergone transformation since their emergence, but they still carry a negative undertone considering the Caribbean past of epistemic and literary colonization through imperial power. Caribbean literature, the four novels here are no exception, frequently addresses those inequalities that are deeply rooted in the period of conquest and colonialization.<sup>63</sup> Above I have touched upon the post-colonial criticism of the *Bildungsroman* along with the strategy of *writing back*. Now, criticism of the postcolonial both as a theoretical concept itself and in its temporal dimension, suggesting that we have gotten past colonial dominance, comes from the corner of decolonial thinkers.<sup>64</sup> Walter Mignolo’s fundamental issue with postcoloniality is that in contrast to decoloniality it

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62 In a very broad sense, ‘interpellation,’ in the sense of Louis Althusser, means the interrelation of the individual and ideology and the ways the subject is defined externally and positioned through it. According to Althusser, “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (1971: 173). They “are always-already interpellated as subjects with a personal identity” (178).

63 To mention just two examples, there are St. Lucian Vladimir Lucien’s poetry collection *Sounding Ground* (2014) or Guyanese Oonya Kempadoo’s novel *Tide Running* (2001).

64 On the origin of the decolonial option, Mignolo states, “decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint. And this occurred in the Americas, in Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean thinking. It later continued in Asia and Africa, unrelated to the decolonial thinking of the Americas, but rather as a counterpoint to the re-organization of colonial modernity with the British Empire and French colonialism” (Mignolo 2011: 46). Quijano further argues that race, as a social construct, is a primary factor for the classification and stratification of the world’s population. He adds, “[t]he racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism

suggests an 'after' of coloniality. The prefix 'de' assumes, instead, many temporalities and it is aware of the imperial dimension of a unilinear concept of time and assumes the pluriversality of local time, including European imperial time, for instance [...]. Coloniality is still with us: there is no 'post' from decolonial perspectives. (Mignolo 2014a: 21)

The "coloniality of power," meaning the continuity of hegemonic relations and imbalances which are a direct legacy of European colonialism in the Americas, pertains to the same degree to economic and political control as it does to social relations and knowledge production.<sup>65</sup> In an interview, Mignolo furthermore stresses that decolonial thinking "no es un método a aplicar sino una manera de estar y pensar en el mundo" (2014b: 62). Agreeing that decoloniality is primarily a way of *being* and *thinking*, it should also underlie our ways of *seeing* and *describing* the world. In this respect a decolonial option applies to the same degree to methodology and terminology, and may start with a serious engagement with the literary genre especially when considering the literature's potential of world-making and imag(in)ing and how literary theory and narrative analysis conceive of it. Here Audre Lorde's contention makes sense: A continuous use of certain tools will not dismantle persisting power structures that shape plural forms of marginalization and discrimination. A decolonial world envisioned by Caribbean literature will not reveal itself if looked at through colonial lenses. So as to unsettle the *Bildungsroman* along with its ideological baggage, a more profound break with the genre is needed. This decolonial option furthermore engenders a critical discussion on labelling and the mechanisms of the literary field in which the participating entities are in a hegemonic constellation. Moreover, decolonial thinking not only necessitates the contextualization of history, politics, and economics but also a methodological approach that takes the ideologies behind terminologies seriously.

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in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" (Quijano 2000: 533).

65 What Mignolo terms the coloniality of power or "colonial matrix of power" continues to shape contemporary societies and politics in particular in "four inter-related domains [...]: the control of economy (labor, land, natural resources); the control of authority (government, army); the control of gender and sexuality (control of family life and reproduction of the species based on the Christian/bourgeois family) and the control of knowledge and subjectivity (epistemology, aesthetics)" (2008: n.p.). On "The Coloniality of Gender," see especially Lugones (2010).

## 2.3 A Fraught Period: Socialization and the Subject

In her novel *The Scorpion's Claw* (2004), Haitian-Canadian author Myriam Chancy describes an up-rooted self in search of her place in the world. The protagonist reflects on her own becoming and unbelonging:

I haven't realized yet that one can't rush into the future without having looked the past in the face. I know that facing the past would be like holding up a mirror to myself and seeing the pain hidden there, behind the skin still recovering from the scars of adolescence, in the eyes round with anticipation [...]: a life half-lived, cut-off at the roots. (31)

The mirror evokes a dramatic Lacanian moment of confrontation and self-identification – a moment that reveals the necessity of reconciliation of past and present. Interestingly, all of the four novels selected for this study stage such a mirror scene; they do so either in the sense of self-alienation, thus reversing Lacan's hypothesis, or as an instance of self-recognition. Chancy's narrator furthermore hints at the painful and turbulent phase of adolescence, the memories of which are imprinted on her body like scars. The memories in this case not only stem from the transition from youth to maturity, but are also caused by the haunting recollections of the Duvalier dictatorship and its legacy as well as the loss of her home, having moved from Haiti to Canada.

The transformation from child to adult is a particularly contradictory period; Chancy's narrator elaborates not only on pain but also on anticipation and curiosity for what lies ahead. In a similar way, Makeda Silvera describes the coming of age as a "frustrating period for young adults, fraught with insecurities, pain, confusion, excitement, joy and discovery" (Silvera 1995a: ix). A close reading of the novels of the diasporic coming-of-age genre makes clear that the source of this pain and insecurity is not only all the 'weird stuff' the changing body does, but also the often stereotypical ascriptions by the society or peer group. Joy, on the other hand, may be derived from a nurturing community or sexual pleasure. Thus, coming of age can be specified as a fraught period of bodily and emotional turbulences that renders the adolescent subject vulnerable to exterior influences or intrusions.

Broadly defined, the novels "narrate[...] the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network larger than the family or the religious community" (Smith/Watson 2010: 120). In a diaspora context, such as Chancy's novel envisions, the coming-of-age novel is particularly well suited to investigate how migration, cultural entanglements, and growing up in (at

least) two locations perceived as different (namely the Caribbean and North America) impact on the individual and alter subject formation. The formative process is not a coherent one but disrupted and unsettled by the experience of migration. Socialization takes place in a transnational social network and is further problematized by displacement, clashing codes of conduct, or stereotypes that may be damaging to the individual. The central aspects of the genre type are hence the conflicting socialization of individuals as sexualized, racialized beings into socially sanctioned, but often compulsive roles and the negotiation of the own identity, needs, and obligations within family and community structures and the wider society which is often in conflict with a positive self-definition and personal liberation.

Relocated in a new environment, the novels' protagonists suddenly find themselves in a reference frame different to the one they have been accustomed to. Gloria Anzaldúa puts this comprehensibly in her theory of the borderlands, stating that "having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision" (1987: 78). The collision of different sociocultural sets reinforces the confusion felt by the adolescent individual. It may thus be an alienating experience. Anzaldúa's observation recalls Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* and structural conflict (cf. 1984) to describe the discrepancy of internalized dispositions in relation to cultural patterns and expectations of the social location (considered as gender- and ethnicity-specific or milieu-specific). Nevertheless, the emergence of an in-between-state of what Anzaldúa terms a *mestiza consciousness*, a borderland of identity/identities, may also be enriching and not necessarily alienating and damaging to the subject.<sup>66</sup>

Insights from sociology, in particular socialization theory, provide an understanding of subject formation envisioned in the novels of development. Socialization names the process of becoming a subject, encompassing the social conditions that enable the individual to develop and secure her own personality and identity. It denotes

the formation process of the personality in a productive engagement with the natural dispositions, particularly bodily and psychological characteristics ('inner/interior reality'), and the social, physical environment ('exterior reality'). This definition is based on the assumption that the individual is strongly influ-

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66 Homi Bhabha reaches a similar conclusion in his more abstract conceptualization of the *Third Space*, a space of hybridity from which new subject positions can emerge provided with the power to act (cf. 1994).

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enced by her environment, while at the same time actively participating in the construction of social structures. (Hurrelmann 2002: 7; my translation)

From the beginning, children enter in continuous contact and exchange with their surrounding and into relation with contact persons they need to confront and engage with (sometimes involuntarily) (cf. Unfried 2013: 32). While it is assumed that individual development in itself is a universal experience, every child is born into a very specific sociocultural framework. In addition, the parameters which condition, structure, or (partially) determine personality formations are individually specific, best explained by taking into consideration intersectional theory.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that migration leads to a profound change of this framework. The assumption, however, that the emergence of the subject happens quite passively under certain circumstances without her intervening, would be a denial of individual capacity to transform these structures. Also, assuming that embodied subjectivity is constructed, one may ask with Butler “who is doing the constructing?” (1993: 6). Following from the premise of agency, the subject is doing it herself, co-producing and complicit in containing certain hegemonic relations. This brings to mind Anthony Giddens’ idea of the interdependency of agency and society (cf. 1984), i.e. the existence of intentionally acting agents who create social structures under certain conditions determined in turn by these structures.<sup>68</sup> Sociologist Andreas Reckwitz concretizes the location of the embodied subject as she finds herself in an ambiguous constellation as an autonomous, acting, self-determined entity, on the one hand, but, on the other, is limited by or subjected to culture-specific rules, codes, and expectations (cf. Reckwitz 2008: 14).

It is, furthermore, through the “process of reiteration” (Butler 1993: 9) by which the subject comes into existence and incorporates certain norms and

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67 “An intersectional perspective always takes the multidimensional character, the entanglements, the analogies and simultaneities of various axis of stratification into account. Accordingly, research carried out in that field considers every constellation as ‘always already’ marked by various factors, for example, race and racial hierarchization/racist exclusion as ‘always also’ and ‘always already’ defined by other dimensions of inequality such as gender, sexuality, social class, citizenship, religion and furthermore differing from locality to locality and from context to context” (Roth 2013: 2).

68 In her book, *Nomadic Subjectivity* (1994), Rosi Braidotti, too, discloses the ambiguity of the acting subject: “The concept of the body in the specific inception given to it by the philosophy of modernity and the theories of sexual difference refers to the multifunctional and complex structure of subjectivity, the specifically human capacity for transcending any given variable [...] while remaining situated within them” (Braidotti 1994: 198).

standards perceived as normality (as for instance in what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix). This pertains to the linguistic level, group-specific performances, as well as to a certain habitus. Butler and Michel Foucault have made explicit the central role the body plays (or performs) in the formation of the subject and the construction of identity, as the following chapter highlights. In addition, Foucault brings in the dimensions of discipline, control, and punishment that impact the production of an embodied subjectivity or docile body. In this context, the literary form of the novel of development, Slaughter rightly points out, recognizes both “the individual as a social creature and the process of individuation as an incorporative process of socialization” (Slaughter 2007: 19), accomplished in relation to the social surrounding. Assuming a polarity of individual and society, agency and structure (cf. Reckwitz 2008: 15), I analyze in how far the novels reflect on those disciplining measures within society that are played out on the body and how these affect individual and communal development.

## 2.4 The Coming-of-Age Novel: Form and Features

Accounts or narratives of coming of age and individual development can be found in different fictional and non-fictional genres, such as the memoir, the biographical novel, the neo-/slave narrative, and so forth.<sup>69</sup> “The challenge remains to conceive of a genre flexible enough to encompass various paths of development” (Rishoi 2003: 61). How does the coming-of-age novel achieve this goal? How to avoid “a one-size-fits-all journey of development [...] that ends up sounding as much like a grand narrative as the earlier model” (61), as Rishoi asks with respect to endless adaptations of the *Bildungsroman*. Moving on from here, the coming-of-age novels selected here introduce subjects who seek to obtain a more nuanced picture of their own selves and a better understanding of the world. The four authors this study engages with carefully depict the formation of the Caribbean subject set against the backdrop of social transformation (e.g. nation and community building) and large-scale migration. The writers juxtapose their representations of these formative processes with a close examination of the human body and body politics, which, as I argue, are informed by colonial continuities of inequality. In the remainder of this chap-

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69 Several studies attest the influence of the slave narrative on the coming-of-age genre, e.g. Rishoi (2003), Smith/Watson (2010), or LeSeur (1995).

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ter, I wish to highlight some prominent formal and thematic features and recurring motives of these coming-of-age novels. As a study is always limited in scope, the four novels selected here are considered not as representative of Caribbean literature in general but certainly as exemplary for the genre as it has developed since the 1990s in Caribbean women's writing and as part of a Caribbean diaspora poetics.

### 2.4.1 Genre Bending and Remembrance

If the Greater Caribbean and its diasporas constitute a space characterized by hybridity, transculturality, movement, and the creolization of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and artistic elements and artefacts, its diverse literature certainly reflects this character. The coming-of-age genre in Caribbean literature is likewise a hybrid genre and defies too narrow definitions. The genre boundaries are fluid and, like the coming-of-age narratives Rishoi looks at, "not constrained by a generic formula" (Rishoi 2003: 62). Thus, it intermixes with other genres like the family saga (such is the case with Espinet's book or Lakshmi Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* [2012]); it interweaves a coming-out narrative (e.g. Silvera's novel or Achy Obeja's *Memory Mambo* [1996]); or may integrate the plot of the *Künstlerroman* (cf. LeSeur 1995: 25-26) as Cruz' and Espinet's novel demonstrate with their protagonists who are pursuing a creative career as painter (*Soledad*) or filmmaker (*The Swinging Bridge*).

What further 'unsettles' the novels of the genre – to use Bolaki's phrasing – on the aesthetic and textual level is the texts' frequent usage of oral history, folk tales, anecdotes, references to Hinduism (as one of the major religions especially in Trinidad, Surinam, and Guyana) or Afro-creole religions like Vodou or Santería. This may be for educative purposes, as cautionary advice, or as means of self-empowerment and identification. Likewise, creole proverbs, ancestral wisdom, spiritual and religious practices are included. That way the writers ground their works in local knowledge combining it with their respective African, Indian, or European heritage to construct a multi-layered diasporic space.<sup>70</sup>

To come to terms with the past seems crucial for individual and communal development. For this reason, the authors integrate several different sources of

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70 For instance, the phrases that introduce each chapter of Silvera's novel are mostly Yoruba proverbs and thus establish an African diaspora connection on the aesthetic level (see chapter 4).

remembering, such as diary entries, excerpts taken from notebooks or sometimes history books, souvenirs, photographs, and letters. In the attempt to recover that which seems lost, the narrative process often splits into fragments thereby interrupting the linear script of subject development proposed originally by the *Bildungsroman* form that imagines coherence. These fragments of identity that both the characters and the reader need to put together then create a collage showing that collective memory is intertwined with the personal story and individual lived experience.

Noteworthy, since the novels usually cover a relatively large time span in their accounts of the live stories of multiple generations, they draw a complex and detailed picture of Caribbean history and the postcolonial as well as the diaspora society. These stories are located within a clearly defined temporal and spatial context; they mention specific locations, historical and political facts, dates, and data. Through the novels, the authors often re-visit and re-imagine colonialism, indentureship (see chapter 5), decolonial movements, or the political turmoil after independence and nation building. Merle Collins, in her coming-of-age and neo-historical novel *Angel* (1987), for example, depicts the U.S. intervention in Grenada's regional politics from the perspective of her protagonist; Julia Alvarez' *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) documents the terror and violence of the Trujillo dictatorship by narrating the destinies of the Mirabal sisters. Oonya Kempadoo's coming-of-age novel *Buxton Spice* (1998) implicitly criticizes a seemingly harmonious ethno-cultural creolization in Guyana of the 1970s.

The juxtaposition of the coming-of-age novel with the neo-historical novel thus creates a hybrid genre to document parts of an often silenced or forgotten history, building an archive of knowledge in which the body is significant for storing memories and lived experience, according to Francis (cf. 2010: 133). In addition, the four novels that I read more closely in this study may offer a less extensive 'historical panorama' through the coming-of-age narratives – with the exception of Espinet's book – but they do engage in a critical analysis of migration and the social conditions in the diaspora locations. What emerges is a social realism with a didactic purpose (cf. Machado Sàez 2015).

#### 2.4.2 Language Use and Subversion

The use of idiomatic language, creole, and vernacular is not a specific feature of the coming-of-age novel itself, but of Caribbean literature in general and of a

diaspora poetics in particular. Language is used as stylistic device and/or to highlight the ethnic, Caribbean background. The writers considered here engage in a ‘creolization of the text’ through mixing local ‘dialects’ and idioms with the English ‘standard’ form. There are different degrees how this is accomplished, for instance through the inclusion of single idioms without translating them, most frequently these are food items, descriptions of characters, or emotional conditions. For these words a glossary may be included as appendix, either on the author’s own or the publisher’s accord. Another option is to write the dialogues between or the thoughts of characters in creole, followed by direct translation; single longer passages or even the complete text may be written in creole, though the latter is rarely the case.<sup>71</sup> Of the four writers included here, Silvera makes the most extensive use of Jamaican patwa (what effect this has in the narrative is discussed in chapter 4). Language use in this context becomes an affirmative act of identity and a means of demarcation from imposed standards. But, one may ask, what happens to its decolonizing agenda in the context of diaspora literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Does it forfeit its emancipatory function to the marketing strategies of ethnic or migrant writing?

Especially throughout the first half of the twentieth century, with the aim to dismantle the prestige associated with standard English, French, or Dutch (to a lesser degree Spanish), many writers have begun to include creole languages, e.g. Kreyòl, Patwa, or Sranan-Tongo, in their literary works. Maryse Condé sees the possibility for resistance to colonial oppression in the use of creole language in literature and expresses the “need for linguistic subversion” (1998: 103).<sup>72</sup> In the decolonial period, the struggle for independence, as Torres-Saillant similarly argues, is construed “as a people’s continuous and necessary battle for language” (2013a: 18). In his definition of a specific Caribbean poetics, he pays attention to the linguistic possibilities, which writers like Kamau Brathwaite exploit in their *œuvre*, thereby “recasting of the old master’s *logos* into a regionally relevant speech of liberation” (ibid.: 22). Alongside that which is expressed lies the need of a “decolonized language, one that would *authentically* express the Caribbean worldview” (ibid.; emphasis added). Surely, it remains debatable what this authentic expression may be and whether there is a

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71 One example is Jamaican Macka Diamond’s designated dancehall novel *Bun Him!!!* (2012).

72 At the time, European literature was dominant in the region and local writers adjusted their works in form, style, and language according to European models. Jacques Roumain was among the first to counter the imposition of the colonizer’s language on local literary production in the context of the Haitian *indigénisme*. Similarly, Claude McKay and Louise Bennett are well known for elevating patwa to a more prestigious part of Jamaican identity.

singular worldview shared by all Caribbean people which can be transmitted through literature and language use.

While this is just a very brief exploration of the topic, the point I wish to make is that language use in the medium of (Caribbean) literature is political, concerned with hegemonic formations. A constructed ‘authenticity’ achieved through the inclusion of idiomatic language is a marketable feature in ethnic writing, meaning here Caribbean novels of the diaspora in the U.S. and Canada. It is a means to represent an ethnicized identity, offering a glimpse into ‘real’ life experiences and community slang as demanded by the reading public.<sup>73</sup> In the same minority context, however, language use still constitutes one aspect of identity politics. It is a strategy adopted by the authors to claim recognition, establish cultural meaning, and produce consciousness – though not all claim to be political and resistant. It unsettles the reading process and challenges the reader unfamiliar with creole language (or Spanish as in Latina fiction). While the role of creole language use in literature has shifted, i.e. increased in recognition and familiarity, it remains a marker of lower status in the Caribbean (in terms of class and education), and of difference when spoken in the diaspora location (meaning migrant ‘Other,’ not part of the mainstream culture). It remains a political issue in terms however of both resistance and market customization.

### 2.4.3 Narrative Structure and Perspective

Each of the four novels selected here contains a first-person narrative of a personal story. The narrative seldom follows a chronological order. Multiple temporal levels intersect, an effect achieved through retrospective narration, analepsis, and the juxtaposition of different plot lines that belong to the life stories of several generations. The frame of the story constitutes an I-narration, usually by one adult woman and from a present stage. In retrospect and fragments, she retraces her own path of development, thereby recording a family’s migration story and individual trauma. These constitute the several embedded plot lines. Additionally, multiple sub-ordinated first- or third-person accounts from different generations lend the texts a polyphonic impression and offer a multi-

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73 The use of creole language shifts on a “creole continuum” (Sheller 2003: 187) to be more easily accessible for a readership that is not familiar with the idioms, but desire their consumption nevertheless. Mimi Sheller remarks, “the metropolitan centre has in many ways embraced ‘creole cultures,’ getting close to them, letting them in, taking pleasure in consuming their exotic flavour” (Sheller 2003: 175).

dimensional perspective not only on an individual's life story but the historical emergence of a society (in a Bakhtinian sense but less universal).<sup>74</sup>

The novels cover a relatively large time span as the narrative accompanies the individual up to twenty or forty years with only one focus on childhood experiences and the formative period of adolescence and adulthood.<sup>75</sup> It furthermore reaches far back in time in its tracking down the ancestral line. Stephanie Lovelady detects a commonality in many immigration and coming-of-age narratives that she describes as "a persistent tendency to look backwards" (Lovelady 1999: 30), an evident "pull of the past" the characters give in to – which corresponds to the generic proximity to the neo-historical novel. The "[f]ragments of memory" the reader is thus presented with, according to bell hooks, "are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation" (hooks 1989: 147) The retrospective narration underlines the importance of remembering to retrieve a history marginalized or forgotten.

The formation of the migrating subject is neither linear nor coherent but fragmented and confusing. If the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* is characterized by teleological development, owing this to the linear progression inherent in the process of formal *Bildung*, the circularity of these woman-narrated novels breaks with this tradition (cf. Künstler 2012: 42). What this shows is that (logical) consecutive stages of maturation, apart from biological aging, are an illusion. The circular structure of the narrative is achieved through memory fragments, flashbacks and forward movement owing to the unstable, fraught diaspora existence which contests coherent formation of the individual. Also, in the case of Silvera's and Espinet's novels, the ongoing narrative at one point returns to or catches up with the opening scene. The ending of the novels is thus never absolute, because coming of age in itself "suggests a process with no clear beginning or ending" (Rishoi 2003: 47).<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the narrative usually closes when the protagonists have reached a certain stage

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74 Bakhtin claims that "[g]enerations introduce a completely new and extremely significant aspect into the depicted world" (Bakhtin 2010: 18). The depiction of the life stories of several generations and their contexts, what he calls "multi-generational time," creates "historical time" (ibid.).

75 Celis restricts her study to the investigation of childhood experience and early adolescence and the corresponding sexualization of the female body (cf. Celis 2015).

76 In her definition of the coming-of-age narrative, Rishoi finds that it usually "refuse[s] closure, preferring instead an ambiguous textual ending that affirms the provisional nature of identity" (2003: 63).

of completion or self-acceptance, a coming to terms with the self that often goes along with reconciliation of mother and daughter.<sup>77</sup>

The coming-of-age novels read here open *in medias res* to perform a double initiation. The reader is thrown into the world of the characters to experience a similar abrupt moment of a 'secondary' initiation: First of all, the main characters have usually already come of age in a biological sense; they are being initiated, so to speak, with a certain age into cultural or context-specific moral values and normative conduct but still have unresolved conflicts or traumatizing memories to face. A blow of fate then functions as trigger that initiates the process of remembering their childhood years. This is crucial as it eventually leads to emotional maturation, healing, and reconciliation. This second 'initiating moment,' as I call it, in Silvera's novel is the grandmother's burial and reading of her will which catapults the protagonist back to her childhood. The same happens in the case of Espinet's protagonist whose brother's progressing disease and death functions as trigger to reflect on her becoming woman as well as in the case of Cruz' eponymous heroine Soledad whose mother's sudden emotional retreat and apathy have a formative effect on the mother and the daughter alike.

The temporal (and spatial) gap between the act of narration (narrative time) from an adult perspective of the childhood and earlier formative events (narrated time) creates emotional distance. This renders possible a more objective evaluation of the past on the part of the characters, which in turn offers the reader a more profound understanding of the protagonist's current disposition and motivation. At the same time, the first-person point of view (along with temporal distance and unstable psychological dispositions of some characters) creates a sense of uncertainty and unreliability, making the reader question some of the young women's decisions. Also, the descriptions of other persons through the I-narrators' perspectives make difficult an objective evaluation of these characters' comportment and surely direct readers' sympathies. Donette Francis summarizes the adult-narrated coming-of-age novels thusly:

Defying the developmental logic of the Bildungsroman, these coming of age depictions of Caribbean girlhood into womanhood portray girlhood from an adult perspective without any hint of sentimentality or romanticization. Instead these representations of unsuccessful adventure quests spotlight the interior lives of Caribbean women and girls to connect pivotal scenes of *subjection to subject formation*. (2011: 337; emphasis added)

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77 Benítez-Rojo makes an interesting point saying that "the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* does not usually conclude with the hero's saying good-bye to the stage of apprenticeship in terms of a clean slate" (2006: 25).

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The Caribbean diaspora novel does not offer space for nostalgic sentiment nor a romanticized future. It is rather the processing of past inflictions of bodily and emotional harm that is constitutive to the formation of the subject. Such a scene of subjection is depicted, for example, in Espinet's novel in the 'gravel incident' in which the protagonist is made to kneel on stony ground until her knees start bleeding. This punishment, at the same time corporeal and psychological, is inflicted upon her by her father for allegedly improper feminine conduct and the transgression of ethnic boundaries (see chapter 5). The narrator discloses the mechanisms of power and body control that unjustifiably subject the adolescent female. Only from her adult perspective is she then able to assess the causes of this cruel treatment and eventually forgive him. The adult point of view provides the protagonist with more authority and insight in order to actively reflect on her own becoming thereby questioning certain aspects of gender-specific expectations, social requirements, or normative behavior which are perceived as confining and limiting to personal development.

### 2.4.4 The *Kumbla* and the Collective Novel

At the end of the novel *The Heart Does Not Bend*, Silvera's protagonist Molly Galloway comes to the conclusion that "we don't live our lives independent of each other. It's all a give and take" (263). These words, which she directs at her teenage daughter in an attempt of reconciliation, are relevant less because of their didactic purpose indicating that life is often about compromise, but rather for their insight that human existence is based on interdependence and mutuality. Contrary to the individualistic trajectories depicted in conventional versions of the novel of development, the novels that emerge against a minority background have the tendency to feature a more collective vision of subject formation. The life stories and fates of the characters depicted in multiple intersecting plotlines add to the communal character of the coming-of-age novels. Bolaki confirms this notion for ethnic American fiction whose writers frequently "communalise' individualistic forms such as the novel of development" (Bolaki 2011: 25). Likewise, in Black British writing, Mark Stein discovers the juxtaposition of several stories in what he terms the "*multiple bildungsroman*," referring in particular to David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991), in which "the

depiction of a variety of character developments allows the narrator-protagonist's formation to be seen in context" (Stein 2004: 150).<sup>78</sup>

The aspects of community and relationality continue to be remarkable features in the coming-of-age form. As Wilson notes the protagonists are "defined by their connections to others" (Wilson 2008: 5). She differentiates the terms novels of "dialogic interplay" (6) and "relational autonomy" (16), two specific definitions that describe the different phases of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The first focuses on the protagonist's early interaction with elders and peers as well as a playful initiation into her social surroundings. The latter implies the development of a young adult into a more autonomous being who balances out her desire of independence and intimacy always in relation to a larger context, i.e. "her nation, her race, the present as well as past and future generations" (Wilson 2008: 20). The applicability of the different terms and such a clear temporal distinction between girlhood and adulthood is disputable – especially as the coming-of-age novel usually sets out on a much longer journey accompanying the protagonists through these various stages of becoming woman. Nevertheless, the aspects of the dialogic and relational remain relevant: Édouard Glissant's *poétique de la relation* describes Caribbean identity as relational. He highlights that in Caribbean literature and culture "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 2010: 11). Furthermore, Glissant's idea of a "collective novel" can be applied to the diasporic coming-of-age novel if considered as "the novel of the relationship of individual to collectivity, of individual to the Other, of We to Us" (1989: 87).

Certainly, all four writers discussed in this study write a collective novel carrying forward Glissant's idea, which makes them remarkably Caribbean. However, if the Caribbean novel of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was still concerned, and necessarily so, mostly with a community's emergence from colonial domination, the women-authored novels published after 1990 have notably moved on by adding depictions of individualist trajectories intertwined with the communal. George Lamming introduces the 1983 reprint of his *Bildungsroman In the Castle of My Skin* (1970) as follows:

The book is crowded with names and people, although each character is accorded a most vivid presence and force of personality, we are rarely concerned with

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78 The pattern of such a multiple or collective coming of age is discernible not only in the novels included here but also, to mention two further examples, through the character constellation in Trinidadian-British Lakshmi Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* (2012) or in *Unburnable* (2007) by Marie-Elena John, a U.S.-based writer from Antigua.

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the prolonged exploration of an individual consciousness. The Village, you might say, is the central character. When we see the Village as collective character, we perceive another dimension to the individual wretchedness of daily living. (xxxvi)<sup>79</sup>

Lamming thus 'communitises' the narrative form, foregrounding the village as an entity that needed to 'come of age' first. The focus on the collective, as he explains, allows him to represent economic hardship and colonial racism not as individual issue but structural problem. His anti-colonial 'village narrative' along with the depicted collective emergence serves as allegory for nation building processes and the formation of an ethnic-cultural identity. However, Lamming may be criticized for reproducing a nationalist, patriarchal discourse that sets in power a regulatory regime operating against women whose individual sufferings are anonymized by blending them into the communal structure of the village and nation.<sup>80</sup> Many women writers, on the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of their communities' sustaining network structure or solidarity, see the necessity of detailed explorations of individual consciousness and lived experience. This becomes clear, for instance, with regard to systematic and individual violence against women.

Caribbean women writers of the diaspora tend to highlight communal life, in particular the nurturing community of women, symbolized by the *kumbla*,<sup>81</sup> and their bonds of solidarity the protagonists find empowering. This however is not supposed to mean that subject formation in these novels is always a

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79 This resonates well with Makeda Silvera's short story "Her Head a Village" (1994).

80 On the criticism of Lamming's treatment of gender issues and female characters, see Simoes da Silva (2000).

81 *Kumbla* means cocoon implying safety, comfort, and protection or self-defense; it may translate to womb; it may also indicate vulnerability or confinement. Here, it is also a reference to the essay collection edited and introduced by Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbla* (1990) I mentioned earlier, which amongst other things, deals with the voicelessness or absence and underrepresentation of Caribbean women writers. Emphasizing their feminist impetus, the two editors explain the meaning of the volume's title to signify "movement from confinement to visibility, articulation, process. As process, it allows for a multiplicity of moves, exteriorized, no longer contained and protected or dominated. 'Out of the Kumbla' is as well a sign for departure from constricting and restricting spaces. It further signifies the taking of control and [...] is above all an articulation of our presence on the literary landscape" (19). In Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), for example, the *kumbla* is a central trope. The chapter "The Kumbla" refers to the various meanings of the *kumbla*. In one instance, it takes on a rather negative connotation of over-protection: "But the trouble with the *kumbla* is the getting out of the *kumbla*. It is a protective device. If you dwell too long in it, it makes you delicate" (130).

harmonious endeavor. The negotiation of one's own identity, one's needs but also obligations within the (extended) family or community structure is often in conflict with a positive self-definition and wish for personal liberation, complicated further by a social surrounding perceived as alienating. The core of the family or community network usually constitutes a triadic interrelation of the grandmother, mother, and daughter – or their “inter- and intra-generational female bonding” (LeSeur 1995: 189) – an often complicated but necessary constellation emerging from the matrilineal structure of the households, which the novels suggest as a direct result of the economic situation, absent fatherhood, and transnational family patterns. What seems crucial during the early formative years of the characters is informal learning through storytelling as a source of knowledge to be passed on to the next generation. The grandmother's voice often serves as a narrative authority in the transmission of motherly wisdom and life philosophies. The construction of a female lineage or woman-centered genealogy indeed foregrounds women's agency and subjectivity. But this has the effect of marginalizing the male perspective and reducing representations of masculinity to stereotypical, often negative descriptions (see in particular chapters 4 and 7).<sup>82</sup>

The *kumbla* along with gendered restrictions nevertheless can be perceived as confining – as is the case for Kincaid's *Lucy* or Cruz' *Soledad*. Interestingly enough, the characters do not always seek shelter in the close community, but hide in secluded places, on roof tops, in treehouses, or secret circles, away from the prying eye of mother, grandmother, neighbors, or educators. There, they can build liberationist spaces for self-development and sexual dis- or recovery. The importance of and comfort provided by the community should of course not be discarded, especially not in a minority context where the surrounding is perceived as alienating. For instance, looking at the representations of community in Toni Morrison's and Maxine Hong Kingston's novels, Pin-Chia Feng notes that “[a] sense of community, a network of relations, is of particular importance to ethnic women in their struggle against [...] racism, sexism, and classism” (1997: 12). Bolaki affirms this similarity, as many of the women characters in U.S.-ethnic literature “turn to less alienating spaces for empowerment and belonging, notably their local communities” (2011: 24-25). The community also in Caribbean women's writing provides safety and healing power, as writ-

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82 María Cristina Rodríguez makes a similar observation in almost all of the twenty-four novels she studies. In the depicted narrative worlds, which apparently revolve around only dysfunctional heterosexual partnership, “[m]en enter the lives of these women and sometimes bring moments of happiness, but mostly they deceive, abuse, and abandon them” (2005: xv).

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ers like Silvera, Espinet, Danticat, and Cruz show in their description of empowering social and familial cohabitation.

### 2.4.5 Migrating Plots and the Diasporic

The context of migration, in which the four authors set their respective novel, causes shifting articulations of identity and positionality characterized by discontinuities and ruptures. The title of this second chapter, “Roo/utes of Development,” plays on the metaphors of roots and routes as paradigmatic for diasporic Caribbean culture and literature.<sup>83</sup> They are defining elements of Caribbean diaspora consciousness and transnational communities pointing to their multiple origins and destinations. The coming-of-age novels here are concerned with diasporic subject formation which manifests itself in the simultaneity of mobility and attachment, a combination that unsettles fixed, stable identity concepts. *Roots* signify origin – this may be a concrete location or imagined essence – and permanence; in some cases it may also mean a permanent state of ‘inbetween-ity.’ On the other hand, *routes* refer to a rhizomatic network of “[d]ecentered, lateral connections” (Clifford 1994: 306), interconnecting very diverse diaspora locations and subject positions which, as well, may constitute points of reference for identification.

Migration is a central aspect of Caribbean life, continuously shaping the socio-ethnic composition of the region and the respective host countries. In this context, identities, constructed as ethnic, gendered, sexual, cultural, and national, are complex and complicated, at times conflicting, even contradictory. Stuart Hall notes a “preoccupation with movement” (1990: 234) in the contemporary Caribbean film which he relates to the state of Caribbean people being “the prototype of the modern or postmodern New World nomad, continually moving between centre and periphery” (ibid.). The migrating subjects thereby undo this very same binary. Accordingly, recurring themes and motives in contemporary Caribbean literature are identities that are in flux, as well as imagined and real journeys, and nomadic movements.

The aesthetics of diaspora in the selected novels is realized in a “[t]wo-way gaze” (Page 2011)<sup>84</sup> directed both at the island and the metropolitan location.

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83 As suggested by Glissant (2010), Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1994), and Ferly (2012).

84 This is not limited to Caribbean diasporic literature in the U.S., which Page’ selection of texts by Diaz, Danticat, and Garcia may indicate. Mark Stein identifies “the diasporic” as a distinguishing element also of the Black British novel of transformation, “reaching across space and time” (2004: 171).

Constant switches in location and temporal jumps create a dense web of migratory routes, reflecting the search of an uprooted self in a transnational constellation. The back-and-forth movements between the locations and in time not only fragment the narrative but also create decentered, multiple subject positions that unsettle fixed notions of place and belonging. At the same time, this creates the illusion of spatial proximity and emotional closeness in defiance of material boundaries that inhibit movements of the body. Noteworthy is the urge to rewrite the ancestral or natal land at the expense of a thorough description of the migrant location, which is to suggest that despite the fact that the permanent place of residence is in the North American cities, retaining connections to the Caribbean and temporary return is important for the protagonists' becoming. The characters tend to privilege the Caribbean space for the matter of healing and psychological survival. The constant evocation of that place may also indicate that the Caribbean forms (an imaginary) part of the Northern metropole.<sup>85</sup>

The coming-of-age novel of the Caribbean diaspora is concerned with the effect of migration on individual subject formation. The narrative accompanies the protagonists on their journeys from the Caribbean to the Northern metropolis mostly in order to be reunited with an estranged mother or extended family. Yolanda A. Doub identifies the travel motif as one of the central plot-driving elements in Latin American novels of development.<sup>86</sup> While I do not wish to compare our respective text corpora on this issue, what I find interesting in her analysis is the contention that "the protagonists' awareness and interiorization of concepts of race, class, and gender [...] are influenced greatly by their experiences over the course of their travels" (Doub 2010: 6). Although the term 'travel' does not really capture the migratory experiences made by the female characters in the novels selected for this study nor their "diasporic sensibility" (Page 2011: 226), a similar situation can be detected in coming-of-age novels set in the Caribbean and diaspora location. The relationships of the self with the family, community, and general society constantly need to be redefined against the shifting backgrounds of socio-cultural spaces in which societal factors like class, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality take up new meanings. Notably, the often involuntary journeys of adolescent girls are central to the plot structure and constitute a break in the character's individuation process, which is usually marked by narrative absence. The arrival in the new location necessitates an

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85 Kezia Page applies the term "diasporic sensibility" to describe "how Caribbean people have scattered to geographic spaces outside of the region and seeded Caribbean culture in these spaces often radically transforming them" (226).

86 Hence her descriptive term of "journeys of formation" in her title (cf. Doub 2010).

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attempt to belong, integrate, and find a routine; for others it goes along with confinement, isolation, and disintegration.

Likewise, the alienating experience of dislocation, the non-recognition of or by the mother, or direct confrontation with racism is accompanied by narrative gaps or ellipses, which indicates a profound break in subject formation – an indication of a certain rupture in the child or young woman’s emotional development leading to estrangement from the self and others. As Künstler points out with reference to Hispano-Caribbean migrant fiction in the U.S., the coming-of-age process and troubled psychological disposition correlate with the experience of immigration. According to Künstler, a “twofold transition” takes place with respect to personal development and maturation, the experience of passage, confrontation with the unknown, with regard to estrangement, adaptive difficulties, the feeling of not belonging, confusion, insecurity and disorientation, but also regarding a productive crisis, self-discovery, new opportunities and the beginning of ‘a new life’ (cf. Künstler 2012: 17).

In theory as in literary practice, diasporic formations, meaning both the creation and existence of diaspora communities as well as a subject’s being in diaspora, oscillate between a celebratory ethos of liberation and a melancholic sense of violent uprooting or loss. Despite the more negative and rather troubling experiences associated with migration, the move away from the Caribbean homelands is often perceived as liberating. The diaspora location provides the migrating subject with more opportunity and liberty, a promise which in many respects holds true. This should however not neglect the reality of discriminatory practices, the confrontation with and internalization of racial as well as sexual oppression and stereotypes at both locations, the confusion that comes with displacement, or likewise precarious living conditions.<sup>87</sup> Here Bolaki convincingly reasons that “[m]obility creates opportunities for reinvention of identity, but it also becomes entwined with trauma in many recent ethnic American novels of female development that focus on experiences of displacement and exile” (2011: 240). Importantly, she points out the central role the body plays in the context of displacement and traumatic experiences: “Often,

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87 Antiguan writer, Jamaica Kincaid, in *Lucy* (1990) tells the story of a West Indian girl who comes to North America to work as an au-pair. Thereby, Kincaid covers such topics as the coming of age, female sexuality and agency, the dominance over men during the sex act, etc. The novel is often discussed as an example for the narrative representation of a liberating sexuality in the diaspora (opposed to sexual constraint back home in the Caribbean). However, Lucy’s emotional dependence on her mother back home in the Caribbean, tells a different story, also Lucy’s relationships to the men and her sexual experience seem to be rather meaningless, and there is an emotional void.

the body becomes the trope of exploring diasporic displacement and trauma, both personal and cultural” (ibid.).

#### 2.4.6 Adolescence, Aging, and Bodily Transformation

The coming-of-age genre in general and the four selected novels in particular shift attention to the body.<sup>88</sup> Bolaki makes an important observation in her analysis of Audre Lorde’s so-called biomythography *Zami* (1982), stating that “[t]he climactic moment of coming to consciousness about identity are played out on the body” (2011: 192). Indeed, the body constitutes one of the essential aspects in subject formation since physical, emotional, and intellectual development cannot be conceived of or conceptualized in the body’s absence. In coming-of-age literature, the body, which is inscribed already with meaning, as I elaborate on in the next chapter, is highly significant for the narrative structure. According to Rishoi, “[t]he physiological changes of female puberty seem to work against the cultural pressure to ignore the body, resulting in a notable bodily presence in the narratives” (2003: 12). The role of the body and the interrelation of subjectivity and embodiment in the subject’s formative process are foregrounded.<sup>89</sup> Coming of age not just denotes the process of growing up but also highlights bodily transformation in socio-culturally specific terms. A feminist-oriented reading of the genre pays special attention to the female body to foreground the social, cultural, historical, and political significance of the body.

Of special interest is the individual’s corporeal transformation. These are, first of all, biological and primarily affect the materiality of the body, the changes of the body during puberty and the subject’s attempt to come to terms with her newly (because transformed) embodied identity. In Erna Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) the protagonist, Nelly Richmond, describes her first menstruation: “‘-You are eleven now and soon something strange will happen to you. [...]’ I needed cleansing. [...] We had known that ‘it’ would come one day [...]. ‘It’ was a hidey-hidey thing ! It made you a whisper. [...] ‘It’ made me powerful too and in a strange way” (119-120). In Ramabai

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88 I mention the body as the last of the major aspects that define the coming of age novel not because it is the least important. On the contrary, it constitutes the central aspect and shall as this final point serve as a bridge to the ensuing chapter.

89 More conventional genre discussions of the bildungsroman do not consider the body or embodiment to the same degree. This might be due to the association of the term *Bildung* with the cultivation of the mind, the civil character, and citizenship, while at the same time neglecting the physical aspects of the *Bildungs*-process.

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Espinete's novel (see chapter 5), Mona, the protagonist, too, notices the changes of her adult body as compared to her younger self in a photograph, seeing a "young Mona, her tough hairy forearms ready for anything" (147). Looking at her body now she realizes how "[t]hose hairs must have fallen off over time. I felt a pang of regret as I looked at the steady arms of that young girl, so sure of herself, so different from the older woman" (133). The characters' explanations shed light on a carefree childhood that ends as soon as the girls grow into an adult. Nelly becomes aware not only of her corporeal contamination, but also a certain "corruptive" power, "the power of a duppy" (120-121), associated with her period and sexuality affecting her surrounding's reaction towards her. In contrast, Mona draws a more depressing picture of a burdensome femininity full of insecurity and regret. Both cases exemplify the mystery and potential danger emanating from the female pubescent body. Espinete as well as Brodber link corporeal experiences such as menstruation to the discursive construction of the body, making clear its relation to societal expectations and practices of cultural normalization that determine what it means to become and be a woman.

Not only is physiological change represented in most novels of the genre, also sexual awakening is made explicit. As Rishoi argues "the journey of adolescence is also a physiological process that gradually transforms the body of a child into a sexually mature adult body" (Rishoi 2003: 48). Kempadoo's novel *Buxton Spice*, as a case in point, focuses on the coming of age of eleven years-old Lula. The girl describes her discovery of her sexuality and body as she secretly masturbates in the bathtub. She shares this sexual experience in the early pubescent phase with Makeda Silvera's Molly who hides with the girl from next door in her treehouse where they explore newly found bodily pleasures (see chapter 4).

Taking these examples as starting point, it can be observed that within such (trans)formative processes the growing into familial, societal, and cultural structures constitutes a major challenge for the young girls as well as the adult women. The formative influence of the social surrounding on the protagonists should not be underestimated. Rishoi, for instance, describes coming of age as

a complex of biological, cultural, psychological, and political events and changes whose meaning is largely determined by the expectations of the culture in which it takes place. And, although the bodily changes that accompany adolescence *are* universal, the meaning of those changes is socially articulated through discursive practices that serve to define and articulate the parameters of adolescence. (Rishoi 2003: 48-9)

The universal experience of adolescence, as pointed out already, is complicated and individualized through the surveillance of the embodied subject. The female body as well as woman's sexuality are regulated by a society's ideals, norms, and institutions, which the coming-of-age genre closely scrutinizes. What needs investigation are the ways the novels' characters perceive of themselves and experience their bodies. How does this *self-perception* change during puberty and how does the *gaze* of others – two simultaneously operating factors – too change? Is the assumption that migration and socialization in different cultural, socio-political contexts trouble this perception valid? Questions like these resonate with Anzaldúa's remark on the collisions of different frames of reference quoted earlier. Moreover, of particular interest in the respective analytical parts is the extent to which cultured, sexualized, gendered, racialized inscriptions fix the adolescent and adult woman's body within a social matrix of power relations. Instead of seeing the body as a fixed, stable entity, I argue along with Elizabeth Grosz: The body is subject to transformation and "must be seen as a series of processes of becoming" (Grosz 1994: 12).