



**Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro**  
Centro de Educação e Humanidades  
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Walter Cruz Caminha

**Jamaica Kincaid's narratives: denouncing coloniality, revising  
history, revealing subjectivities**

Rio de Janeiro

2019

Walter Cruz Caminha

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subjectivities**



Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Estudos de Literatura.

Orientadora: Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris

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Banca examinadora:

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Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris (Orientadora)  
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

---

Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dra. Maria Aparecida Andrade Salgueiro  
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

---

Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dra. Eliane Terezinha do Amaral Campello  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande

Rio de Janeiro

2019

## **DEDICATION**

Dedico esta dissertação a todos que um dia tiveram – e ainda tem – suas individualidades negadas, suas subjetividades apagadas e suas realidades deturpadas.

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When it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it, I did not tell this to the gardeners who had asked me to explain the thing I was doing, or to explain what I was trying to do; I only marveled at the way the garden is for me an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings).

*Jamaica Kincaid*



## ABSTRACT

CAMINHA, Walter Cruz. *Jamaica Kincaid's narratives: denouncing coloniality, revising history, revealing subjectivities*. 2018. 93 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018.

This thesis aims at investigating the composition of the identities of narrators and characters in Caribbean literature, specifically in Jamaica Kincaid's works. With a strong autobiographical slant, constantly confirmed and problematized by the author, her narratives address coloniality in Antigua and its effects in the lives of the locals. In a process that denotes/ involves engagement, reflection and creativity, Kincaid denounces, questions and represents the consequences of coloniality, highlighting the expression of the subjectivity of narrators and characters. The main texts chosen to be part of the literary corpus of this dissertation, *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Brother* (1997), feature narrators who map Antigua, whether to present it for those who only know the European narrative about Antigua or to remember a childhood before moving to the USA. Focusing on the main aspects that compose the identities of narrators and characters in Kincaid's works, three perspectives are explored as keys to analyze the literary corpus in this dissertation: the use of the English language as a tool to denounce colonial practices; additions or revisions of versions of Caribbean history narrated by European colonizers; and the influence of autobiographical elements in the author's body of work. Privileging critics and scholars from Latin America as theoretical framework, the present analysis investigates how the aspects previously mentioned compose the identities of the characters, throwing light onto the Caribbean subjectivities presented in Jamaica Kincaid's texts.

Keywords: Coloniality. History. Autobiographical Writing. Subjectivities. Jamaica Kincaid.

## RESUMO

CAMINHA, Walter Cruz. *Jamaica Kincaid's narratives: denouncing coloniality, revising history, revealing subjectivities*. 2018. 93 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018.

A presente dissertação tem como objetivo a investigação da composição das identidades de narradoras e personagens na literatura caribenha, mais especificamente nas obras de Jamaica Kincaid. Com um forte cunho autobiográfico, constantemente confirmado e problematizado pela autora, suas narrativas abordam a colonialidade em Antígua e seus efeitos nas vidas dos locais. Denúncias, questionamentos e reflexões sobre as consequências da colonialidade permeiam sua obra, principalmente na manifestação da subjetividade de suas narradoras e personagens. As principais obras do corpus literário desta dissertação, *A Small Place* (1988) e *My Brother* (1997), apresentam narradoras que fazem um mapeamento de Antígua, seja para apresentá-la aos que só conhecem a narrativa europeia sobre a ilha ou para lembrar de sua infância antes da migração para os EUA. Como principais eixos que compõem as identidades das narradoras e personagens das obras de Kincaid, três frentes são abordadas como chave de leitura nesta dissertação: o uso da língua inglesa como ferramenta para denunciar práticas coloniais; a adição ou revisão de versões da história do Caribe narrada pelos colonizadores europeus; e a influência de elementos autobiográficos da autora em suas narrativas. Privilegiando críticos e pesquisadores latino-americanos como fundamentação teórica, a presente análise investiga como os eixos mencionados formam a identidade dos personagens, evidenciando as subjetividades caribenhas apresentadas nos textos de Jamaica Kincaid.

Palavras-chave: Colonialidade. História. Escrita autobiográfica. Subjetividades. Jamaica Kincaid.

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## INTRODUCTION

Countries in Central and South America have been under the effect of colonization since the navigations from Europe heading West were initiated by countries such as Spain, England and Portugal. Those nations sought to expand their economic power and geographical influence through the domination of new territories, regardless of the native peoples they would find living in the New World. History shows us that the peoples who lived in the Americas were enslaved, decimated and, many times, extinct by the colonizing groups that arrived from Europe. In addition to the diseases brought by the Europeans to the Americas, a legacy fueled by the processes of colonization was left to the countries under the rule of the empire: erasure of cultural background and history, forced use of a new language (especially when the native language was not operating under an alphabetical system), imposition of habits and religion and the importation of African slaves as workforce to replace the Amerindians killed by the Europeans, among other kinds of oppression.

In *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), Walter Mignolo discusses how Latin America is a concept created by the European colonizers upon their arrival five hundred years before. In the first chapter, titled The “Americas” on the Colonial Horizon of Modernity, Mignolo states that up to 1492, “the Americas were not on anybody’s map” (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.2), According to the scholar, “until the early sixteenth century, America was not on anybody's map simply because the word and the concept of a fourth continent had not yet been invented” (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.2), but it did not mean that the geographical place that has been called America since then did not exist yet. The lands already existed, such as the places formerly known as Anáhuac and Tawantinsuyu, and different societies like the Aztecs and the Incas inhabited them, leading their lives in a non-Eurocentric way. Mignolo states that:

“America,” then, was never a continent waiting to be discovered. Rather, “America” as we know it was an invention forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions. The narratives that described the events as “discovery” were told not by the inhabitants of Anáhuac or Tawantinsuyu, but by Europeans themselves. (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.2)

Mignolo’s (2005) insights on the invention of the Americas articulate with Eduardo Coutinho’s (2003) discussion on the territorial scope of the term “Latin America”. In *Literatura Comparada na América Latina: ensaios* (2003), Coutinho argues that, initially, Latin America was a term used to differ the rest of the Americas from the Anglo-Saxon portion (COUTINHO, 2003, p.42). Later, the use of the term was restricted to refer the

Spanish speaking countries in the Americas, becoming a synonym to *Hispanoamérica* (COUTINHO, 2003, p.42). Gradually, especially from the 20th century on, other countries and regions were absorbed into this definition of Latin America, such as Brazil, the French Caribbean and the province of Québec (COUTINHO, 2003, p.42). Coutinho also adds that the greatest transformation for the term “Latin America” happened after the inclusion of countries and peoples in the Caribbean which had not been colonized by Latin countries, such as the English and Dutch colonies in the region, besides Hispanic communities in the USA (COUTINHO, 2003, p.43).

Walter Mignolo (2005) refers to the alleged discovery of the Americas as a narrative created by the European navigators and, in order to justify his line of thought, he argues that there is a difference between “discovery” and “invention” that is much more than a simple choice of words. First of all, Mignolo (2005) states that the words “discovery” and “invention” do not represent different interpretations of the same event; rather, they “belong to *two different paradigms*” (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.3). The Argentinean scholar explains the difference between the words mentioned:

The first presupposes the triumphant European and imperial perspective on world history, an achievement that was described as “modernity,” while the second reflects the critical perspective of those who have been placed behind, who are expected to follow the ascending progress of a history to which they have the feeling of not belonging. Colonization of being is nothing else than producing the idea that certain people do not belong to history - that they are non-beings. (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.4)

This issue discussed by Walter Mignolo (2005) is addressed and problematized several times by the narrators in Jamaica Kincaid’s works. In the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988), for instance, the narrator is straightforward about which version of the history of her home country is authorized to be told:

Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost completely around England? Well, that was so. I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England. (KINCAID, 1988, p.33)

The narrator also points out how education in Antigua is shaped in order to serve primarily one of the parts in the processes of colonization, as she claims that in schools and libraries built by the British empire the colonizers “distorted or erased my history and glorified [their] own” (KINCAID, 1999, p.36). It is through History that the distortion and erasure denounced by the narrator are propagated, spreading a version of the contact between the British and the Caribbean that privileges only the European colonizers.

The relation between history and fiction also involves privileging one over the other for the sake of an alleged scientific impartiality. History, as it is considered a science, is attributed an exemption from external influence; meanwhile fiction has its status of art interpreted in a limiting sense due to its imaginative aspect, that distances it from scientific precision. However, contemporary theory has pointed the convergences between history and fiction in order to identify the convergences that bring them closer. Scholars as Linda Hutcheon (1988) indicate that both history and fiction rely on narrative and its characteristics, a topic that will be further developed later on this thesis. It is through processes of selection, editing, erasure and other strategies that both history and fiction are made, inevitably leading to choices of what is told, by whom, where and how.

It is this perspective that motivated my reading of Jamaica Kincaid's works in order to better understand the Caribbean identity, as represented by the Antiguan author. Jamaica Kincaid was born on the island of Antigua, and lived in St. John, the capital, until her teenage years. At the age of 17, her mother sent her to the USA to work as an au pair and help provide for her family. After a few years of working and studying, Kincaid dropped out of college and started working for a magazine. Her career as a writer was greatly influenced by William Shawn, editor of the *New Yorker*, whose support was a turning point in the Antiguan author's life. Kincaid has won several awards for her literary production, such as the Anifield-Wolf Book Award and The Lila-Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Award for *Annie John* (1985), besides being a recipient of the PEN/Faulkner Awards for Fiction in 1984 and 1997<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the identities of the narrators and characters in Jamaica Kincaid's writing are created, considering not only the primary works chosen as literary corpus but also her other publications and interviews. Investigating the elements that compose the identity of the lives she portrays in her narratives might lead to a clearer notion of what happened and still happens in the Caribbean. Through an analysis of the composition of the identities of characters, it is possible to better understand the Antiguan subjectivities – and Caribbean, by extension – she expresses through her writing. I understand that literature can provide additions or revisions to the history recorded by hegemonic nations and this seems to be a concern for the author, as the narrator in *My Garden (book)*: (1999) openly states:

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<sup>1</sup> BENSON, Kristin M.; HAGSETH, Cayce. Jamaica Kincaid. *Voices from the Gaps*, 2001. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/166247>. Accessed on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

In almost every account of an event that has taken place sometime in the last five hundred years there is always a moment when I feel like placing an asterisk somewhere in its text and at the end of the official story making my own addition. (KINCAID, 1999, p.164)

Kincaid makes her own additions to history, both in her fiction and non-fiction, resorting to different strategies accordingly. The “asterisks” she places in official accounts of history permeate her fictional and non-fictional works, mediated by the imaginative aspect of literature.

In order to conduct the investigation of the identity of Kincaid’s narrators, this thesis follows three main aspects that can be easily grasped in Jamaica Kincaid’s writing: the use of the English language by the Caribbean characters, the intricate relationship her narrators have with History and the importance of the autobiographical details in the author’s works – whether fiction or non-fiction. It is important to mention that the scope of this research does not privilege discussions on race and gender, which are themes that are always touching upon coloniality. Due to time limitations, I have decided not to focus on these themes, but I certainly intend to look further into them during my doctoral research.

The first chapter, Hybridity and language: denouncing coloniality through the English language, foregrounds the posture of the narrators in Kincaid’s writing towards the colonizer’s language. The focus of this chapter is to analyze and discuss how the English language is seen by the narrators – especially when it comes to the feeling of dislocation related to coloniality and diaspora – and how it is used by them to talk about their life experiences inside the colony. The difference between what they say about the language and what they do with it, for instance, is observed in this chapter, as the narrator in *A Small Place* (1988) uses the English language to denounce the difficulty in talking about the crimes committed by the British colonizers while using their official language, imposed in the process of colonization. In addition, the effects of living abroad in the way one speaks is addressed by the protagonist in *My Brother* (1997), as she notices that she and her brother, despite speaking the same language, have completely different ways of using the English language, a product of her living abroad for decades while her brother remained in Antigua.

This chapter, then, is dedicated to investigating the use of the English language as a means to denounce the relations of power and oppression that prevailed during the colonial period and continued after independence. By analyzing how coloniality through language works for different characters, who went through different experiences in Antigua and abroad, it is possible to understand how language affects their identities, especially once they are in touch with each other, as the narrator Jamaica and her brother Devon in *My Brother* (1997).

For this first chapter, conceptualizations of the term “hybridity” by Radhakrisnan (1996), Ashcroft et al (1998) and Nayar (2015) serve as basis to understand the role of language in the construction of hybrid identities. A discussion by Soto-Crespo (2002) regarding the relevance of naming things helps understanding how language is used to establish and maintain relations of power in the Caribbean. Other scholars, such as Carole Boyce Davis (2018), Leigh Gilmore (2001) and Susheila Nasta (2009) have their works about Kincaid cited in order to complement the discussions and analysis of the literary corpus.

The second chapter of this thesis, *Narratives from Antigua: revising History through Jamaica Kincaid’s literary production*, focuses on the possibility of reading Jamaica Kincaid’s works as revisions to official historical records. As both history and literature cannot be considered impartial, this chapter proposes that the works of Caribbean writers can be read as alternative sources to have a broader understanding of coloniality in the region. As History, the discipline, leaves out details of the oppression experienced by the peoples who lived and still live in the Caribbean, it might be literature, then, a way to access this part of the narrative that was left out. By reading not only the *memoir My Brother* (1997) and the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988) but also Kincaid’s essays and interviews, it is possible to have a different perspective of Antigua and other parts of the Caribbean, as they show the perspective of someone who was born in a colony. It is also important to keep in mind, as the first chapter of this thesis will also address, that Kincaid had the opportunity to leave Antigua and has lived for decades in the USA, a hegemonic country. That means that the effect of hybridity on her is different from what her family, who never left the island, experienced; therefore, her perspective when writing about the country is not of someone who has always lived there.

For the second chapter, discussions on history by scholars as Edouard Glissant (1999) articulate with the analysis of the relations between history and fiction proposed by researchers as Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Beatriz Sarlo (2007). The discussion of the concept of “autobiographical truth” and its implications in literature is based on the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010). Anibal Quijano’s (2007) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s (2016) works on coloniality give a better notion on how revisions of history found in literature contribute to the promotion of a decolonial thought.

The third chapter of this thesis, “Serial autobiography”: autobiographical elements in Jamaica Kincaid’s narratives, centers on the relevance of autobiographical details in Kincaid’s works. The coincidences between the lives of the author and those of her narrators are visible throughout her works, as pointed by scholars such as Leigh Gilmore (2001) and Susheila



Nasta (2009). In her public statements on radio and television interviews, Jamaica Kincaid confirms that many of the details that surface in her narratives come from personal experience. However, she reminds her readers that her work is mainly fictional, despite the heavy autobiographical influence. When asked about the coincidence between the time when Annie John, the protagonist in the novel named after her, and Kincaid herself left Antigua, the author answers “It is a coincidence, but that was when I really did leave home” (FERGUSON, 1994, p. 175). However, Kincaid quickly adds that, despite novels like *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990) being “very autobiographical”, *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996) is not (FERGUSON, 1994, p. 175). According to Kincaid, this, which was the novel she was writing at the time of the interview, “is autobiographical in ideas, but not in situation” (FERGUSON, 1994, p. 175). An analysis of the coincidences between Kincaid and her narrators enables the reader to better understand how the identity of those characters are built and the way they represent Caribbean subjects. The creative process of Jamaica Kincaid, which includes using many elements from her own life to build her characters, results in narratives that contribute to a better comprehension of life in the Caribbean as told by those who were colonized rather than colonizers.

In this chapter, as it focuses on the autobiographical elements featured in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Gunthórunn Gudmundsdóttir’s *Borderlines* (2003) and Paul John Eakin’s *Living Autobiographically* (2008) guide a reading of those elements for a better understanding of their relevance in the narratives. Leigh Gilmore’s (2001) and Susheila Nasta’s (2009) discussions on the intricate relationship between Kincaid’s life and her works fundament the analysis of the literary corpus.

As this research deals with postcolonial and decolonial studies, it is essential to establish the theoretical framework that fundamentals the notion of coloniality used in this thesis. The main definition for coloniality used in the analysis of Kincaid’s works in this research was published by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in the article *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality* (2016). The Puerto Rican scholar, whose works deal with coloniality from a Caribbean and Latin American perspective, establishes a difference between the pairs colonialism/decolonization and coloniality/decoloniality, which cannot be used interchangeably. He states that the first pair usually refers to “past realities or historical episodes that have been superseded by other kind of socio-political and economical regimes”, implying some kind of closure or overcoming (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2016, p.10). The

second pair, however, coloniality/decoloniality, is not locked in the past or confined to a specific period or event. As Maldonado-Torres explains:

In contrast, coloniality and decoloniality refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization. Because of the long-time and profound investment of what is usually referred to as Europe or Western civilization in processes of conquest and colonialism, this logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power is intrinsically tied to what is called “Western civilization” and “Western modernity.” (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2016, p.10)

Therefore, when referring to what is being exposed in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, the choice for this thesis is to look for evidence of coloniality. This is due to the fact that the focus is not the practical processes of colonization and independence – from the arrival of European ships in the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the late decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – but the discourses, the relations of power and the logic created by those processes. Maldonado-Torres’s thoughts on coloniality derive from the discussions of Aníbal Quijano on the matter. In the article *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality* (2007), the Peruvian researcher states that:

Coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn’t exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples. But it hasn’t ceased to be, for 500 years, their main framework. (QUIJANO, 2007, p.170)

Once again, the difference between colonialism – a period in time when colonial practices were conducted by England, Portugal, Spain and other European nations – and coloniality – a logic in force throughout modernity – lies on the time frame. As an example, Quijano mentions that European coloniality of power (the idea of superiority and inferiority between cultures, peoples, races, etc.) “has proved to be longer lasting than Eurocentered colonialism” (QUIJANO, 2007, p.171). In other words, even though independence has reached the nations which were under the rule of colonizers, it does not mean that colonial practices were immediately suspended.

In a nutshell, this research addresses coloniality as Caribbean and Latin American scholars have been conceptualizing it, due to an alignment in political, racial, gender and social aspects. Working with postcolonial and decolonial concepts studied by researchers from non-hegemonic nations contributes to the analysis proposed regarding the indictments of coloniality in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, the revisions of History that might surface in her narratives and the importance of autobiographical details in her writing.

The literary works selected for this research are, as previously mentioned, the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988) and the novel *My Brother* (1997), both written by the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid. The choice of two distinct genres was not by chance: the content of each work complements the other in the sense that one focuses in the place - the Caribbean island of Antigua - while the other focuses in the family of the main character. Despite these being the primary works in the literary corpus of this thesis, other publications by Kincaid will be essential for the analyses conducted, such as *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990) and *My Garden (book):* (1999). Her texts have a very clear autobiographical slant, as the author has mentioned more than once in her interviews, and each character contributes to a deeper understanding of the author and her craft.

In the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator presents Antigua by the means of a touristic guide, but it is easily perceived that the description of the island is directed towards both the old colonizers of the Caribbean country – the English – and to the contemporary tourists interested in enjoying their trips without worrying about the conditions of the local people. The narrative points a finger at the consequences of colonizing oppression, which lasts even after the alleged independence. Simultaneously inside and outside the narrative, inside and outside Antigua, the narrator is influenced by a variety of displacements – geographical, emotional, temporal, among others – which provide her with a critical point of view regarding her homeland. The elucidation of the period when Antigua was ruled by England demonstrates the processes of appropriation of the land and imposition of customs, depriving people of their culture and making them “foreign” in their own country. Therefore, it is perceived that the narrator does not feel part of what the Antiguan people have become during and after the period under the Crown, branded by colonial exploitation, poverty and neglect.

In the *memoir My Brother* (1997), Kincaid offers a critical account of the narrator’s return to Antigua after decades of being away from her place of origin in order to visit her dying brother, who is suffering from the complications of AIDS. It also gives a clear picture not only of the physical but also of the emotional distance that might exist between a diasporic subject and his/her homeland. The reader learns details of the narrator and her family's lives through the commentary on past episodes, especially those involving her childhood and teen years, before moving to the USA. The *memoir* is not about her brother's death, as the memories presented focus on the reconstruction of his life, a life with which the narrator had barely had contact. It can be read as an attempt at knowing her dead brother, with

whom she had lived only during his early years, while simultaneously coming to terms with her own life before and after leaving for the United States.

The other texts that will complement our analyses throughout this thesis are two novels and a collection of essays. *Annie John* (1985), Kincaid's first novel, is a coming-of-age narrative about Annie John, a child growing up in St. John's, Antigua. She faces a gradual emotional detachment from her mother, culminating in the girl's migration to the United States in order to work as an au pair and help provide for the family. Even though it is not a continuation of *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990) is the story of a girl who has just arrived the USA to work as an au pair for an American family. The book is an account of her impressions and experience in this new country. *My Garden (book):* (1999) is a botany-themed collection of essays narrated in first person. The essays relate the main theme, gardening, to the history of the Caribbean, generating comparisons among plants, conquests, peoples and other topics.

As the narratives chosen place the reference on the self, it is possible to say, then, that we are working with life narratives, as described by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. In *Reading Autobiography* (2010), the researchers state that life writing has been foundational for the Western subject, especially considering that in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, autobiographical discourse became even more popular (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.124). The scholars also point that:

In many places, readers seek out life stories in which autobiographical subjects fracture monolithic categories that have culturally identified them, such as "woman" or "gay" or "black" or "disabled," and reassemble fragments of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency into new modes of subjectivity. (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.124)

This desire to break with stereotypes as the ones listed by Smith and Watson (2010) can be articulated to what this thesis proposes: understanding the Caribbean subject from a perspective different to the one provided by hegemonic narratives regarded as official history. As personal experience plays an important role in Jamaica Kincaid's writing, the reader is presented with "modes of subjectivity" (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.124) that question the colonial history narrated by European or U.S. textbooks.

Throughout the three chapters of this thesis, it will be possible to have a broader understanding of the main elements used by Kincaid to constitute her narrators' and characters' identities. As suggested by the organization of the chapters, each of them will focus in one major aspect that can be easily grasped from Jamaica Kincaid's body of work, and the theoretical framework in each chapter will help guide the analysis in the search for evidence of those traces of identity.

## 1 HYBRIDITY AND LANGUAGE: DENOUNCING COLONIALITY THROUGH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

*“My feet are (so to speak) in two worlds.”*

Jamaica Kincaid<sup>2</sup>

*“I am in a state of constant discomfort and I like this state so much I would like to share it.”*

Jamaica Kincaid<sup>3</sup>

Narratives under the umbrella term “postcolonial literature” have been developed since the first colonized nations achieved their independence, usually reflecting a male-centered view of the processes that culminated with and followed the creation of nation-states. However, it is from the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, once colonies in Central America and Africa gained their late independence, that marginalized groups – especially women and indigenous peoples, previously disregarded by critics in literature (BOEHMER, 2005, p.216) – have become more visible within the literary production labeled as “postcolonial”. As postcolonial writers usually discuss issues related to colonial practices and the process of independence, their narratives can be read as possible additions or revisions to what is known as History registered or produced by hegemonic countries. Themes such as racism, poverty, oppression and the legacy of colonialism are common in postcolonial literature, though they are not widely discussed in canonic narratives.

The Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid develops her narrators and main characters from the point of view of women who either live or lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean. In novels such as *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990), the author tells stories of girls who go through the process of leaving their home countries to live in the United States. In these narratives, the protagonists grow up in a colony and then are sent to a hegemonic country, experiencing a scenario completely different – economic, political, social, and so on – from the one they had been used to. In the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988), the reader is guided through contemporary Antigua by a bold narrator who denounces all the oppression experienced by the people who live on the islands. The individual voice, who speaks of collective problems

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<sup>2</sup> (KINCAID, 1999, p.123)

<sup>3</sup> (KINCAID, 1999, p.229)

experienced by Antiguans, does not spare the British colonizers, Antiguan authorities or tourists who visit the Caribbean without caring about the people who live there. In her fictional and non-fictional texts, Kincaid resorts to diverse strategies, some of which will be discussed in this thesis, to denounce the oppression, racism and inequality affecting the Caribbean in general and Antigua in particular. Kincaid, as suggested by Carole Boyce Davis, is “perhaps the most experimental writer in a new generation of writers” while unfolding her self through multiple avenues (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.8-9).

Homeland to the author, Antigua is commonly the setting to Kincaid’s narratives. The island – which paired with Barbuda forms a country – was first visited by the Europeans in 1493, when Christopher Columbus arrived and the region was under the Spanish domain. As in other parts of the Caribbean, the island was colonized by the British since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the history of systematic oppression inflicted by the English people began. Extraction of natural resources, the damaging plantation system and slavery were among the most common colonial practices in Antigua. After the extermination of native Caribbean peoples, who did not survive the slavery process and the diseases brought in the ships by the Europeans, African labor was imported in order to continue the exploration of the lands.

Considering that the independence of Antigua and Barbuda was officially granted only in 1981, Jamaica Kincaid – born in 1949 – was able to experience the effects of British ruling over the island while she was growing up until she moved to the USA at 16 years old to work as an *au pair*. Her writing, including her novels, essays and short stories, constantly addresses issues related to colonial practices and their perpetuation even after the official independence from England. In addition, Kincaid’s position as a migrant writer enables her to see Antigua from a different perspective, one of a local who was able to build a life outside the island and live in a hegemonic country such as the United States since she was 16 years old. Living in the USA has probably changed Kincaid’s way to face Antigua and contributed to foreground the distance she puts between herself and her home country, both in her narratives and interviews. As pointed by Carole Boyce Davis, “Jamaica Kincaid never idealizes or accepts idyllic Caribbean narratives uncritically” (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.12).

According to the scholar, Kincaid’s works are inscribed with the “rejection and hard critique of an insider/outsider” (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.12), as shown in *A Small Place* (1988), for instance. This perspective of an insider/ outsider is a product of her life experience in Antigua and in the USA. Jamaica Kincaid is fully aware of the advantages of living in the United States, but she does not idealize her adopted country either, as she knows that the political and economic power of the USA contributes to the oppression of peoples in the

Caribbean and other parts of the world. In her interview to Moira Ferguson, for instance, the interviewer asks Kincaid if she sees herself as an exile in the USA. The Antiguan author says that yes, she feels like an exile, but Americans are expatriates too, as “They do these horrible things to other people so [they] can live” (FERGUSON, 1994, p.186).

In the article Jamaica Kincaid, Caribbean Space and Living Dislocations (2018), Boyce Davis discusses the migration issue for Caribbean subjects as Jamaica Kincaid. The Trinidadian professor states that on the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, migration seemed to be a consistent pathway for young Caribbean people who sought a more advanced life experience once the end of colonialism and the development of new nations in the region took place (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.10). Boyce Davis briefly describes the issue of migration in the Caribbean as follows:

Three-to-four hundred years of slavery and extractive colonialism left the Caribbean with little in terms of institutions, infrastructure and resources, except with the open possibility of migration to Europe for some, to North America for others, as one way of accessing education or getting back some of those economic resources. But we also know that those migrations, in either context, did not necessarily produce uniformly the promises of “a better life” or the full belonging that was often assumed on departure. (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.10)

As a migrant Caribbean subject, Kincaid was susceptible to this uncertain possibility of leading a better life outside the colony. Nowadays, of course, as the writer has worldwide recognition and enjoys a comfortable life due to her successful career, her position as a migrant or diasporic subject is not the same as when she was a teenage girl going to the USA to work as an *au pair*.

It is possible to relate Jamaica Kincaid to what Elleke Boehmer has described as “the generic postcolonial writer” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

[...] more likely to be a cultural traveller, or an ‘extra-territorial’, than a national. Ex-colonial by birth, ‘Third World’ in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, she or he works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national, ethnic, or regional background. (BOEHMER, 2005, p. 227)

Even though Kincaid has started writing in the 1980s and was born when Antigua was still a British colony, her position as someone who writes from a hegemonic country about an underdeveloped region brings to mind Boehmer’s description. Through sharp criticism regarding colonial practices and all kinds of oppression imposed to Antigua, the Caribbean writer denounces – in English and from the United States – the problems caused and left in Antigua by the former colonizers of the island.

To complement Boehmer's (2005) thoughts on the migrant writer, a concept that underscores the hybrid aspect in diasporic subjects due to their experience in multiple places can be retrieved from reflections by other scholars. In *Diasporas*, a chapter from *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford describes homeland as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity (CLIFFORD, 1997, p.256), and explains in a note that the term "contrapuntal" has been used by Edward Said to mention a positive aspect of exile. For Said, exile provides the subject with a plurality of vision that would not be achieved by someone who has lived in only one place or been in touch with one culture (apud CLIFFORD, 1997, p.365). Edward Said states that in this plurality, "both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (apud CLIFFORD, 1997, p.365). Besides this contrapuntal perspective, it is possible to notice that living in the USA was probably a catalyzer in her career: it was in the United States that the Antiguan writer met William Shawn, who employed her at *The New Yorker*, a magazine in which, from 1976 to 1996, Kincaid was able to establish her career as a writer.

Jamaica Kincaid makes use of her position as a migrant writer living in the USA to stress the influence of colonization in the life of Antiguans – and Caribbeans in general. In *My Garden (book):* (1999), Kincaid's narrator, whose life details are very similar to the author, explains that her present position as a writer living in Vermont made her go from the conquered class to the conquering one (KINCAID, 1999, p.123), indicating that the narrator understands that she is privileged in relation to other Antiguans who did not have the same opportunities. In a radio interview for the Kojo Nnamdi Show, in 2013, Kincaid answers a question about her name – her birth name is Elaine Potter Richardson – and she is asked about the name she adopted to publish her writings:

Now, the name itself, which will be the other part of your question, even if you haven't asked it, is why Jamaica and why Kincaid. I wanted something that was from that part of the world that I was from, and I wanted something that was from the other part of the world that I come from, something Scottish or English sounding. (KINCAID, 2013)<sup>4</sup>

By adopting a first name that addresses the Caribbean and a last name that calls to mind British colonization, Kincaid is able to merge the major influences in her identity. As she wrote in *My Garden (book):* (1999), "this naming of things is so crucial to possession" (KINCAID, 1999, p.122), Therefore, Kincaid's strategy highlights the hybrid aspect of her

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from radio interview, available in the references in the end of this thesis.



identity, which is showcased in her pen name. The writer is not only aware of the hybrid aspects of her identity but also willing to stress them whenever possible.

Besides addressing hybridity in interviews, the author herself has commented several times that, even though her works contain autobiographical elements, they are not to be read as autobiographies, but rather having features in common with her own life. In an interview to Shanda Deziel, Jamaica Kincaid clarifies that she does not write about her own life story, but she does use it to write multiple stories in her texts. Referring to *Mr. Potter* (2002), one of her novels, she stresses that:

I'm the writer writing about Mr. Potter, but in the book I'm not necessarily the narrator. The narrator is Mr. Potter's daughter. In real life I am Mr. Potter's real-life daughter. You follow. . . . It uses my biography but it's not about me and it uses his biography but it's not about him. If I had wanted it to be about he and I, I wouldn't have called it a novel. (DEZIEL, 2002 apud NASTA, 2009, p. 75)

Once Kincaid emphasizes that she calls a text such as *Mr. Potter* (2002) a novel, she is underscoring the fact that she uses details from her own life to write fiction. Therefore, when reading Kincaid's novels and short stories, one should not take them as autobiographies, even though the coincidences found among them signal the complex interweaving of fact and fiction. Critic Susheila Nasta elaborates on the idea of "serial autobiography" presented by Gilmore and compares Kincaid's works to a family album:

[...] the multiple self-inventions and family portraits she has created can most usefully be seen as a dynamic, performative, and cross-genre literary project, which resists closure and the need to present discrete portraits of a life linked to verisimilitude, or what we might call authentic autobiographical truths. (NASTA, 2009, p.65)

The connection between Kincaid's life story and the "family portraits" (NASTA, 2009, p.65) she creates highlight the hybrid aspect of her identity – not only her identity as a migrant writer but also as a Caribbean woman who lived in a British colony prior to moving to the United States – and the hybrid aspect of her writing, which interweaves fact and fiction.

As this research is dealing with the use of autobiographical details in fiction, such as Kincaid's novels, short stories and non-fiction, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's discussion on what is autobiographical truth becomes relevant to the matter<sup>5</sup>. In *Reading Autobiography* (2010), the scholars propose what they call a fundamental question when it comes to life narratives: what is the truth status of autobiographical disclosure? (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.15). Other questions unfold from this one, such as how do we know if what is told by

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<sup>5</sup> As the focus of this thesis is not the discussion of the concept of autobiographical truth, it was briefly addressed in order to clarify our perspective on the matter when approaching Kincaid's works.

a narrator is the truth or a lie, or even if this acknowledgment actually makes a difference (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.15). It is what the authors state right after proposing those questions that interests us when reading Jamaica Kincaid's works:

Thus, when one is both the narrator and the protagonist of the narrative, as in life writing, the truth of the narrative becomes undecidable; it can be neither fully verified nor discredited. We need, then, to adjust our expectations of the truth told in self-referential writing.

Of course, autobiographical claims such as date of birth can be verified or discounted by recourse to documentation or fact outside the text. But autobiographical truth is a different matter. (...) Thus autobiographical truth resides in the intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life. (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.15-16)

This conceptualization of autobiographical truth as described by Smith and Watson (2010) is what seems to serve as background to the discussions by Susheila Nasta (2009) and Leigh Gilmore (2001) previously mentioned. Both the idea of a "serial autobiography" which does not need confirmation in Kincaid's life and the comparison of the author's works to "family portraits" articulate with the exchange between narrator/protagonist and their reader pointed out by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010). As the reader learns about the hybrid aspects of the characters/narrators through these coincidences between Kincaid's life and her narratives, the idea of autobiographical truth is essential to understand how hybridity is expressed in the author's works. This matter will be better explored in the third chapter of this thesis, in which the discussion focuses on the autobiographical aspect of Kincaid's works.

In "Beyond" Gender: The New Geography of Identity and the Future of Feminist Criticism, the first chapter of *Mappings* (1998), Susan Stanford Friedman discusses the complex relations between identity and gender. The scholar describes six different discourses of positional identity, referring to the sixth one as the discourse of hybridity, which "has emerged most directly out of ethnic, postcolonial, and diasporic studies" (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.24). Friedman explains that hybridity, as a discourse of identity, relies on movement through space, both materially and figuratively, which materializes a movement through different cultures (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.24). On the other hand, hybridity might also configure identity "as the superposition of different cultures in a single space often imagined as a borderland" (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.24), being the borderland a site of blending and clashing of cultures.

Friedman's explanation on hybridity, then, elicits the heterogeneous aspect of identity, which cannot be seen as pure or authentic. The scholar also highlights that the processes of hybridization can occur by both positive and negative means, as "such grafting often takes the

form of painful splitting, divided loyalties, or disorienting displacements”, whereas “sometimes it leads to or manifests as regenerative growth and creativity” (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.24). However, it is possible to see both sides of hybridity, retrieving what has been discussed about the contrapuntal aspect of it, as Said has stated (apud CLIFFORD, 1997, p.365). Jamaica Kincaid has experienced, throughout her life, multiple forms of hybridity: the clash between colonizer and colonized, the new life in a hegemonic country and her visits to Antigua after a long time away. They were not negative altogether, considering that living in the USA provided her with the opportunity to succeed as a writer.

In addition, according to the dictionary *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, hybridity “commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (ASHCROFT et al, 1998, p.118). The definition of the concept in this dictionary also mentions what Homi Bhabha calls the “third space of enunciation” (ASHCROFT et al, 1998, p.118), a contradictory and ambivalent space formed by systems of cultures in constant contact. It is in this *third space* where cultural identity emerges, making it impossible to think of a hierarchy of cultures based on the idea of purity. One of the premises in imposing the identity of the colonizer over the colonized is that they are pure or original, but once their cultures are in contact, this premise is contradicted. Despite the difference in power, the contact affects both cultures – colonized and colonizer –inflicting changes to both of them.

In *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary*, a more recent collection of concepts and their definitions edited by Pramod K. Nayar, the scholar points out the irony of hybridity within the uneven relations of power between colonizer and colonized:

Within postcolonial studies, ironically, colonialism itself is seen as enabling the creation of hybrid cultures where the colonized subject adopts European ways of speaking (i.e., adopts the colonial master’s language), dressing and eventually thinking as well. Homi Bhabha sees hybridity as an empowering condition where both cultural purity and cultural diversity are rejected. (NAYAR, 2015, p.92)

Nayar highlights that, to Bhabha, the colonized may resist the imposition of a unitary identity through hybridity. The rejection of an alleged cultural purity allows the colonized to play an active role in the third space, as the colonizer’s identity – seen as pure or original – will also be influenced by the contact between the two. This way, it is not possible to consider that only the colonized culture will be affected by the imposition of the colonizer culture. This issue is also addressed by Ashcroft et al (1998), who claim that adopting subversive counter-discursive practices might collaborate with an active decolonizing project. It is essential to notice that both Ashcroft et al (1998) and Nayar (2015) recognize that the cultures in contact

– colonizer and colonized – are in different positions regarding power, meaning that the colonizing culture is privileged in the processes of cultural assimilation, even if still subject to influence from other cultures. In other words, power plays a crucial role in hybridity processes.

Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan takes into account the uneven relationship of power in his discussion of hybridity. In *Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity*, a chapter in *Diasporic Mediations* (1996), the Indian scholar discusses how identity and hybridity are linked within the field of postcolonial studies. He contrasts two major versions of hybridity – metropolitan and “postcolonial” – that carry important differences between them:

The crucial difference that one discerns between metropolitan versions of hybridity and "postcolonial" versions is that, whereas the former are characterized by an intransitive and immanent sense of *jouissance*, the latter are expressions of extreme pain and agonizing dislocations. (RADHAKRISHNAN, 1996, p.159)

As pointed out by Radhakrishnan, the motivation and implications of hybridity might be divided between metropolitan and “postcolonial”, according to how hybridity is manifested in the person’s identity. While an individual might be able to claim metropolitan hybridity “as a comfortably given state of being”, postcolonial hybridity is seen as “an excruciating act of self-production by and through multiple traces” (RADHAKRISHNAN, 1996, p.159). Therefore, metropolitan hybridity is a privilege for those who are able to travel back and forth and claim themselves as hybrid, while postcolonial hybridity is a product of a forced contact between colonizers and colonized, in an unbalanced third space. Metropolitan hybridity would be accessible to those who can move indistinctively and acquire, voluntarily, new characteristics that will comfortably turn to be part of the person’s identity. However, this discussion about willingness is not included in Radhakrishnan’s description of what he calls “postcolonial” hybridity. It seems that from this perspective, Kincaid’s hybridity is both metropolitan and postcolonial. Her career as a writer living in the USA has provided her with agency, mobility and freedom.

It is important to mention that Radhakrishnan uses quotation marks when mentioning “postcolonial” because of his discussion on the previous pages of the chapter regarding the idea of overcoming or going beyond implied by the prefix “post-”. The Indian scholar mentions Ella Shohat’s considerations on the issue, as she problematizes the use of “post-” when talking about coloniality. The quotation used by Radhakrishnan (1996) can be found in the chapter Notes on the “Post-colonial”, by Shohat (2000), first published in 1992:

Echoing *postmodernity*, *postcoloniality* marks a contemporary state, situation, condition, or epoch. The prefix post-, then, aligns postcolonialism with a series of other posts — *poststructuralism*, *postmodernism*, *post-Marxism*, *postfeminism*, *postdeconstructionism* — all sharing the notion of a movement beyond. Yet, while these posts refer largely to the supersession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic, and political theories, the postcolonial implies both going beyond anticolonial nationalist theory and a movement beyond a specific point in history, that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles. (SHOHAT, 2000, p.128, emphasis by the author)

Terms that have been often used more recently are “decolonial” and “coloniality”, for instance, as proposed by scholars such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) and Aníbal Quijano (2007), but “postcolonial” is used in this thesis when quoting or paraphrasing scholars who have used it prior to what Maldonado-Torres calls the “decolonial turn” (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2016, p.2). Ella Shohat’s thoughts can be articulated with the distinction between colonialism and coloniality proposed by Quijano (2007) and Maldonado-Torres (2016), as both consider that those terms imply a limitation of time frame which could undermine the discussions about the maintenance of a hegemonic logic of oppression after the official independence of former colonies. The term “postcolonial”, when mentioned in this research, should be understood according to Ashcroft et al’s definition in *The Empire Writes Back*: “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” (ASHCROFT et al, 1989, p.2).

Processes that lead to hybridization “may take many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc.” (ASHCROFT et al, 1998, p.118). The contact between two different cultures will make any aspect of it subject to changes, appropriation, resignification, and so on. Among other characteristics of hybridity that surface in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, language is a recurring issue in her novels, essays and short stories. Keeping in mind that Kincaid was educated in the Imperial system, which meant learning the English language since birth, we may go back to Elleke Boehmer’s notes on the postcolonial writer once again:

What began in postcolonial writing as the creolization of the English language has become a process of mass literary transplantation, disaggregation, and cross-fertilization, a process that is changing the nature of what was once called English literature – or, more accurately, literature in English – at its very heart. (BOEHMER, 2005, p.226).

Boehmer points out that postcolonial writers have presented different versions of English in their writings as a sign of “cross-fertilization”, leading to what is called nowadays “literature in English”. It is through the English language that postcolonial writers are able to reach a bigger audience and talk about their lives, cultures, oppression and resistance. Writing in a different language could limit their reach and slow their entrance into the literary scene.

However, this does not mean that postcolonial writers will necessarily abide by formal English, as Boehmer states that the changes in literature in English started as the creolization of the language.

As also highlighted by Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), postcolonial literature has come a long way until reaching the stage it is nowadays, known as literature produced by writers who lived in former colonies and discuss issues related to colonization and independence. What Ashcroft et al (1989) do is divide the first moments of postcolonial literature between what was produced by representatives of the Empire and what was written by local people under the supervision of the Empire. It is only after the development of independent forms of literature that the postcolonial writer is able to write narratives that do not undergo the inspection of the colonizers:

The institution of 'Literature' in the colony is under the direct control of the imperial ruling class who alone license the acceptable form and permit the publication and distribution of the resulting work. So, texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective. The development of independent literatures depended upon the abrogation of this constraining power and the appropriation of language and writing for new and distinctive usages. (ASHCROFT et al, 1989, p.6)

The abrogation mentioned in the introduction of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) is not the same as the idea related to language described by the same authors in their dictionary. Abrogation, a concept explained in *Key concepts in post-colonial studies* (1998) by Ashcroft et al, refers to "the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard' English" (ASHCROFT et al, 1998, p. 7).

In Jamaica Kincaid's case, English was the official language of Antigua when she was born, but alongside with it there was the local *patois* with its vital and dynamic appropriations. In *My Brother* (1997), for instance, when the narrator describes her brother's speech while talking to her, she chooses a literal transcription of the way he pronounces words, underscoring the differences between Antiguan English and British English. In one passage, the narrator paraphrases her brother and then repeats his words in a parenthesis: "Me no get dat chupidness, man" (KINCAID, 1997, p.8). Abrogation has been used as a technique by postcolonial writers to impact readers through the differences between formal English as we are used to and the English (or other languages) spoken by the characters in their stories. Sometimes, in texts that deal with the insertion of words from different languages (indigenous languages, for instance), it might be a way to cause discomfort in the reader, as not understanding an unknown word might turn the reading more difficult.

The use of the English language as a means to break through the bindings of colonization is also addressed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). In the introduction of the book, the authors mention the teaching of English as a way to spread the colonial practices, “both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda, for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values”, in opposition to terms such as “savagery”, “native”, “primitive” assigned to the natives (ASHCROFT et al, 1989, p. 3). The use of the English language has served as a tool to set the colonized under the ideology and rules of the British Empire:

British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of the native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education. (VISWANATHAN, 1987, apud ASHCROFT et al, 1989, p. 3)

This colonial practice of using literature in English to educate the colonized is widely mentioned in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, when characters and narrators denounce how education was used by the British to colonize Caribbean peoples. The chapter Columbus in Chains from *Annie John* (1985) is a clear example of the way Antiguan education was designed to impose British ideology. Annie John, the girl who narrates the story, describes her classes and shows that, despite being far away from Europe, children were taught about European history in the first place. Celebrating the dead Queen Victoria’s birthday as a holiday, for instance, was among the habits imposed by the British on the Caribbean people they had colonized. Christopher Columbus, who first reached the Caribbean from Europe, was depicted in history books as a national hero, someone who had discovered the islands where the children lived. The importance given to Columbus by the English was such that when Annie John wrote “the great man can no longer get up and go” under a picture of him chained in the basement of a ship, her British teacher was extremely offended by the act (KINCAID, 1985, p.78). As a punishment, Annie John was made to copy Books I and II of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

In *Lucy* (1990), Kincaid’s second novel, the main character has a moment of extreme anger when visiting a field of daffodils during spring in the United States. Lucy, who moved to the USA at an early age to work as an *au pair* and help provide for the family, explains that seeing the flowers for the first time reminded her of how she was made to memorize the poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, also known as “Daffodils”, by the English poet William Wordsworth, and recite it to an audience almost ten years before. The girl, who was a pupil at an Antiguan school named after Queen Victoria, was angry because the poem did not mean a

thing for her at the time – daffodils are not native to the Caribbean; therefore, the girl did not relate to the poem as the flowers were unknown to her. The sight of daffodils in the American spring triggered her memories of this episode, making her feel the confusion and anger she had felt at 10 years old all over again. It is relevant to mention that Kincaid herself is not an advocate against English literature, as she explains in *On Gardening*, an interview to Kathleen M. Balutansky. The Antiguan author recognizes the importance of European writers from the past, including the ones that are considered canonic, the “male, and white, and dead!” (BALUTANSKY, 2002, p.799), especially as she believes that reading Shakespeare or Chaucer is more important than reading her writing, because to understand her works, one must have read those authors as background. However, she points out that her criticism as she mentions daffodils, Wordsworth and other classics is towards how the use of English literature “was given to people like [them, the Caribbean colonized] as part of power” (BALUTANSKY, 2002, p.799).

Nonetheless, Kincaid is acutely aware that being deprived of one’s own language and having to use the language of the colonizer is yet another reminder of the power of colonization. In *A Small Place*, a non-fictional text published in 1988, the narrator stresses how complicated it is for her to use the English language in order to denounce what was done by the English colonizers:

For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me. (KINCAID, 1988, p.31-32)

The discomfort expressed by the narrator in using a form of communication that was not originally from the islands shows how hybridity – “postcolonial” hybridity, as mentioned by Radhakrishnan (1996) – forces a reconstruction of the Caribbean subject’s identity through language. She describes the act of using English to describe English crimes and criminals as absurd since that language is the only tool she and other colonized people have to void their grievances. This discourse brings to mind Audre Lorde’s *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (2007), as Kincaid’s narrator claims that the English language could not express properly the crimes committed by the British Empire in the Caribbean. According to the narrator in *A Small Place* (1988), having to speak English is the hardest part of the legacy left by the colonizers:



But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. (KINCAID, 1988, p.31)

This way, not having a proper native language that could identify her people as Caribbean is a great wound in the history of the islands. It forces the different Caribbean peoples who were colonized by the British Empire to conform to a language that was not native to them, even if they want to denounce their colonizers. However, it is also through writing in English and retelling history from a different perspective that the author appropriates the language of the colonizer “for new and distinctive usages” (ASHCROFT et al, 1989, p. 6). This way, the use of the English language against the British hegemony is an important means of decolonization and empowerment of the colonized people, as a “strategy of resistance” (HARRIS, 2013, p. 42). In practice, what the narrator does is exactly using the master’s tools – the English language – to denounce the oppression imposed by the British to the Caribbean people, what Carole Boyce Davis would call a “creative use of anger” (BOYCE DAVIS, 2018, p.12). The narrator in *A Small Place* (1988) uses the imperial language to criticize imperial practices, including the imposition of a language, much in the same fashion as Caliban curses at Prospero in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

You taught me language; and my profit on’t  
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language! (SHAKESPEARE, 2017, p.25)

*A Small Place* (1988) is a good example of how postcolonial writers may use the English language as a means to publish their works and talk about the colonial practices from a different perspective. Other works by Jamaica Kincaid present the use of the English language related to some degree of autonomy. In *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996), the protagonist Xuela learns to read and write in English in school, which makes her realize that new opportunities appear before her, besides understanding the hierarchy imposed by the colonizers regarding the English language and the local French *patois*. In *Mr. Potter* (2002), a detail about her father’s life is repeated throughout the whole novel: he had never learned to read and write, while his daughter Elaine did. It indicates that Mr. Potter had been in a subaltern position for his whole life, while his Elaine had some degree of autonomy provided by literacy.

The non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988) was written as if it were a travel guide, a genre which implies that positive aspects of a city or country will be presented, like the main touristic attractions, good restaurants and shops. However, these expectations are tossed away

right in the first pages, once the narrator opens the text by questioning the name of the airport on the island – named after the Prime Minister of the country at the time, V.C. Bird – as it shows the kind of things that are given attention to in present-day Antigua. The narrator points out that one would expect a politician to attribute his or her name to hospitals, schools and other buildings that serve directly the local population, rather than an airport that would be used mostly by foreign tourists. The narrator constantly stresses that she is describing Antigua from the perspective of a local while using the language of the people who once colonized the island. It is the English language that enables her to address the contemporary European tourist and denounce the oppression imposed by their British ancestors to Antigua:

The Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist, would see now. That Antigua no longer exists. That Antigua no longer exists partly for the usual reason, the passing of time, and partly because the bad-minded people who used to rule over it, the English, no longer do so. (KINCAID, 1988, p.23)

Throughout the 81 pages of *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator criticizes the legacy left by the British colonizers and the attitudes of the contemporary tourist who visits Antigua. The author does not tone down her criticism regarding colonial practices in Antigua and the influence of colonization in the history of the Caribbean peoples. It is the English language that enables the narrator to denounce crimes against Antiguan, such as in the following passage:

You murdered people. You imprisoned people. You robbed people. You opened your own banks and you put our money in them. The accounts were in your name. The banks were in your name. There must have been some good people among you, but they stayed home. And that is the point. That is why they are good. They stayed home. (KINCAID, 1988, p. 35)

It is possible to notice that the narrator does not spare words – English words – to criticize and denounce the practices used during the process of colonization of Antigua. She is straightforward and sharp in her criticism, using a simple language to guarantee her message will be noted by her audience. The simple language also contributes to show how simple is the point she is making: colonization is a crime and Antiguan were victimized by the British Empire.

In *My Garden (book)*: (1999), Jamaica Kincaid writes about gardening and the West Indies from the perspective of someone who has lived her childhood and part of her adolescence in colonized Antigua but now enjoys a comfortable life in the USA and has a successful career as a writer. Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, in the article *Death and the Diaspora Writer: Hybridity and Mourning in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid* (2002), claims that Kincaid

“refers to the garden as a site where history and conquest meet in naming the exotic other” (SOTO-CRESPO, 2002, p.347).

In the end of the introduction in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), the narrator recalls the moment she realizes why she keeps shaping her gardens in asymmetrical, seemingly disorganized ways. After being asked repeatedly by the people who had worked in her gardens about the shapes of the flower beds, she concludes – to herself, not openly to the gardeners:

When it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it, I did not tell this to the gardeners who had asked me to explain the thing I was doing, or to explain what I was trying to do; I only marveled at the way the garden is for me an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings). (KINCAID, 1999, p.7-8)

In the essay *To Name Is To Possess*, the author discusses the importance of naming things – plants, peoples, countries – and how it allows the colonizer to control, possess, or appropriate whatever is being named. To illustrate her point, the narrator talks about the linguistic changes that followed the colonization of Mexico. As the collection of essays revolves around the theme of gardening, she uses the name of the flower known nowadays as dahlia as an example of the linguistic changes. The narrator in this essay explains that the Aztecs were living in the region of Mexico when the Spanish arrived and began colonizing the land, controlling and exterminating the locals. In the process, a lot changed, including the names of the plants. In order to describe the changes that happened to the name of the dahlia, she presents a hypothetical situation involving an Aztec person in a flower shop:

Certainly if after the conquest an Aztec had gone into a shop and said “It’s my husband’s birthday. I would like to give him some flowers. May I have a bunch of cocoxochitl, please?” no one would have been able to help her, because cocoxochitl was no longer the name of that flower. It had become the dahlia. (KINCAID, 1999, p.117-118)

The narrator clarifies that the dahlia, a native plant from Mexico and formerly known as *cocoxochitl*, was not a sensation in Central America, and was only cultivated for agricultural and medicinal uses. However, it was only after “it was removed from the place where it had always been, and transformed (hybridized), and renamed” that the “dahliamania” began (KINCAID, 1999, p.117). After it was named – and therefore possessed – and hybridized by the Europeans, the dahlia was used for gardening and landscaping purposes.

The narrator also mentions that plants from other parts of the world ruled by the British were brought to Antigua, showing the extent of the territories under Imperial rule.

It is worthy noticing that Kincaid refers to Hernando Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, as “the Spanish marauder” who invaded the country, a choice of words that signals how the narrator is naming history in order to grab hold of it: instead of praising Cortez for his deeds as history books do, Kincaid uses all kinds of words to call him a criminal for everything he has done for the Caribbean.

In the same essay, the connection between the stories of the plants and the history of the Caribbean peoples becomes clearer. The narrator compares the processes of renaming and hybridizing the plants to what had been done to the native people of the Caribbean: the attempt at erasing their history and replacing their tongues in order to fulfill the purposes of the colonization. She underscores that “it is not surprising that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names (Rodhesia to Zimbabwe, LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka)” (KINCAID, 1999, p.122). Although admitting that a name change will not undo what has been done, she sees the “impulse to reach back and reclaim a loss” as legitimate (KINCAID, 1999, p.122).

This particular discussion about name changing brings to mind Kincaid’s interview to Kojo Nnamdi, when she says that her pen name recalls both the Caribbean and Europe, the parts of the world where she is from (KINCAID, 2013). Once she changes her birth name – Elaine Potter Richardson – to Jamaica Kincaid, in 1973 (NASTA, 2009, p.64), she is not only liberating herself from her family ties in order to write about Antigua but also stressing her hybrid character.

Kincaid’s works, such as the essays in *My Garden (book)*: (1999) and *A Small Place* (1988), describe how fresh starts do not exist, especially for people from the West Indies, whose hybrid identities are so intertwined with the colonizers’. It is possible to see in Kincaid’s texts that a fresh start is denied to the people from the West Indies, especially because of “postcolonial” hybridity – the forced process described by Radhakrishnan (1996). Changing the name of a country, for instance, is an important step towards achieving independence, but it will not automatically provide it with a new history, dismissing what happened in the past five centuries or replacing colonial practices by equalitarian ones.

In *My Brother* (1997), Jamaica Kincaid’s *memoir* about her brother Devon, who died from complications of AIDS at the age of 33, hybridity also plays a prominent role. However, while the examples presented above from *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Garden (book)*: (1999), show hybrid aspects resulting from the contact between colonizer and colonized,

hybridity in *My Brother* (1997) is presented from a different perspective. In the *memoir*, the narrator, who also happens to be the main character, is a writer called Jamaica who moved to New York at a young age and had not spent much time with her family in Antigua for three decades – many coincidences with Kincaid’s life details – until her brother falls sick. The difference in the approach to hybridity in this work is that the *memoir* is narrated by someone who is getting to know Antigua again, due to the years she had been away from her homeland. This way, Jamaica’s impressions and memories of the island are filtered through her experience of living an independent life for 30 years in the United States, a period when she was able to build a family and a career for herself.

In Kincaid’s case, especially taking into account her works and interviews, it is possible to see that her diaspora experience does not evoke an ideology of return. As discussed by Avtar Brah in *Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities*, the eighth chapter in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), “not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’” (BRAH, 1996, p.177), as a diasporic subject does not necessarily experience a homing desire. The Indian scholar states that the homing desire – a wish to return to a place of origin – must not be mistaken for the desire for a ‘homeland’ (BRAH, 1996, p.177):

The *concept* of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins.*

The problematic of ‘home’ and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition, but how, when, and in what form questions surface, or how they are addressed, is specific to the history of a particular diaspora. Not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’. For some, such as the South Asian groups in Trinidad, cultural identification with the Asian sub-continent might be by far the most important element. (BRAH, 1996, p.189, emphasis by the author)

It is clear in *My Brother* (1997), then, that Jamaica does not manifest the desire to be back in Antigua, as she identifies Vermont as her home, where she has built a life for herself. The diaspora experienced by Jamaica does not sustain an ideology of return, as she does not feel that she must go back to her place of origin.

According to Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, the *memoir* about Devon’s death is not only a way to remember the event and mourn the passing of her sibling but an analogy between his death and the decay of the Caribbean:

In *My Brother*, Kincaid analogizes AIDS, the multisymptom illness spreading throughout her brother’s body, with the spread of colonialism in the West Indies, an analogy she develops by suggesting that her brother’s subaltern body becomes bereft of life in postcolonial Antigua, just as the West Indies were depleted of their flora during colonization. (SOTO-CRESPO, 2002, p.343)

The *memoir*, besides being a way to understand her brother's life and passing, is also an attempt to map the Antigua that Jamaica is visiting and match her memories with the places she sees. However, as she had been away for so long, especially due to a distance she made sure to put between her life and family in the United States and her previous life and family in Antigua, the writer has changed so much that she does not feel that she belongs there anymore. At first, visiting her brother, for example, is nearly the same as visiting a stranger or a colleague. Afterwards, the narrator feels the trips she makes to visit her dying brother are a way to understand herself and come to terms with her family and her homeland:

I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself: I would write about him. I would write about his dying. When I was young, younger than I am now, I started to write about my own life and I came to see that this act saved my life. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 195-196)

For Jamaica, the writer/narrator, the *memoir* is not simply a record of what she had lived and was living at this point in her life, but a way to process everything that happened between her, her family and her place of birth. The narrator is aware that writing is a way she found to deal with her emotions towards her brother, her mother and Antigua, and she does not hide this from the reader.

Jamaica makes several trips in a short period of time to see her brother and take him drugs from the USA to help improve his health condition. Providing AZT, a cocktail of drugs that fights the symptoms of the disease, is essential for her brother to experience at least a temporary relief and live longer. The interactions between Jamaica and her brother during this period show that despite the fact that both were educated in Antigua and learned to speak English living in the same environment, her experience abroad has changed the way she speaks. At the same time, her brother, who has never left Antigua, speaks English the way Antiguanians do. This difference between the way they speak is highlighted in many passages throughout the *memoir*. In the beginning of the text, after encountering Devon for the first time in years and seeing him in the hospital bed, she remembers one of her few visits to Antigua, many years before. Jamaica recalls having counseled her brother to have safe sex and avoid being in contact with the HIV virus:

I told him to protect himself from the HIV virus and he laughed at me and said that he would never get such a stupid thing ("Me no get dat chupidness, man"). But I might have seemed like a ridiculous person to him. I had lived away from my home for so long that I no longer understood readily the kind of English he spoke and always had to have him repeat himself to me; and I no longer spoke the kind of English he spoke, and when I said anything to him, he would look at me and

sometimes just laugh at me outright. **You talk funny, he said.** (KINCAID, 1997, p.8, emphasis added)

Even though they are speaking the same language, Jamaica has changed the way she speaks English due to the decades she has lived in the United States. For Devon, her brother, speaking English like an American made her sound funny, as it was different from the way he and other Antiguan sounded. This shows that both brother and sister have hybrid identities, but in different ways: the two were born and raised in Antigua during a period when the country was still a British colony; therefore, their identities were affected by the colonial practices. However, only Jamaica's identity was influenced by decades of living abroad and having minimum contact with her homeland. Having lived completely different lives during the 30 years they had been apart made them sound different from one another.

In the *memoir*, the Antiguan writer also highlights how she speaks differently from her mother, who had been to the USA a few times to visit her daughter. Her mother, in contrast to Devon, tries to adequate her way of speaking when talking to Jamaica, and this is also noted by the narrator:

But many days later my mother said to me, He has gotten so black, the disease has made him so black (she said this to me in this kind of English, she makes an effort to speak to me in the kind of English that I now immediately understand). (KINCAID, 1997, p.9)

By stating that her mother “makes an effort” to adequate her speech to hers, the narrator observes that the difference in the way they speak English is not a small one. In addition to the writer's emotional issues with her mother, which permeate the entire narrative, language, then, seems to be another obstacle between them. Once again, the difference in the way they speak is a product of different experiences involving hybridity: while one of them was able to live a comfortable life in a hegemonic country, the other one has always lived in the former colony and has been affected by the legacy of the Empire.

The interaction between Jamaica and another character suggests that this adjustment of their discourse might be linked to the kind of education each of them had access to. Dr. Ramsey, the Antiguan doctor who was called by Jamaica to take care of her brother at the hospital in Antigua, “was considered the leading authority in Antigua in regard to” AIDS (KINCAID, 1997, p.30-31). Therefore, it is possible to imply that he has had access to education, either on the island or abroad. Jamaica notices that Dr. Ramsey, despite being a figure of authority, does not behave as other authorities in Antigua:

He agreed to meet me and at the time he said he would arrive, he arrived. I only mention this because in Antigua people never arrive when they say they will; they

never do what they say they will do. He was something I had long ago thought impossible to find in an Antiguan with authority: he was kind, he was loving toward people who needed him, people who were less powerful than he; he was respectful. (KINCAID, 1997, p.32)

Dr. Ramsey's intention to adequate his discourse to his audience becomes even clearer when he interacts with Devon. The doctor seems to ensure his discourse is adequate to his audience as he acts and speaks according to the person to whom he is talking. Before examining Jamaica's brother, Dr. Ramsey talked to the patient about sports and music as if they were old friends. After checking Devon with bare hands, the doctor spoke to him in the kind of English Antiguan are used to speak, leaving Jamaica confused:

After he was done, he sat and talked to my brother some more; he spoke to him in broken English; I could not understand what they were saying, they spoke very fast, it was the most animated I had seen my brother since I first saw him lying there dying. (KINCAID, 1997, p.33)

Once again, the narrator stresses the difference she notices between the kind of English spoken by Antiguan and the kind of English she has become used to speaking after living in the United States for decades. The fact that she cannot understand what Dr. Ramsey and her brother say shows how hybridity has affected her capacity to understand those who are allegedly her equals. After 30 years of living in the United States, it is her experience in the North that prevails over her childhood in Antigua, making her feel dislocated when listening to the people around her speak. She labels Dr. Ramsey's speech as "broken English" when he is speaking to Devon, adopting a hegemonic posture towards his type of discourse and failing to see it as an act of translation.

It is possible to see Dr. Ramsey's act of changing accent and register according to the person he addresses as a sort of "translation", in which he adapts his speech in order to speak the same language as his interlocutor. As Claudia Lima Costa and Sonia Alvarez (2013) argue, "if the act of speaking already means being engaged in translation, and if translation is a process in which the self opens up to the other, we might say that it always implies a dislocation of the self" (COSTA & ALVAREZ, 2013, p.579)<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, one can observe that Dr. Ramsey is very comfortable when interacting with either a local who has never left Antigua, as Devon, or someone whose life experience abroad has provided her with other hybrid aspects, as Jamaica.

Hybridity, as described in dictionaries of concepts such as *Key concepts in post-colonial studies* (1998) and *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* (2015), is the process of

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<sup>6</sup> My translation. In the original: "Se o ato de falar significa estar já engajada em tradução, e se a tradução é um processo onde o eu se abre para o outro, podemos dizer que sempre implica um deslocamento do eu".



creating new forms of cultures and identities through the contact in the third space of enunciation. In postcolonial theory, it is the contact between colonizer and colonized that triggers changes in their identities, mediated by the relations of power held between them. In this third space, all aspects related to culture are subject to hybridization, including political, linguistic and racial ones, and given that language is the main way to be in contact with the other, it is not difficult to spot aspects of hybridity in it.

As highlighted by Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), language is an essential tool to colonize a nation, and it will inevitably undergo changes once it starts being used by the people who are forced to do so. It is not up to the colonizer to decide whether the changes will be allowed to happen or not, even though the tools to control the production of knowledge might slow the processes of hybridization. As pointed by Aníbal Quijano, during the period of imposition of European colonialism, “the repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives” (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169), shaping an expropriation of the colonized’s prior knowledge.

In her works, Jamaica Kincaid uses the English language to talk about Antigua, the effects of coloniality and personal stories of local people. Moreover, the writer also discusses the use of the English language itself, as it was imposed on many Caribbean locals once England started colonizing the islands. Kincaid mentions the education in English, showing how British culture was forced on Antiguan through the language taught by the Empire.

The narratives written by Jamaica Kincaid feature characters and themes that make traces of hybridity stand out. Issues regarding the contact between colonizer and colonized, as well as diverse aspects of contemporary diasporas, permeate her works, whether through her narrators or main characters. The “language of the criminal” (KINCAID, 1988, p.31), as the narrator in *A Small Place* (1988) calls English, is one of the recurring traces of hybridity found in Kincaid’s narratives.

The use of English in education and literature, for instance, is a theme in novels like *Lucy* (1990) and *Annie John* (1985). Meanwhile, the identification of the English language as a means of controlling Caribbean people is found in the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988) and in the essays featured in *My Garden (book):* (1999). As pointed out by Ashcroft et al (1989), denouncing the colonizer through the colonizer’s language shows an appropriation of the English language that contributes to the resistance against colonial practices.

Furthermore, the clash between the way characters speak to each other in *My Brother* (1997) shows how hybridity is not only a collective phenomenon but also an individual one. Once Jamaica lives abroad for such a long time, she cannot help but absorb American culture,

including the way she speaks English. The narrator herself feels she does not belong on the island anymore, as she recognizes her family and house in the United States as her actual home.

In conclusion, hybridity is a common theme in Jamaica Kincaid's literary works, especially through language, because her characters show traces of what Radhakrishnan calls "postcolonial" hybridity (RADHAKRISHNAN, 1996). Through the narrators' comments denouncing colonial practices, it is possible to notice that Kincaid's characters were forced into reconstructing their subjectivities according to the contact they have had with hegemonic cultures. The language Antiguans use, which is not original from the Caribbean, is filtered by the aspects of their identities that were not erased by the colonizers. This way, Antiguans speak English differently from British or Americans, despite the attempt to impose European customs upon them during the period the island was still a colony.

## 2 NARRATIVES FROM ANTIGUA: REVISING HISTORY THROUGH JAMAICA KINCAID'S LITERARY PRODUCTION

*I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself: I would write about him.*  
 Jamaica Kincaid<sup>7</sup>

The epigraph above is one of the many quotations in Jamaica Kincaid's works that led to the reflection proposed in this chapter. Her narratives are permeated by this idea of writing as a means to save oneself, to come to terms, to get to know the other and the self. A portion of this comes from her interest in writing about her homeland from the perspective of someone who was able to leave for some time and then return – temporarily or permanently – as the author herself has done throughout her life. In Kincaid's case, she has spent over twenty years without visiting her family in Antigua, and her visits became more frequent once her brother was ill.

In *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator describes history in Antigua from the point of view of a local, someone who has lived on the island throughout the final decades of colonialism and the period following the independence from England. Her criticism towards colonial practices shows a perspective of the years of oppression that is not commonly found in history books produced in and by hegemonic nations. The sharp tone used to describe Antigua and its governing officials shows that the history of the island is not one of economic growth and independent administration. On the contrary, the Caribbean country was left with a legacy of underdevelopment after centuries of exploitation and oppression.

In *My Brother* (1997), the narrator, who is named Jamaica, explains that for her, writing is an act of saving herself, even though the stories she tells on the *memoir* revolve mainly around her brother Devon and her mother, who live in Antigua. Her conclusion on the *memoir* is that she needs to write about her brother's death to know him better and understand their relationship throughout the decades they had been away from each other. Recollecting Devon's story is, then, a way to understand the history of her family and her homeland, a personal register that cannot be found in official records.

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<sup>7</sup> (KINCAID, 1997, p.195-196)

As Jamaica Kincaid's narratives have a strong autobiographical slant, they do not necessarily abide by the official records in history books. Alternatively, they provide the reader with different perspectives of the processes of colonization and independence of the homeland of the author, used as scenario to most of her stories. These parallel versions of history are discussed by scholars as Walter Mignolo (2005), Edouard Glissant (1999) and Linda Hutcheon (1988), among others, whose works serve as key to read Kincaid's writings as new possibilities to understand life in Antigua and other parts of the Caribbean.

The theme of this chapter evokes Edouard Glissant's reflection on the history of the Caribbean. Although Glissant was born in the Francophone Caribbean, his observations apply to the Anglophone Caribbean as well. The Martinican scholar describes the slave trade as the brutal dislocation that began a history characterized by ruptures in the Caribbean (GLISSANT, 1999, p.61). He compares the way history was produced in Europe and in the Caribbean, stating that the former had its history produced gradually and continuously, whereas the latter was crafted "in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces" (GLISSANT, 1999, p.62). Glissant, then, calls this dislocation in the Caribbean a "nonhistory", which affects the collective memory of the native people by erasing it. What Glissant means is that colonization in the Caribbean resulted in the erasure of the history prior to the arrival of the Europeans in order to give room to versions imposed by the colonizers.

The relation between Caribbean history and ruptures is also discussed by Stuart Hall. In *Thinking the Diaspora: Home-thoughts from Abroad* (1999), the scholar associates these ruptures to the violence imposed by the colonizers upon the many regions in the Caribbean:

Far from being continuous with our pasts, our relation to that history is marked by the most horrendous, violent, abrupt, ruptural breaks. (...) What we now call the Caribbean was reborn in and through violence. The pathway to our modernity is marked out by conquest, expropriation, genocide, slavery, the plantation system and the long tutelage of colonial dependency. (HALL, 1999, p.5)

Both Glissant (1999) and Hall (1999) agree on the matter that in the last five centuries, the Caribbean was created, shaped, forged in violence and colonial oppression. Caribbean history, then, is permeated by ruptures, whether physical, epistemic, economic, ideologic, and so on. As Glissant (1999) argued, what happened before the arrival of the colonizers has been erased by those dislocations and is considered "nonhistory".

This idea of nonhistory proposed by Edouard Glissant articulates with Walter Mignolo's discussion about history in Latin America. In the preface of *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), the Argentinean professor explains Eric Wolf's position about non-European

societies, presented in *Europe and the people without history* (2010), first published in 1982. Mignolo states that the title of Wolf's book is not a denial of history for certain people in the world. According to Mignolo, Wolf describes how, from Ancient Greece to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "every society that did not have alphabetic writing or wrote in a language other than the six imperial languages of modern Europe did not have History" (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xii). If they did have their own history but were considered not to have one, what were the implications of this to these societies? Mignolo argues that:

In this view, History is a privilege of European modernity and in order to have History you have to let yourself be colonized, which means allowing yourself, willingly or not, to be subsumed by a perspective of history, life, knowledge, economy, subjectivity, family, religion, etc. that is modeled on the history of modern Europe, and that has now been adopted, with little difference, as the official model of the US. (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xii)

It is possible to see, then, that this is a matter of epistemic power. Narratives of inferiority were imposed on the people who were considered to have no history prior to their colonization, as their existence did not conform to the model maintained and spread by hegemonic nations from Europe. However, as Mignolo points, the issue of history and the imposition of a new model is just a part of what the scholar describes as the foundation of modernity: "The 'discovery' of America and the genocide of Indians and African slaves (...), more so than the French or Industrial Revolutions" (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xiii). The Argentinean scholar goes even further and claims that the arrival of the Europeans in America and the genocide promoted by them constitute coloniality, a "darker and hidden face of modernity" (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xiii), that is, coloniality is an important part of modernity and one could not exist without the other. Mignolo argues that, considering that the Americas nowadays are a product of the European commercial expansion, it is not possible to conceive an "idea of Latin America" in isolation from the "ideas" of Europe and the USA (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xiii).

In *My Garden (book)*: (1999), for instance, the narrator makes comments that bring to mind immediately Glissant's (1999) discussion on nonhistory. In the essay *In History*, she mentions more than once that her history began in 1492, the year when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean. She also insists on the question "What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?" (KINCAID, 1999, p.153), wondering whether she can call "history" the processes of colonization that lasted for centuries in the region.

Following the discussion about coloniality in the West, Walter Mignolo describes some of the premises of what Arturo Escobar called the modernity/coloniality project. Among

the premises listed are some ideas such as: there is no modernity without coloniality, as the second is constitutive of the other; the modern/colonial world can have its origin traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the discovery/invention of America is linked to the European Renaissance via coloniality; “modernity” is the name of the European quest for hegemony, and coloniality is a darker side of it; capitalism, as of today, is the essence of modernity and coloniality; coloniality suffered transformations after World War II, when countries such as Spain and England, previous hegemonic forces, gave place to an imperial leadership by the USA; etc. (MIGNOLO, 2005, p.xiii)

The presuppositions above exposed by Walter Mignolo work as didactic way to start conceptualizing coloniality and highlight its intricate relation with modernity. In addition, these statements regarding modernity and coloniality give us a first look on those concepts in order to shape the theoretical framework that will help us understand coloniality in Jamaica Kincaid’s works and how it affects the identity of the narrators and characters portrayed in her novels, memoirs, essays and so on.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the approach proposed in this research searches for evidence of coloniality in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, rather than colonialism. The difference established by Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) between the pairs colonialism-decolonization and coloniality-decoloniality makes clear that coloniality includes colonialism, but is not limited to it. In his article *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality* (2016), Maldonado-Torres explains that while the pair colonialism/decolonization refers to a time span that lasts from the beginning of colonial practices to the process of independence, the other pair, coloniality/decoloniality is related to practices, epistemology, ideologies, etc., that create a logic based on the principles of coloniality (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2016, p.10). Therefore, when approaching Jamaica Kincaid’s works based on this perspective of coloniality, we are looking at elements that show how coloniality has affected and still affects the lives of Antiguans and other people in the Caribbean even decades after the independence of the former colonies.

In *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator of the non-fictional text describes an Antigua that exists after independence, that is, after what we understand as colonialism. However, as the narrative is developed and she points a number of problems left as legacy by the British empire, it becomes clear that the official period under the rule of England was one among the many problems faced by the locals in the island.

The narrator, who speaks directly to her audience of modern colonizers and contemporary tourists, mentions more than once this idea of overcoming that might be

implied by the process of official independence. She uses a very straightforward tone to question the reader about this issue, as she asks “Do you ever try to understand why people like me cannot get over the past, cannot forgive and cannot forget?” (KINCAID, 1988, p.26). Her position on the matter is clear in her speech: there is no such thing as getting over what had been done to the people in Antigua.

She taunts the reader, showing that the thought of surmounting colonialism seems easy for those whose ancestors were once in the position of the colonizers, but not for those who were living and working in the colonies:

Are you saying to yourself, "Can't she get beyond all that, everything happened so long ago, and how does she know that if things had been the other way around her ancestors wouldn't have behaved just as badly, because, after all, doesn't everybody behave badly given the opportunity?" (KINCAID, 1988, p.34)

Getting beyond, as the narrator questions her audience, is not something that can be easily experienced by the people who live in Antigua, neither before nor after independence. This criticism towards the idea of supersession fuels the discussion on terms such as “colonialism” and “postcolonialism”, raised by scholars such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016), as mentioned above, Ella Shohat (apud RADHAKRISHNAN,1996) and others, who claim that one must be attentive to the temporal limitation that these words imply to the discourse.

Besides Maldonado-Torres (2016) and Walter Mignolo (2005), this thesis also relies on the works by Aníbal Quijano when it comes to understanding coloniality. In the article *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*, Quijano (2007) discusses coloniality in relation to issues such as race, power and the production of knowledge. To begin with, the Peruvian scholar explains colonialism and how it affected knowledge. Through a process of systematic repression, colonizers expropriated the colonized from their knowledge in order to impose new forms of thinking, new ideologies, beliefs and images to be followed as models (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169). According to Quijano:

The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169)

This repression, as described by the scholar, occurred both by the denial of the colonized’s previous knowledge and the imposition of new patterns of producing it (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169). At first, this new knowledge brought by the colonizer would be inaccessible to the natives, and then, gradually, it would be open to the dominated as some of

them would be co-opted to be part of the power structures and help maintain them (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169). This step, as the Peruvian professor describes, was an important one to help implement colonialism:

At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught them in a partial and selective way, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169)

Furthermore, Quijano comments on the violence promoted by colonial practices, especially the decimation of nearly 65 million natives in America in a period of less than 50 years (QUIJANO, 2007, p.170), a number that shocks for the extension of extermination in such a short time span. Aníbal Quijano states that:

The scale of this extermination was so huge that it involved not only a demographic catastrophe, but also the destruction of societies and cultures. The cultural repression and the massive genocide together turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality; that is, deprived of their own patterns of formalized, objectivised, intellectual, and plastic or visual expression. (QUIJANO, 2007, p.170)

The passage above brings to mind the reflection on history and language proposed by Walter Mignolo (2005), discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Mignolo stated that peoples with forms of expression other than the ones used in Europe were considered to have no history and, consequently, had a new history imposed to them. According to Quijano (2007), as the genocide promoted by colonialism in America was not only physical – murdering people – but also cultural, one may conclude that the history that lasted for these peoples would be the one they could tell from the patterns of expression imposed by the rulers from Europe (QUIJANO, 2007, p.170):

Henceforth, the survivors would have no other modes of intellectual and plastic or visual formalized and objectivised expressions, but through the cultural patterns of the rulers, even if subverting them in certain cases to transmit other needs of expression. Latin America is, without doubt, the most extreme case of cultural colonization by Europe. (QUIJANO, 2007, p.170)

Aníbal Quijano is referring not only to the language itself, as we have discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. When the narrator in *A Small Place* (1988) asks her audience “For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime?” (KINCAID, 1988, p.31), it is possible to notice that she is, besides criticizing the imposition of the English language by the colonizers in Antigua,



questioning the way history can or cannot be told through the use of a linguistic code that is permeated by a colonizing logic.

The arguments presented by Glissant (1999), Mignolo (2005) and Quijano (2007) regarding the obliteration of history prior to colonization also articulate with considerations made by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. In *Reading Autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives* (2010), the scholars describe what they call “politics of remembering”: since remembering is a territory under constant conflict, not everyone is entitled to it, as “there are struggles over who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.24). Considering that the relations of power between colonizer and colonized are unequal in the processes of colonization, the European version of what happened in the colonies was to be considered the official one to be recorded in textbooks and granted scientific recognition.

In *Caribbean Discourse* (1999), however, Glissant suggests that it is the role of the Caribbean writer of remembering and crafting the history that was once denied to the colonized in the region. The Martinican scholar states:

Because the collective memory was too often wiped out, the Caribbean writer must “dig deep” into his memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in the everyday world.

Because the Caribbean consciousness was broken up by sterile barriers, the writer must be able to give expression to all those occasions when these barriers were partially broken. (GLISSANT, 1999, p.64-65)

Jamaica Kincaid is a prime example of what Glissant (1999) describes as the role of the Caribbean writer. Throughout her fictional and non-fictional texts, she digs deep into her memory and the collective memory of Antigua and the Caribbean, providing her readers with new perspectives on the effects of coloniality in the region.

In her writings, Jamaica Kincaid creates narrators who constantly speak about coloniality in Antigua. In the non-fictional text *A Small Place* (1988), the reader is presented with a description of Antigua after its independence, and the narrator constantly addresses issues related to the legacy of the centuries under the British rule, underscoring the neglect of the island:

Antigua used to have a splendid library, but in *The Earthquake* (everyone talks about it that way — *The Earthquake*; we Antiguans, for I am one, have a great sense of things, and the more meaningful the thing, the more meaningless we make it) the library building was damaged. This was in 1974, and soon after that a sign was placed on the front of the building saying, THIS BUILDING WAS DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1974. REPAIRS ARE PENDING. The sign hangs there,

and hangs there more than a decade later, with its unfulfilled promise of repair (...)  
(KINCAID, 1988, p.8-9)

The state of deterioration of the land is exposed by this narrator, as well as by the protagonist in *My Brother* (1997), who is mapping Antigua and comparing the island to her memories, since she had been away for decades. Jamaica, the narrator of the *memoir*, also describes the poor conditions of conservation of virtually anything left for the locals:

I rode in a hired car and it took me past the Magdalene maternity ward, where I was born, past the place where the Dead House used to be (a small cottage-like structure where the bodies of the dead were stored until their families came to claim them), but it is not there anymore; it was torn down when it grew rotten and could no longer contain the smells of the dead. And then I came to a major crossing where there was a stoplight, but it was broken and had been broken for a long time; it could not be fixed because the parts for it are no longer made anywhere in the world — and that did not surprise me, because Antigua is a place like that: parts for everything are no longer being made anywhere in the world; in Antigua itself nothing is made. (KINCAID, 1997, p.23-24)

Passages like these, taken from different works by Kincaid, show in detail some aspects of Antigua that are not described in history books. One may find testimonials such as the above in fiction produced by writers from Antigua or other parts of the Caribbean, but history books present pedagogical narratives created by hegemonic countries. In addition, as pointed by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Beatriz Sarlo (2007), literature – especially fiction – does not carry the same scientific responsibility that is attributed to history. Although this might grant literature some discredit regarding historical precision, the imaginative aspect of literature allows the writer to create narratives that might revise the ones considered as official.

History, the discipline, is commonly detached from literature due to an alleged scientific impartiality attributed to it, while the latter is usually described as “art” in a limiting sense. History is seen as exempt from external influence as it is considered a science, whereas literature has a fictional aspect that allegedly refrains it from portraying reality, achieving, at its best, verisimilitude. Postmodern theory, however, has challenged this distinction by pointing the convergences between these two areas. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Linda Hutcheon explains that:

recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure [...] (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.105)

Considering, then, that both history and fiction rely on narrative, it is possible to recognize that both undergo the same processes of selection, erasure, fictionalization, judgment and other aspects that might undermine the possibility of an alleged impartiality. Therefore, one can understand that if history and literature are produced by the same means, then, they can be analyzed through a similar lens.

Textbooks portray the history of the Caribbean according to records made by those who arrived at the lands in ships from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on: the Spanish *conquistadores* and the British colonizers, among others. The Europeans would write reports and send them to the Old World from their ships, settlements and colonies, and these records were later adopted as scientific documents to compose a timeline of the expeditions to the West and the centuries that followed. Yet, as this widespread version of history was a narrative produced by the Europeans themselves, it does not feature details that would have been included by the native peoples from the Caribbean such as the colonial oppression imposed by the newcomers. It is in literature, then, through the works of Caribbean writers, that we can access those details left out from hegemonic narratives. In Jamaica Kincaid's writings, the readers are presented with descriptions of an Antigua that is not found in history textbooks – or even in tourist guides, as *A Small Place* (1988) simulates – offering a new perspective on coloniality in the Caribbean, other than the widely known.

Differently from pedagogical narratives of history found in textbooks, the works by Jamaica Kincaid chosen as literary corpus for this thesis are written in the first person. This choice for narrating stories by using “I” instead of “she” can be related to what Beatriz Sarlo (2007) comments as the subjective turn that took place between the 1960s and 1970s. In *Tempo Pasado: cultura da memória e guinada subjetiva* (2007)<sup>8</sup>, Sarlo explains that the subjective turn from the 1960s on threw light onto *testimonios* and autobiographical narratives, which rely on personal experience and the first person to tell a story.

According to the Argentinean professor, testimonial literature about states of exception and rupture with democracy, for instance, especially stories written in first person, carry a kind of incontestable status that is triggered by the moral recognition that the report of a trauma should not be questioned. Even though Sarlo condemns this uncritical approach of first-person testimonial narratives (SARLO, 2007, p.21), the scholar acknowledges that the record of individual or collective memory is essential to understand an experience and agrees

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<sup>8</sup> Originally published in Spanish, in 2005, under the title *Tiempo Pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión*

with Susan Sontag: understanding is more important than remembering, though the latter depends on the first (SARLO, 2007, p.22).

Following Sarlo's reflection on testimonial literature and autobiographical writing, this thesis does not intend to simply read Jamaica Kincaid's works in the literary corpus as the unquestionable truth of what happened and still happens to Antiguan and other Caribbean people. The main purpose of this reading is to look at literature as an alternative to official records from history books, creating new possibilities to understand the history of Antigua. It is, consequently, a proposal to shift the authorization to remember established by the "politics of remembering" (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.24), giving room to reports that were previously disregarded from any official records.

Kincaid's works can be read as proposed above due to the fact that they are permeated by details from her own life. The Antiguan writer has often addressed – and problematized – the issue of autobiographical elements in her narratives, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and this contributes to a reading that takes into account the experience of living in Antigua. Understanding how her life and her works are intricately connected allows us to see texts such as *My Brother* (1997) and *A Small Place* (1988), besides other ones, as possible revisions of what is told in history textbooks.

The issue of the autobiographical nature of Kincaid's works will be better developed in the following chapter, as it focuses on the importance of autobiographical details from the author to the identity of her characters. The understanding of Jamaica Kincaid's works as life narratives, however, is essential to grasp the relevance of the author's experience in her writings in order to read them as possible revisions of history. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) close their chapter on life narratives by concluding the following:

Our working definition of *self life writing* assumes that it is not a single unitary genre or form, "autobiography". Rather, the historically situated practices of self-representation may take many guises as narrators selectively engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, narrators are at the same time in dialogue with the processes and archives of memories and the expectations of disparate others. (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.18, emphasis by the authors)

Approaching literature produced by Caribbean writers as archives of personal memory enables the reader to see history from a different perspective, other than the hegemonic narratives told in textbooks. In Jamaica Kincaid's case, the reader gets in touch with details of life in Antigua from the inside of the colony instead of the versions registered by *conquistadores* and colonizers. As Smith and Watson state, life narratives are not to be read within a "logical or juridical model of truth and falsehood", neither as factual truth or simple

facts (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.17). Instead, self-referential writing must be approached as a pact between writer and reader, causing the emphasis of the reading to shift “from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communicative exchange and understanding” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.17).

This second chapter, then, as it is dedicated to a reading of Jamaica Kincaid’s works as possible revisions of the history of Antigua, brings on its first pages some important issues that together shape the key to read the novels, memoirs and essays as proposed: a conceptualization of coloniality, in order to identify how it surfaces in each text by the author and how it affects the identity of her characters; a parallel between history and fiction, due to the characteristics that bring those different narratives together, rather than distancing them; and a quick overview on the autobiographical aspect in life narratives, which will be more explored in the third chapter of this thesis. Keeping these concepts and discussions in mind, it is possible to look at works such as *My Brother* (1997), *A Small Place* (1988), *My Garden (book)*: (1999) and others and see how they tell stories that are not featured in history books.

In one of the essays published in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), the narrator discusses how the history of Antigua started and, inevitably, as the theme of the book is gardening, she cannot help mentioning some of the history of botany related to the navigations to the West. The name of the essay, *In History*, indicates the topic discussed by the narrator, who opens the text by questioning the idea of history for someone from the Caribbean like herself:

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?  
Should I call it history?  
If so, what should history mean to someone like me? (KINCAID, 1999, p.153)

She continues interrogating her reader, wondering whether history for her should be like an idea, or something more physical like a wound that heals and opens again with each breath taken since 1492 (KINCAID, 1999, p.153). The year mentioned – the year when the Spanish ships arrived America – is repeated over and over as the genesis of her history, that is, the beginning of history for Caribbean people. When the narrator states “My history begins like this: In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World” (KINCAID, 1999, p.153), it brings to mind the previous discussions on this chapter about nonhistory and the imposition of hegemonic narratives by the colonizers. As the narrator suggests, there is no history for the Caribbean prior to the year when Christopher Columbus arrived in the region, triggering “the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces” (GLISSANT, 1999, p.62) that forged new narratives for the people in Antigua and other countries in America.

In the chapter Genre, Genealogy and Genesis, Jana Evans Braziel addresses the issue of genesis in Jamaica Kincaid's *Mr. Potter* (2002). In a book dedicated to discussions on Kincaid's works, the scholar argues:

In Kincaid's engagements with genesis, she joins a Caribbean "quarrel with history" that is above all a preoccupation with genesis (origins, creation, filiation), even through its disavowal or a Caribbean turning away from the possibility of creative beginnings. In this sense, Kincaid joins other Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant in their poetic revisions of genesis, creation, and myth. (BRAZIEL, 2009, p.178)

Braziel highlights Kincaid's constant reference to genesis, origins and beginnings in her text, as the example mentioned above from the essay *In History*. The narrator insists in the year of 1492 as the origin for her and for the people in the Caribbean, explaining that this was the year when the Spanish *conquistadores* first arrived at the region. This example from *In History* is very similar to the ones given by Braziel (2009) throughout her article, taken from *Mr. Potter* (2002). It is easy to notice that the year of 1492 seems to figure most of Kincaid's narratives, which corroborates Braziel's (2009) argument that the Antiguan author is engaged in writing about beginnings, as 1492 was the year when the colonization in the Caribbean began.

The narrator of *In History* also brings up a question that articulates with the idea of history and fiction being more convergent than divergent, as proposed by Linda Hutcheon (1988) when pointing the similarities between the two forms of narrative mentioned:

Is it a collection of facts, all true and precise details, and if so, when I come across these true and precise details, what should I do, how should I feel, where should I place myself? (KINCAID, 1999, p.153)

All the questions above are asked in less than fifteen lines on the first page of the essay, which continues with the narrator raising more and more questions about Columbus, the navigations and the history of the Caribbean. On the following pages, the narrator insists a few times that the New World, as called by the Europeans, was new only to Christopher Columbus and the ones who came after him. To people from the Caribbean, the New World was simply their native place, but when the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived, they described it as new due to the fact that they had never seen it before:

He, Christopher Columbus, then discovers this new world. That it is new only to him, that it had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before he became aware of it, does not occur to him. (KINCAID, 1999, p.154)

This passage clearly shows that, to European colonizers, the history of the conquered countries prior to their navigations did not matter, as they would simply impose a new

narrative to them. The narrator in the essay even compares Columbus to a child, calling him “childish, immature, small-minded” (KINCAID, 1999, p.154), which articulated with the idea of seeing something as new just because it was never seen before, reminds us of Jean Piaget’s stages of cognitive development.

The researcher described four different stages of cognitive development for children between 0 and 12 years old (apud MCLEOD, 2018), and as the narrator in *In History* describes Columbus, he seemed to be stuck in the first stage: sensorimotor, a stage that is usually experienced by children between 0 and 2 years old, and then overcome right after this age. The narrator explains that America did not exist for Columbus before he saw it, which is how babies under 2 years old understand the world around them: if they cannot see something in front of them, it is not part of any possible reality. As the narrator in the essay highlights, “It was the New World – but New only because he had never seen it before” (KINCAID, 1999, p.154-155).

Considering that the recently found Caribbean had a “blankness to it” (KINCAID, 1999, p.155), Columbus and other *conquistadores* started to name everything. This, according to the narrator, is a form of having knowledge of things, an issue she develops with more depth in *To Name Is To Possess*, another essay from *My Garden (book)*: (1999). Europeans considered that in this New World, things were unnamed; therefore, they could not exist in a hegemonic narrative created by the countries from the Old World. As the narrator in *In History* states, “[This world he saw before him] had no before. I could say it had no history, but I would have to begin again, I would have to ask the question again: what is history?” (KINCAID, 1999, p.155).

Even though the narrator dedicates this essay to talking about Christopher Columbus, she explains that he himself did not visit the island of Antigua. However, she recognizes that if it were not for his stops on the Caribbean, the history of her homeland – or at least the hegemonic narratives that tell the story of the people from Antigua – might have been completely different:

[Christopher Columbus] saw Antigua, I believe on a weekday, but if not, then it would have been on a Sunday, for in this life there would have been only weekdays or Sundays, but he never set foot on it, he only came across it while passing by. My world, then, the only world I might have known if circumstances had not intervened, entered human imagination – the human imagination that I am familiar with, the one that dominates the world in which I live – as a footnote to someone just passing by. (KINCAID, 1999, p.158)

It is possible to notice that the narrator acknowledges that the history from where she is from, at least as it is widely known, was written by the Europeans who conquered those

lands, and had Columbus not paid attention to Antigua, the history of the country could have turned into just a footnote in his reports about the Caribbean. As the essays in *My Garden (book)*: (1999) follow the theme of garden and botany, the narrator also addresses a brief part of the history of plants.

She gives a short account of how plants have two names: one used by the people who actually value them, and another one in Latin, a proper name assigned by botanists. Her point is that the Latin names for plants disregard the popular name, which is based on the characteristics and uses of the plant, and the narrator, who has gardening as a hobby, often refuses to use the Latin names attributed by the Europeans. When explaining how the system for naming plants was imposed by George Clifford and Carolus Linnaeus, she adds that she would like to make an addition to this kind of historical report:

In almost every account of an event that has taken place sometime in the last five hundred years there is always a moment when I feel like placing an asterisk somewhere in its text and at the end of the official story making my own addition. (KINCAID, 1999, p.164)

The passage above illustrates the proposal made in this chapter: to read Jamaica Kincaid's writings as additions, asterisks that enable the author to include personal details in major narratives created by the hegemonic countries that colonized the Caribbean, especially Antigua. Through her novels, *memoirs*, essays and, why not, public statements, the writer is able to give her audience a perspective of history that is not commonly found in textbooks and other records widely spread by the countries which have once colonized nations in the Americas and other parts of the world.

The essay What Joseph Banks Wrought, also published in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), brings the narrator's reflections on the influence of England on the Antiguan landscape, focusing on botany, the ostensible theme of the collection. In the beginning of the text, the narrator claims that the English have a sort of obsession about the order and shape of their landscapes, a characteristic that Antiguan people lack (KINCAID, 1999, p.132). She says that this comparison is unfair, due to the fact that Antiguan people have been influenced by the English through colonial practices:

I make this unfair comparison (...) only because so much of the character of the Antiguan people is influenced by and directly inherited (through conquest) from the English people; I can cite immediately the pity and cruelty showered at once on the weak, and a love of gossip (...) (KINCAID, 1999, p.132)

After pointing out that the colonizers have had a major influence in the identity of the Antiguan people, she underscores the social and economical implications of coloniality



among the locals. She explains that having a garden meant having at least some money, and Antiguan would show this by planting flowers around their houses:

Ordinary Antiguan then (and by “ordinary Antiguan” I mean the Antiguan people who are descended from the African slaves brought to this island by Europeans; this turns out to be not an uncommon way to be ordinary), the ones who had some money and so could live in a house with more than one room, had gardens in which only flowers were grown, and this would make even more clear that they had some money, because all their outside space was not devoted only to feeding their families but also to the sheer beauty of things. (KINCAID, 1999, p.133)

As the Antiguan would be imposed the knowledge, habits and models from the English, it is natural that they would try to mimic the gardens of the colonizers. She continues addressing this idea of imitating the colonizers, which is also relatable to Aníbal Quijano’s (2007) insights about power and seduction. Once the colonized is lured into reproducing the logic of coloniality, they will imitate social and economical traces of power and hierarchy. The narrator makes her point clear about this in the essay:

When these people (the Antiguan) lived under the influence of those other people (the English) there was naturally an attempt among certain of them to imitate their rulers in this particular way, arranging a landscape, and they did this without a question; they can’t be faulted for not asking what it was they were doing, that is the way these things work. (KINCAID, 1999, p.134)

Once again, the imposition of the logic of coloniality is responsible for maintaining the ruled under the control of their rulers. By reproducing a model of garden that was created by the English and brought to the West Indies during colonization, the Antiguan show how coloniality can be maintained without any sort of questioning.

In *My Brother* (1997), the *memoir* about Devon, the narrator constantly points the effects of coloniality in Antigua, which were harmful during the period of colonization and still persist after the official independence from England. Throughout the pages of the *memoir*, she addresses the state of conservation of the streets, public buildings and places that offer essential services like hospitals, maternities and so on. In one of her visits to her brother at the hospital, she describes the conditions of the place where her brother is being treated:

We looked out on an ordinary Antiguan landscape. There was a deliberate planting of willow trees, planted, I suspect, a long time ago, when Antigua was still a colony and the colonial government would have been responsible for the running of the hospital. It was never a great hospital, but it is a terrible hospital now, and only people who cannot afford anything else make use of it. (KINCAID, 1997, p.10-11)

Whenever the people in Antigua depended on the same hospital where her brother was staying, they were faced with many difficulties, especially when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Jamaica, the narrator, explains that there was only one doctor treating the disease on the

island, as there was no public concern about it (KINCAID, 1997, p.30-31). Consequently, there were no drugs to slow the development of the symptoms – such as the AZT –, no support groups for people suffering from AIDS, and so on (KINCAID, 1997, p.30-31). The narrator states:

It is felt in general, so I am told, that since there is no cure for AIDS it is useless to spend money on a medicine that will only slow the progress of the disease; the afflicted will die no matter what; there are limited resources to be spent on health care and these should be spent where they will do some good, not where it is known that the outcome is death. This was the reason why there was no AZT in the hospital (...) (KINCAID, 1997, p.31).

The difficulties in getting AZT in Antigua were such that Jamaica had to ask a friend, who is a doctor in the USA, to write a prescription so she could buy the drug and send it to Antigua (KINCAID, 1997, p.34). The narrator is also able to perceive how coloniality works in Antigua and compare it to her experience living in a hegemonic country, the USA, for instance, where she has lived for thirty years. She explains that there were more drugs lacking in the hospital, not only a specific drug such as the AZT. Her brother's symptoms like thrush and pneumonia could not be treated with the medicines available. She gives the following example of what happened to her brother:

One night my brother had a terrible headache and needed something to ease the pain; there was no aspirin on the ward where he was staying and no aspirin in the dispensary. A nurse on duty had some in her purse for her own personal use and she gave my brother two of them. There are people who complain that a hospital in the United States will charge six dollars for a dose of Tylenol; they might wish to look at this way of running a hospital: bring your own medicines. (KINCAID, 1997, p.34)

She recognizes that his chances would have been better if treated in the USA, but for her, taking her ill brother to her house in Vermont did not seem like a viable solution. She believes she would not have enough money to give him the proper support, besides having an already organized structure for her family, and her brother's presence would interfere in this balance she had conquered throughout her decades living in the USA. Besides, in the "combustion of feelings" she has towards her family in Antigua, she concludes that she does not love her brother, as it must be some kind of feeling other than love (KINCAID, 1997, p.50-51).

After explaining why she could not take Devon to stay with her and be treated in the USA, Jamaica ponders on the causes of his illness. She concludes that besides his carelessness, there was also a public health issue involved:

(...) it was the fact that he lived in a place in which a government, made up of people with his own complexion, his own race, was corrupt and did not care whether he or other people like him lived or died. (KINCAID, 1997, p.49-50)

This observation on the government made by the narrator articulates with the idea of power being seductive proposed by Aníbal Quijano (2007). As stated by the Peruvian professor, the colonizers might “co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions” (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169), which would then lead to have them in the government even after official independence. Jamaica points this out in the passage above, as she claims that the people from the government share the same complexion of her brother, but corruption keeps them from working for people like him.

In addition to the health system conditions on the island, the narrator in *My Brother* (1997) also describes the state of conservation of buildings related to education in Antigua. When mapping Antigua as she remembers things from her childhood and from her recent visits, she describes her brother’s former school: “We walked over to the grounds of his old school. It did not seem to have any memories for him; he noticed that it was dilapidated, he wondered why children were sent to a school with holes in the building” (KINCAID, 1997, p.80). It becomes clear that, besides health, education is also affected by coloniality in Antigua.

In the novel, Jamaica shows how she and her brother faced history as it was taught in schools on the island, back when they were kids living under the British imperial rule. Their points of view seem to complement what the narrator in the essay *In History*, in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), mentions about placing an asterisk to make an addition to official records. Jamaica, the narrator in *My Brother* (1997), recalls the different attitudes towards reading that she and her brother had when they were children:

(...) when I was a little girl, living on that small island, I used to steal books from the library, not my school, but the library; the school that I attended had no books that I wanted to steal. I would not have wanted to steal a book about history; I stole only novels, and all the novels I stole were novels I had read, they were all written in the nineteenth century. I was not interested in history then, only so now; my brother had history books on his shelf. (KINCAID, 1997, p.94)

She then explains why her brother preferred history books rather than novels: he liked the way each story was told, especially the narratives created by hegemonic forces about conquests and navigations. The choice of the word “thieves” to describe famous names as Nelson, Hawkins and Drake was made by both brother and sister, showing that they shared the same understanding about the history of the Caribbean, as she mentions that “He was obsessed with the great thieves who had inhabited his part of the world, the great hero thieves

of English maritime history: Horatio Nelson, John Hawkins, Francis Drake” (KINCAID, 1997, p.94-95). Jamaica makes a clear statement that her brother was aware that in the history books he had read, he –the people from Antigua, actually – was on the side of the conquered, rather than the conquerors:

He thought that the thing called history was an account of significant triumphs over significant defeats recorded by significant people who had benefited from the significant triumphs; he thought (as do I) that this history of ours was primarily an account of theft and murder (“Dem tief, dem a dam tief”), but presented in such a way as to make the account seem inevitable and even fun: he liked the costumes of it, he liked the endings, the outcomes; he liked the people who won, even though he was among the things that had been won. (KINCAID, 1997, p.95)

For Devon, being “among the things that had been won” (KINCAID, 1997, p.95) did not seem to keep him from enjoying the narratives he read from history books. However, Jamaica and other narrators created by Kincaid show the discomfort in understanding how and why those narratives were created and imposed to them and the people from Antigua. Those narrators are able to identify how coloniality affected and still affects their homeland.

In *A Small Place* (1988), it is not difficult to find alternative accounts of history in the narrator’s speech. Throughout the narrative, she gives the reader a new perspective on how colonization occurred in Antigua, besides the legacy of coloniality that persists after the independence of the former colony. The narrator is straightforward about whom she is talking to and what she is talking about:

Let me just show you how you looked to us. You came. You took things that were not yours, and you did not even, for appearances' sake, ask first. You could have said, "May I have this, please?" and even though it would have been clear to everybody that a yes or no from us would have been of no consequence you might have looked so much better. Believe me, it would have gone a long way. I would have had to admit that at least you were polite. (KINCAID, 1988, p.35)

It is possible to notice that even though she ironically suggests a different approach by the colonizers, she understands that it would have made no difference in the outcome: Antiguans would still spend centuries under the rule of the British anyway. In the passage that follows the previous one, which has already been quoted in the first chapter of this thesis, the narrator states that the colonizing forces murdered, imprisoned and robbed the local people from Antigua once they arrived in the island. She also comments, a few pages later, that no sort of historical effort to retrieve any kind of records from their past can compensate for what Antigua has been through in the last five decades:

As for what we were like before we met you, I no longer care. No periods of time over which my ancestors held sway, no documentation of complex civilisations, is any comfort to me. Even if I really came from people who were living like monkeys

in trees, it was better to be that than what happened to me, what I became after I met you. (KINCAID, 1988, p.37)

It becomes clear, once again, that the narrator's position in *A Small Place* (1988) articulates with Glissant's discussion on nonhistory. She understands that her ancestors, the native people from Antigua, might have had records of their history, but they were obliterated with the imposition of colonial practices on the island. This way, she believes that retrieving this history will not bring any comfort for her, as centuries have gone by and coloniality is still a problem in the present.

The example given above from *A Small Place* (1988) resonates with Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001). Both Kincaid and Dionne Brand manifest their concern about history and the new beginnings imposed through the processes of colonization. Brand's narrator states:

Having no name to call on was having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present. That fissure is represented in the Door of No Return: that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New. The place where all names were forgotten and all beginnings recast. (BRAND, 2001, p.5)

Similar to the narrator in *A Small Place* (1988), Brand's narrator underscores the rupture imposed by colonization, which represented the beginning of a new history for those who were forced to be under the rule of a hegemonic nation. The narrator in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001) also mentions the issue of naming, as she says that in the New World, names were forgotten, clearly an important part of the colonial oppression. It brings to mind, then, the discussions on the essay *To Name is To Possess*, published in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), seen on the first chapter of this thesis.

In the closing paragraph of *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator sums up the history of Antigua focusing on the slavery issue. She states that Antigua "was settled by human rubbish from Europe, who used enslaved but noble and exalted human beings from Africa" to achieve the power and wealth they were searching for (KINCAID, 1988, p.80). The narrator attributes this search to loneliness and emptiness, what she calls "a European disease" (KINCAID, 1988, p.80). The way she describes how the processes of decolonization happened show that the people in Antigua are still oppressed by coloniality, as she says that "eventually, the masters left, in a kind of way; eventually, the slaves were freed, in a kind of way" (KINCAID, 1988, p.80).

The final passages of the text suggest an ambiguity that confirms how the narratives created by hegemonic nations privilege those who were ruling over the ones who were ruled.

The narrator in *A Small Place* (1988) briefly explains what happens when slavery ended, which represented a big step towards independence in the colonies in the American continents:

Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings. (KINCAID, 1988, p.81)

The passage above shows that, once slavery is ended, those who owned people as properties did not have to compensate the former slaves for the years of forced work. They became “human beings” as the narrator describes, getting rid of the negative status they had prior to the abolition of slavery. For the slaves, however, being free from forced work did not mean their lives had a fresh start, as history textbooks imply. They became “just human beings”, with no reparation or compensation for the centuries of oppression.

Jamaica Kincaid also addresses history in her interviews when asked about her life and her works. In the interview *A Lot of Memory*, when asked by Moira Ferguson (1994) about history in her fiction, Kincaid claims that she does not think consciously about including history in her writings as she does not consider her writings to bear such an importance:

MF: Are you conscious of making history a part of your fiction?  
JK: Oh no, good heavens. That is so frightening. If I thought my writing was important in any way I perhaps would be afraid to do it. It is only important to me. I can't imagine it is important to anyone else. (FERGUSON, 1994, p.173).

By answering this way such a question, it becomes clear that the writer is aware of the implications of talking about history in her works but chooses not to discuss this strategy with the interviewer or the public. It shows, then, that the Antiguan author consciously uses her narratives as a platform to talk about history in her home country, but a version of history that is not spread as official. Her position as someone who grew up in a former colony enables her to provide her readers with a different perspective of life in Antigua.

Jamaica Kincaid writes about lives that are not privileged in narratives created in and by hegemonic nations. The Antiguan author writes her fiction and non-fiction from the perspective of the colonized and those who live in the former colony after independence, underscoring the legacy of the Empire which oppresses people in Antigua. Her narratives about people who live on the island and those who had the opportunity to live abroad give the reader details that cannot be found in history textbooks. Those details are not taken into account by European and North American pedagogical narratives of history due to the fact

that they would damage the status of heroes, conquerors and benefactors attributed to the people from the Old World. Needless to say, most of the additions made by Kincaid that challenge a hegemonic version of history come from her personal experience inside and outside Antigua.

These details omitted from European narratives surface in Jamaica Kincaid's works as traces of coloniality. My understanding of coloniality, as discussed in the beginning of the chapter, comes from the works by Walter Mignolo (2005), Aníbal Quijano (2007) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016), who point that coloniality is not restricted to a time span, as it represents a logic rather than a period. As Walter Mignolo (2005) describes, "modernity" is the name of the European quest for hegemony, which included coloniality as a driving force. Mignolo (2005) also states that coloniality is what made viable the discovery/invention of America, during the European Renaissance.

According to Maldonado-Torres (2016), coloniality refers "to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization" and it may last even after colonialism ended, once oppression over the former colonized persists. As stated by Ella Shohat (2000), one must pay attention to the time limitations that the ideas of colonialism and postcolonialism might imply. The relations of power between colonizer and colonized or, after independence, between those who rule and those who are ruled, are the focus of this proposal of reading Jamaica Kincaid's literature.

Aníbal Quijano (2007) also explains how coloniality works by describing the way colonial practices are implemented. The imposition of the repression through the production of knowledge, perspectives, images, systems and models brought by the colonizer to the new land is what makes the control and power over the colonized possible. Gradually, some of the dominated are lured into the colonial institutions in order to help maintaining them from the inside (QUIJANO, 2007, p.169).

By looking at coloniality from this perspective, it is possible grasp the traces of it found in Jamaica Kincaid's literature. Her works are constantly touching upon the "politics of remembering", a concept discussed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010). As the relations of power between those who colonize and those who are colonized are unequal, not everyone is entitled or authorized to remember; therefore, through literature, it might be possible to fulfill the gaps left in pedagogical narratives of history, as they were not produced from the colonized's perspective.

These narratives, however, are not as different from fiction as they seem. According to Linda Hutcheon (1988), even though historical narratives are granted scientific recognition

and an alleged impartiality, they rely on the same processes of selection, erasure, fictionalization, judgment and other aspects shared with fiction, making them more similar than different (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.105). In addition, both fiction and history are more committed to verisimilitude than any objective truth (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.105).

It is also relevant to mention that this proposal of reading Kincaid's works as possible revisions of history does not take her writings as absolute truth. According to Beatriz Sarlo (2007), there is a kind of incontestable status to testimonial literature, especially the ones dealing with trauma and states of exception, that makes these testimonials unquestionable (SARLO, 2007, p.21). However, the approach to Kincaid's body of work in this thesis takes into account that this kind of report of individual or collective memory is essential to understand the relations of power in Antigua, whether being questioned as testimonial literature or not.

After establishing the key to read Kincaid as proposed, the analysis of works such as *A Small Place* (1988), *My Brother* (1997) and *My Garden (book):* (1999) was able to identify how coloniality works in Antigua for those who live on the island, both before and after the official independence. In addition, it was also possible to understand how the diverse genres chosen – non-fictional text, *memoir*, essay – can contribute to make additions to the hegemonic narratives known as official history. It becomes clear that the state of conservation of public services, the relations between government and population, among other aspects brought up by the analysis, are not exactly as described by the nations who arrived in the Caribbean five centuries ago.

These alternative reports or additions are essential to understand how the identity of the Caribbean subjects portrayed in Jamaica Kincaid's narratives are formed, based on their perspective on their homeland, their family and the hegemonic nations which have once colonized them. By the use of a straightforward tone, her narrators talk about all aspects related to coloniality in Antigua, measuring no words when it comes to criticizing the colonial practices imposed on the island. It is possible to see, then, that coloniality plays a major role in their identity.

In *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Garden (book):* (1999), comments made by the narrators refer to individual and collective history, while in *My Brother* (1997) and other novels, historical perspective is interweaved with the private lives of the characters. The relationship of the narrators with family members plays an important role in the process of knowing the other and the self, which leads us to take a better look at the influence of autobiographical elements in Jamaica Kincaid's works.



### 3 SERIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY”: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN JAMAICA KINCAID’S NARRATIVES

There is no reason for me to be a writer without autobiography. There is none at all. I have no interest in writing as some sort of exercise of my class. I am not from a literary class.

For me it was really an act of saving my life, so it had to be autobiographical. I am someone who had to make sense out of my past.

*Jamaica Kincaid*<sup>9</sup>

It is pointed out by scholars, critics and the author herself, that Jamaica Kincaid makes an extensive use of details from her own life to build her narratives. In her interviews, the Antiguan writer constantly addresses this matter, playing with the fact that she uses her life to write, but at the same time stating that she does not write about herself. As addressed briefly in the first chapter of this thesis, Kincaid has stated in an interview to Shanda Deziel that in *Mr. Potter* (2002), a novel that tells the story of her father, she does use details from her and her father’s lives, yet, she writes a novel instead of a biography. As Kincaid says, “It uses my biography but it’s not about me and it uses his biography but it’s not about him. If I had wanted it to be about he and I, I wouldn’t have called it a novel” (DEZIEL, 2002 apud NASTA, 2009, p.75).

The idea of using autobiographical details to write fiction has been widely discussed by different scholars. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), for instance, have published a whole book on life narratives – an umbrella term that includes autobiography, biography, autofiction, etc. In *Reading Autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives* (2010), Smith and Watson dedicate the first chapter of the book to describe the concept of life narrative and distinguish terms that are related to it but not synonyms. At first, the scholars explain that “autobiography” is nowadays a term used to name the practices of self-referential writing that emerged in the period of the Enlightenment and became popular in the West (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.2). However, the professors underscore that the concept of “autobiography” as it is currently understood has been criticized by postmodern and postcolonial theorists, as they consider the term inadequate to deal with works of life writing

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<sup>9</sup> (FERGUSON, 1994, p.176)

produced outside the canon (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.3). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that:

Thus, many postmodern and postcolonial theorists contend that the term *autobiography* is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life writing not only in the West but around the globe. (...) Thus, its politics is one of exclusion. (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.3, emphasis by the authors)

As argued in postmodern and postcolonial studies, the canonical aspect of the genre autobiography does not take into account the production of other genres in life writing outside the hegemonic West. Due to this, scholars such as Julie Rak and Leigh Gilmore propose a shift from “autobiography” to “autobiographical discourse”, leading to a new perspective in relation to the inscription of the self in the literary text:

This shift from genre to discourse opens to the scene of autobiographical inscription beyond the printed life story. It also attends to the aspects of power inherent in acts of autobiographical inscription and recognizes that those whose identities, experiences and histories remain marginal, invalidated, invisible, and partial negotiate and alter normative or traditional frames of identity in their differences (RAK, 2004 apud SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.3)

The autobiographical discourse, then, is widely present in what the authors call life narratives – which are not restricted to the concept of autobiography. Still in the first chapter of *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Smith and Watson establish a difference between life writing and life narrative, terms that include but are not limited to autobiographical or self-referential writing. According to the professors, life writing is “a general term for writing that takes a life, one’s own or another’s, as its subject” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.4). This form of written text can be not only autobiographical, that is, self-referential, but also biographical, novelistic, historical (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.4). Meanwhile, life narratives are more general due to the fact that they are not limited to the written text. They are acts of self-representation of all kinds which can be expressed through different media, using the producer’s life as subject (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.4).

In the same chapter, Smith and Watson discuss the relation between life writing and fiction. The professors claim that the confusion between the two terms are very common, especially because of the characteristics that life writing and fiction share: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, among others (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.9-10). However, the main difference between life writing and fiction is related to the world they refer to:

But they are distinguished by their relationship to and claims about a referential world. We might helpfully think of what fiction represents as “a world”, and what life writing refers to as “the world”. Further complicating matters, many

contemporary writers deliberately blur the boundary between life writing and the kinds of stories told in the first-person novel that some call “faction”, others “autofiction” (see Rachel Toor) (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.10).

Therefore, Smith and Watson (2010) consider that the agreement between writer and reader on what world is referential to the narrative is the main point of divergence between life writing and fiction. The first one will have the real world as both writer and reader know as a reference, while the second one will have its own universe to refer to. It does not mean, of course, that fiction will not rely on verisimilitude or that life writing will abandon any fictional aspects just because of these different referential worlds. The Icelandic professor Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003) considers that fictionality is not something external to or incompatible with the autobiographical processes in life writing (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.4). Even though she is talking specifically about autobiography at this point in her text, her arguments can be related to life writing in general.

In the introduction of *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing* (2003), Gudmundsdóttir explains that the autobiographer works by negotiating “the borders and boundaries between autobiography and fiction” (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.4-5). The scholar states that this negotiation is more evident in the text especially when the autobiographer “deals actively with the problematics of the writing process itself” (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.5). This idea immediately brings to mind *My Brother* (1997), which is a *memoir*, not an autobiography, but in which Jamaica Kincaid creates a narrator who discusses the importance of writing about her and her brother’s lives in order to save herself.

In addition to the discussion on autobiography and fiction, Gudmundsdóttir also considers that:

Life-writing can be said always to contain both autobiographical and fictional aspects, but an awareness of the problematics involved means the writer has constantly to negotiate the way in which the autobiographical and the fictional aspects of the writing process interact in the text. (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.5)

The interweaving of autobiographical and fictional aspects in life writing represents, then, a dichotomy that must be dealt with by the author. Moreover, as argued by Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003), fiction is also part of another dichotomy present in autobiographies: the individual and the universal. Once the individual writer of an autobiography works with universal experiences, “such as mother-daughter relationships, experiences of crossing cultures, or the death of a parent, he or she has to deal with the universal structure of these experiences” (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.6). She concludes that fiction is responsible for

these universal structures, which are derived from conventions of representation and, then, rely on fiction to state an individuality while at the same time making it public (GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR, 2003, p.6). Once again, even though Gudmundsdóttir's studies are not specifically about *memoirs* or non-fictional texts, it is possible to relate the reflection above to Jamaica Kincaid's fictional and non-fictional works.

Vincent Colonna's work on life writing, specifically autofiction, can also be mentioned in this thesis as some of the aspects described by the scholar might be identified in Jamaica Kincaid's works. In the collection of essays *Ensaaios sobre a autoficção* (2014), Jovita Maria Gerheim Noronha presents a fragment of Vincent Colonna's *Autofiction et autres mythomanie littéraires*<sup>10</sup>, published in 2004. In the chapter Tipologia da Autoficção, Colonna describes some types of autofiction, highlighting the main aspects of each of them and providing literary examples to illustrate his thoughts. In his description of *biographical autofiction*, Colonna addresses issues similar to the ones discussed in the previous pages of this chapter.

According to Colonna, the current concept of autofiction is vague as it allows the autobiographical procedures in a text to be as variable, inaccurate and imprecise as the author wants (COLONNA, 2014, p.46). It is in the hands of the author the decision to fictionalize more or less a life or an episode when writing his or her narrative, as the degree of fictionalization is not as fixed as it would be in an autobiography (COLONNA, 2014, p.46). In Jamaica Kincaid's case, she repeatedly warns her readers in her public statements about this possibility of fictionalizing her autobiography in order to create her narratives, which should not be read as documents of her past.

Colonna also claims that subjectivity has played a growing role in fiction since Romanticism, contributing to the ambiguous practices of mixing autobiography and fiction (COLONNA, 2014, p.47). The French scholar mentions the words of Christopher Isherwood, who claims that "everything one invents about oneself is part of their personal myth and, consequently, is true" (ISHERWOOD, 1976 apud COLONNA, 2014, p.47). In her interviews, Jamaica Kincaid plays with this idea, as she constantly warns that she writes fiction based on autobiographical elements of her life, not autobiographies

The discussions by Smith & Watson (2010), Gudmundsdóttir (2003) and Colonna (2014) also articulate with the ideas on autobiography and truth brought by Paul John Eakin in the book *Living autobiographically: How we create identity in narrative* (2008). In the first

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<sup>10</sup> The fragment in *Ensaaios sobre a autoficção* (2004) was translated from the original version in French to Portuguese by Jovita Maria Gerheim Noronha and Maria Inês Coimbra Guedes.

chapter, Talking about ourselves: The rules of the game, Eakin comments on the controversial *memoir* by James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces*, published in 2003. The scandal emerged after accusations of forgery were made by a website in the beginning of 2006, a few months after the book was adopted by the Oprah Winfrey's Book Club in the year before. Journalists, critics and the public opinion turned against James Frey as the book was sold as a *memoir*, not a piece of fiction; therefore, it should contain some sort of autobiographical truth. Eakin, then, states: "What the Frey episode confirms is that the reception of memoir is contractual: readers expect autobiographers to exhibit some basic respect for the truth of their lives – break that trust and suffer the consequences" (EAKIN, 2008, p.20). As Eakin concludes, the issue with Frey's *memoir* was a matter of marketing it as a *memoir* rather than something else, making his readers expect the contract of truth to be fulfilled by the author.

After discussing this controversial episode, Paul John Eakin proposes, as Gudmundsdóttir (2003), that:

(...) autobiography is a referential art: it self-consciously, usually explicitly, positions itself with reference to the world, and when it does so, it invites – at least potentially – the kind of scrutiny that Frey's book in fact received. We can write about our lives in a memoir as we like, but we can't expect to be read as we like – not, at any rate, if we flout the conventions, and in the case of autobiography, telling the truth is the cardinal rule (EAKIN, 2008, p.21)

This cardinal rule mentioned by Eakin, as the scholar observes, may not be strictly regarded by readers as they allow memoirists some room to make their narratives more flexible through fictionalization (EAKIN, 2008, p.21). Eakin mentions as examples long dialogues described by children who are three to five years old, or an extensive account of the life of a 7-year-old child (EAKIN, 2008, p.21), situations that are not common in real life. These episodes might not represent factual truth but at least they do represent verisimilitude, and that might be enough for the reader (EAKIN, 2008, p.21). The problem is when the writer decides to break this rule and tries to fool his audience:

Call this fiction, call it imaginative reconstruction; these writers impress us as trying to tell the fundamental biographical truth of their lives. (...) But cross the line, as James Frey confesses he did, and the memoirist gets kicked out of the book club. Breaking trust with the readers of your memoir, moreover, proves to be a potentially actionable offense (...) (EAKIN, 2008, p.21-22)

For Paul John Eakin, then, the problem occurs when the writer pushes too much the reader's ability to be flexible when it comes to the cardinal rule mentioned above. Once authors abandon the truth and fictionalizes everything while marketing their books as autobiographical, the reader – and the critics – will not spare them. Keeping this in mind, it is

possible to notice that it is not only the author who will be careful with the autobiographical elements that permeate his or her works. By looking at the arguments by Smith and Watson (2010), Gudmundsdóttir (2003) and Eakin (2008) on the intricate relation between fact and fiction in life writing, one will understand that the readers are also attentive to this issue.

It is clear that Jamaica Kincaid is fully aware of the way her autobiographical details manifest in her works. Her public statements show that the author understands that her writing process creates complex interlocutions between the story of her life and the lives of her characters. Kincaid is constantly addressing this issue in interviews, stating that her books share details from her own life, but they are not about her and her family. In the first chapter of this thesis, for instance, I have mentioned an interview by Kincaid for Shanda Deziel, in which the author states that *Mr. Potter* (2002), a novel that tells the story of her father, is not a biography of real life's Mr. Potter. Kincaid claims "It uses my biography but it's not about me and it uses his biography but it's not about him" (DEZIEL, 2002 apud NASTA, 2009, p. 75), underscoring the fact that *Mr. Potter* (2002) is a piece of fiction based on real-life events; therefore, it should not be read as a biography.

On the other hand, Kincaid allows herself the freedom of inscribing herself in the text by using her birth name at one point in *Mr. Potter* (2002) – Elaine Potter Richardson. A similar situation happens in *My Brother* (1997), as the narrator Jamaica is referred to by her name only once in the whole *memoir*. These strategies, combined with the author's statements in interviews, show that Kincaid deliberately plays with fact and fiction when writing her narratives.

In another interview, this time to Moira Ferguson (1994), Jamaica Kincaid comments on the difference between her novels *Annie John* (1985) and *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996), regarding the influence of her biography in each of them:

MF: Is it a coincidence that Annie John leaves Antigua about the time that Antigua gets associate status around 1967?

JK: It is a coincidence, but that was when I really did leave home. I left home in 1965-66. So it is a coincidence. That book is very autobiographical. Lucy is very autobiographical. I think that what I am writing now is the first thing that isn't autobiographical. It is autobiographical in ideas, but not in situation. (FERGUSON, 1994, p.175)

Both excerpts mentioned above show that Kincaid understands that her writing process includes using details from her life to create her narratives. Moreover, the interviews also show that the author acknowledges the imminent scrutiny by the critics and the public; therefore, she uses her platform as a public person to clarify that she is writing fiction, not biographies and autobiographies.

In the same interview for Moira Ferguson (1994), Jamaica Kincaid is openly asked about the autobiographical aspect of her literature. The Antiguan author answers by saying that it is autobiographical for her, but not necessarily for the other people involved, thus underscoring the fact that she is working with literary representations:

MF: Has your writing been autobiographical?

JK: My writing has been very autobiographical. The events are true to me. They may not be true to other people. I think it is fair for my mother to say, "This is not me." It is only the mother in the books I've written. It is only the mother as the person I used to be perceived her. But I don't mind. (FERGUSON, 1994, p.176)

Kincaid makes a clear statement that what she writes should not be conceived as factual truth or documented history. Instead, it should be read as fiction based on things, events and people known from her personal perspective. Her mother, she mentions as an example, might not recognize herself in Kincaid's narratives, and this would happen because the Antiguan writer creates her stories from her own experiences.

The autobiographical elements in Jamaica Kincaid's works are the main topic in Susheila Nasta's article 'Beyond the frame': Writing a Life and Jamaica Kincaid's Family Album, published in 2009 in the journal *Contemporary Women's Writing*. In her discussion, Nasta presents Kincaid's works as enigmatic portraits of "self", "family" and "history" which are known for "blurring the lines between autobiography, fiction, non-fiction, and memoir" (NASTA, 2009, p.64). Nasta also highlights the hybrid aspect of Jamaica Kincaid's identity, not only because of the contact with the English colonizers in Antigua but also for her life experience in the United States, which inevitably influences her narratives:

Kincaid's ambivalent relation to a troubled colonial past, combined with her diasporic location in the United States has further complicated her perspective, her persistent desire to revisit, reframe, and re-imagine the buried "truths" of her personal history. (NASTA, 2009, p.65)

Throughout her article, Susheila Nasta uses the ideas of "family album", "portrait" and other terms related to photography to discuss the autobiographical elements in Jamaica Kincaid's narratives. Resounding with the reflections on autobiography and life writing in the beginning of this chapter, Nasta also decides for the use of the concept of life writing while adding an asterisk to her choice:

I am using the idea here of "life-writing" rather than "autobiography" – although it is abundantly clear from Kincaid's public staging of her writerly self that the creative reservoirs for her art stem primarily from her own life. I do this because in many ways, the multiple self-inventions and family portraits she has created can most usefully be seen as a dynamic, performative, and cross-genre literary project, which resists closure and the need to present discrete portraits of a life linked to

verisimilitude, or what we might call authentic autobiographical truths. (NASTA, 2009, p.65)

The passage above summarizes how Kincaid's identity is attached to her narratives by the autobiographical elements she uses in them, regardless of the fact that she does not write autobiographies. According to Nasta, even though the scholar uses life writing as the term to describe Kincaid's works, she cannot help but stress the autobiographical character of the Antiguan author's narratives, which makes them transit between genres rather than sticking to only one. The comparison Susheila Nasta makes between a family album and Kincaid's literary texts is a demonstration that Kincaid is able to craft her writing in order to refer to multiple genres and media.

Susheila Nasta also underscores how Kincaid uses her public statements to remain outside of fixed categories – not only the autobiographical and fictional mentioned in the beginning of this chapter but also political and social ones. After raising the question on how to locate Jamaica Kincaid as a writer, Nasta explains that the author refuses to fit into one category:

Not surprisingly, Kincaid, who has always insisted on situating herself outside the critical map of any defining orthodoxies – whether as postcolonial, feminist, Caribbean writer, or born-again American migrant – holds a somewhat ambivalent and troubled position in relation to such views. She has made plain, in several interviews (which would benefit from extended study as a form of life-writing in themselves) the extent to which she wishes to distance herself from any easily identifiable theoretical comfort zone, finding any form of definition – whether linked to her race, gender, or politics – untenable. (NASTA, 2009, p.68)

This “ambivalent and troubled position” has already been commented throughout this thesis, in agreement with Carole Boyce Davis's (2018) and Elleke Boehmer's (2005) reflections. Nonetheless, Jamaica Kincaid not only stresses this condition in her literary works and public statements but also uses it to reinvent her homeland and herself through her narratives. Susheila Nasta points that this is part of a project conducted by Kincaid, who “obsessively returns [to it] in text after text, creating a fictionalized self-inventory”, that is, the family album she creates through her fiction and non-fiction (NASTA, 2009, p.69). In a statement that articulates with the discussions proposed on the second chapter of this thesis, Nasta claims that this personal self-inventory created by Kincaid makes public “the turbulent soil of her Antiguan youth and its relation to a long history of colonial exploitation and deracination” (NASTA, 2009, p.69).

The intricate and deliberate entanglement of Kincaid's life and her characters' is described by Susheila Nasta as a “blurring of the lines between self/character as



subject/object”, a technique used by the Antiguan writer throughout her career (NASTA, 2009, p.70). As an example, Nasta mentions *My Brother* (1997), the *memoir* which is not only about the death of Kincaid’s brother Devon but also about her relationship with their mother. The passage used by Nasta can be retrieved from the second part of the *memoir*:

He had read in a novel written by me about a mother who had tried and tried and failed and failed to abort the third and last of her three male children. And when he was dying he asked me if that mother was his mother and if that child was himself (“Ah me de trow’ way pickney”); in reply, I laughed a great big Ha! Ha! and then said no, the book he read is a novel, a novel is a work of fiction; **he did not tell me that he did not believe my reply and I did not tell him that he should not believe my reply.** (KINCAID, 1997, p.174, emphasis added)

Therefore, it is possible to notice that, besides playing with the relation between autobiography and fiction in her public statements, Kincaid also does so in her narratives. The sentence that closes the paragraph quoted above describes what seems to be the Antiguan writer’s attempt to notify her reader that she understands the cardinal rule of telling the truth in life writing (EAKIN, 2008, p.21), and that she is not trying to fool either the audience or the critics. On the contrary, Kincaid seems to make her readers aware that she is explicitly juggling with autobiography and fiction as in the passage above, in which neither Devon nor the protagonist Jamaica believes that what she had written was plain simple fiction.

The autobiographical aspect of Jamaica Kincaid’s writing is also widely discussed by Leigh Gilmore in *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001), as she claims that the body of work produced by Kincaid throughout her career is an “ongoing self-representational project” composed by her novels (GILMORE, 2001, p.97). Gilmore calls the literary corpus produced by the Antiguan writer a “serial autobiography”, as it is an open-ended project (GILMORE, 2001, p.96). The scholar points that “this practice challenges the limits of the genre” as it adds an ongoing aspect to it, despite the idea that autobiographies have very simple limits (life and death) and usually one volume will suffice to tell the story one wants to tell (GILMORE, 2001, p.96-97). However, as Leigh Gilmore shows, Kincaid resists closure and keeps writing about herself, her homeland and her family, making her serial autobiography expand after each new publication.

In the chapter *There Will Always Be a Mother*, the scholar describes some of the implications of the relation between autobiography and fiction in this kind of self-representational project. Gilmore observes that:

Lest this sound too alien to the autobiographical project, let me assert that it is a central feature of autobiography that the author and protagonist (I use the literary term to clarify the textuality of this figure) tend to be collapsed through the feature

of their shared name into the same entity despite their significant and demonstrable differences. (GILMORE, 2001, p.98)

In *My Brother* (1997), for instance, protagonist and author share the same name, Jamaica. However, as they share more than just the name, it is possible to see the connections between them way before page 91, the first – and only – time the name of the protagonist is mentioned in the whole *memoir*. The choice of keeping the name of the character from the reader for so many pages might indicate a strategy to avoid giving away all the coincidences between author and narrator at once. However, as Kincaid herself claims that to name is to possess, naming the narrator in *My Brother* (1997) Jamaica might represent another strategy, one of not denying the autobiographical aspect of her work and, consequently, inscribing herself in the story she is telling.

The issue of a shared name between author and protagonist in life writing is a very common one, and authors like Jamaica Kincaid, who have a great number of interviews and other sorts of public appearances, are constantly making comments on this matter. The Brazilian writer Cristóvão Tezza, for instance, has published in 2007 the autofiction *O filho eterno*, the story of his son Felipe, who was born with Down's syndrome. In the narrative, Tezza did not name the father and the mother of the boy, explaining in his public statements that this was a way to make the book less personal, as the theme – rejection for a child with Down's syndrome – could face a lot of criticism from the audience. Besides the naming issue, Tezza also chose to have a narration in third person, claiming that people did not need to read the story through his own voice. As Kincaid, Tezza constantly explains that his works, in spite of the strong autobiographical aspect, are pieces of fiction.

Gilmore concludes, then, that collapsing author and protagonist into the same entity via naming can make some readers and critics disregard the differences between those two figures – a real one and a literary one. The scholar states that:

To admit the difference between the writer of the text and the autobiographical protagonist threatens the truthfulness of the scene for some readers and critics. Such admission reveals too clearly the constructedness of autobiography, both its inevitable affiliation with fiction and its recalcitrant realism. (GILMORE, 2001, p.98)

Therefore, it is possible to articulate the name issue raised by Gilmore to the discussion on truth in life writing by Paul John Eakin. As Eakin (2008) stated, the readers and critics expect the life writing author to tell the truth. However, if they admit that the protagonist and the author are not the same person, they will have to face the fact that autobiography involves fictionalization. For the audience, the balance between fiction and

realism, as stated by Gilmore (2001), seems to be the major aspect of the contract between writer and reader in life writing.

The main point in Gilmore's chapter is that the self-representational project created by Kincaid relies more on intertextuality than in the evidences from the author's life in her works. According to Leigh Gilmore, her reading of Kincaid "does not seek a one-to-one correspondence between the author, Jamaica Kincaid, and any single protagonist" in her novels (GILMORE, 2001, p.99). The scholar clarifies her objective with the reading of Kincaid she proposes:

Certainly such correspondences can be pointed out, but they offer a different kind of proof than I am interested in here. I am most concerned with how evidence of the biographical limits and contains the possibilities Kincaid finds in autobiography and how she reveals this protean view through her performance of autobiography as a discourse with an, as yet, limitless capacity for repetition or reengagement. (GILMORE, 2001, p.99)

This way, Gilmore suggests that the autobiographical aspect of Kincaid's narratives surface not through personal information about the author inserted in her texts; rather, Gilmore believes that what makes the corpus so autobiographical is the intertextuality existing among Jamaica Kincaid's works. In the conclusion of the chapter, Gilmore stresses once again:

Given what Kincaid does with the mother-daughter relationship, with the representation of the legacy of colonialism, and given the textual transformations that her serial autobiography enables, any reduction of autobiography to the status of narrow proof is not only unnecessarily limiting, but inaccurate. Instead, autobiography as an intertextual system of meaning is an expansive and expanding network of associations that reaches across the boundaries of texts and lives. (GILMORE, 2001, p.116)

For Leigh Gilmore, the coincidences between each of Kincaid's texts reveal more of the autobiographical aspect in her works than the coincidences between author and protagonists. The scholar explains that this intertextuality builds associations that make the reader feel as if he or she had been in touch with that story somewhere else, not only in Kincaid's works but also in her public statements:

Kincaid's work, as well as her comments in interviews, can be read as this growing network of associations which expands in multiple directions and produces the uncanny sense that we have been "here" before. The "here" may well have been first glimpsed in another text, and we need not confirm its source in Kincaid's life to grasp its intrication within the autobiographical. (GILMORE, 2001, p.116)

It is possible to perceive, then, that the identity of the author surfaces in her writing through this "uncanny sense" described by Leigh Gilmore (GILMORE, 2001, p.116). This

strange feeling that a person, an event or a place was already seen in another story connects each of the volumes in Kincaid's serial autobiography, helping put all the pages of her family album together. As Gilmore concludes, the reader will find more of the autobiographical aspect of Kincaid's works in this intertextuality than in a one-to-one correspondence between the real-life Kincaid and her protagonists.

The concept of intertextuality has been widely discussed by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). In the chapter *Historiographic Metafiction: the pastime of past time*, Hutcheon proposes a definition of postmodern intertextuality:

Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. It is not a modernist desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the richness of the past (see Antin 1972, 106–14). It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature —and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.118)

In Kincaid's case, Hutcheon's statement that postmodern intertextuality is "a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.118) seems appropriate to describe the Antiguan writer's works. In the following chapter, *Intertextuality, Parody and the Discourses of History*, the scholar mentions some changes in the definition of intertextuality throughout history:

As later defined by Barthes (1977, 160) and Riffaterre (1984, 142–3), intertextuality replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself. A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.126)

Putting together Hutcheon's (1988) and Gilmore's (2001) insights on intertextuality, it is possible to perceive that the intertextuality found in Jamaica Kincaid's narratives fit the description above. Her texts refer to historical records and literature in general while also deriving from other texts by the author herself. The meaning addressed in the passage above surfaces in Kincaid's works through the connections she makes between one of her texts and others by herself.

Following the discussions proposed above, by Linda Hutcheon (1988), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), Susheila Nasta (2009) and Leigh Gilmore (2001), I propose a reading of the literary corpus based on the intertextuality among Kincaid's works. Throughout her narratives, Kincaid revisits stories, places, events and names that, together, as pointed by Leigh Gilmore (2001), create a network of associations that showcase the autobiographical

aspect of her writing. It is on this intertextuality and on her interviews, then, that this reading will focus, in a search that is more for the details that her characters share in common than for documented proof of correspondence between author and protagonists.

As pointed by Leigh Gilmore (2001), Kincaid's narratives feature elements that seem to appear more than once, not only in the same text but somewhere else. In *My Brother* (1997), for instance, the narrator Jamaica and her family make the arrangements for Devon's funeral with Mr. Straffee. She buys the coffin for her brother, a cheap one made of pine, with the undertaker, whom she had mentioned in other parts of the *memoir*: she had passed in front of his funeral establishment when arriving in Antigua to visit her dying brother, she remembers his appearance from her childhood, she talks about the coffin when describing Devon's funeral and so on. She comments on the man, saying that "as a child, I was afraid of the undertaker, Mr. Straffee" (KINCAID, 1997, p.103). However, this was not the first time this name was mentioned in Kincaid's works.

In the first chapter of *Annie John* (1985), the narrator describes her contact with death in her childhood and mentions that on the way from her home to the town, she and her mother would pass Mr. Straffee's store. Besides, she also comments on the coffins – their build, varnishing, size – just as Jamaica comments on the funerals she describes in *My Brother* (1997). Death is a constant image in the Antiguan author's body of work, and the funeral of a hunchback girl is an event mentioned in both narratives by Kincaid, which contributes to the intertextuality mentioned by Leigh Gilmore (2001).

In *Annie John* (1985), the child narrator describes the funeral of a girl with a humpback as the first time she had actually seen a dead person. She underscores how curious she was, as she was used to attend the funerals from the outside; therefore, being close to the coffin was a new experience for her:

The first time I actually saw a dead person, I didn't know what to think. Since it wasn't someone I knew, I couldn't make a comparison. I had never seen the person laugh or smile or frown or shoo a chicken out of the garden. So I looked and looked for as long as I could without letting anyone know I was just there out of curiosity. One day, a girl my own age died. I did not know her name or anything personal about her except that she was my own age and that she had a humpback. (KINCAID, 1985, p.9-10)

Annie John was curious about the whole ritual of the funeral, but what intrigued her the most was the appearance of someone who was dead. She comments that someone had told her that dead people look as if they were asleep, but she disagreed after seeing the girl in the funeral. Her impressions were very objective, comparing her look on the funeral to what she looked like the day Annie saw her in the library:

I made my way to the door and entered the funeral parlor. There she was. She was lying in the regular pitch-pine, varnished coffin, on a bed of mauve-and-white lilacs. She wore a white dress, and it may have come all the way down her ankles, but I didn't have time to look carefully. It was her face that I wanted to see. I remembered how she had looked the day in the library. (...) Lying there dead, she looked the same, except her eyes were closed and she was so still. (KINCAID, 1985, p.10-11)

A very similar scene is described by Jamaica, the narrator in *My Brother* (1997), who is at her brother's funeral. The setting makes the protagonist remember her first contact with death in her childhood, a situation which happens to be very similar to the one that happened to Annie John:

It was in that funeral home in which he lay that I first encountered the dead. The dead then was a girl with a hunchback and I did not know her, I only saw her on the street in her school uniform, but her deformity had made her well known to other school children who were not deformed at all, and so when she died I wanted to see what she looked like. Seeing her lying in her coffin created a sense of wonder in me; (KINCAID, 1997, p.182-183)

It is possible to notice that the intertextuality lies in the way the same story is told by the two different narrators. Annie John, a child growing up in Antigua, describes the scene as the first impression of a child about a funeral, focusing on how a dead person would look, especially being someone her age. On the other hand, Jamaica remembers the story of the funeral as a childhood memory from decades ago, a distant past that resurfaces due to the burial of her brother.

Another interesting passage that is repeated in more than one text in Kincaid's literary corpus is related to the author and her brother when he was just a baby. In *My Brother* (1997), the narrator Jamaica remembers when, in her childhood, her brother Devon had just been born and was placed to sleep in his mother's arms. However, as they fell asleep together, the newborn was attacked by ants:

He was placed in a chemise my mother had made, (...) wrapped in a blanket and placed close to her, and they both fell asleep. That very next day, while they were both asleep, he snuggled in the warmth of his mother's body, an army of red ants came in through the window and attacked him. My mother heard her child crying, and when she awoke, she found him covered with red ants. If he had been alone, it is believed they would have killed him. (KINCAID, 1997, p.5-6)

In the *memoir*, as shown above, this episode is told in more details than in *Lucy* (1990). We learn from Jamaica that after killing all the red ants who attacked her son, their mother went to the yard and chopped off the okra tree used by the red ants to get into their house. In the novel, Lucy briefly mentions the episode as part of "all sorts of little details of my life on the island where I grew up" (KINCAID, 1990, p.163): among other major or minor

events, she describes the red ants episode as “the redness of the red ants that attacked my third brother as he lay in bed next to my mother a day after he was born” (KINCAID, 1990, p.163).

The death of a stepfather is yet another token of intertextuality between *Lucy* (1990) and *My Brother* (1997). In the first work mentioned, Lucy received a letter from her mother, among many she had received and not opened, that informed her of the death of her stepfather. However, the situation represented not only the loss of a family member but also a financial issue:

My father had died. It was a month or so ago now. Though for a long time he had suffered from a weak heart, still it was unexpected. I must please come home immediately. But there was something new. My father had died leaving my mother a pauper. He had no money. His safe, where he kept the shoes his mother had sent him and other things valuable to him and where he also kept money, had no money in it. When she went to the bank, his account had no money in it. His account at his gentlemen’s lodge had no money in it. He had borrowed so much against his insurance policy that perhaps he owed his insurance company money, and my mother was now responsible for that. My mother had to borrow money to bury him, and because she was a member in good standing the church provided the service for free. (KINCAID, 1990, pos.158)

In the letter, Lucy’s mother described the financial situation resulting from her stepfather’s death, which made Lucy refrain from ignoring her mother’s attempt to be in touch and replied her with “a cold letter” (KINCAID, 1990, pos.158). In *My Brother* (1997), the narrator Jamaica also describes a similar letter, a note from her mother informing of the death of her husband and the financial turmoil that followed it:

In the letter telling me that my father (...) had died, my mother said that his death had left them impoverished, that she had been unable to pay for his burial, and only the charitable gifts of others had allowed him to have an ordinary burial, not the extraordinary burial of a pauper, (...). The letter was not designed to make me feel guilty. My mother did not know of such a concept, guilt outside a court of law, (...); she only knew of guilt as it existed in a court of law, with its formality of accusation and deliberation and then judgment. To her, she had simply described the reality of her situation, but I felt condemned because I had so removed myself from my family that their suffering had gone unnoticed by me (...) (KINCAID, 1997, p.119-120)

It is possible to notice that in both passages, the main pieces of information described are quite the same: the narrator’s father has died, the mother is complaining about the lack of money even for the funeral, and the protagonist feels distant from her family. In Jamaica’s case, she even feels that she is being condemned by her mother, despite acknowledging that her mother probably did not write with that intention. The similarity between the episodes narrated is, once again, a sign of the growing network of associations described by Leigh Gilmore (2001).

The intertextuality between Jamaica Kincaid's works can also be found in references made to other texts. In a passage from *My Brother* (1997) mentioned earlier in this chapter, Devon asks Jamaica about one of the novels she has published:

He had read in a novel written by me about a mother who had tried and tried and failed and failed to abort the third and last of her three male children. And when he was dying he asked me if that mother was his mother and if that child was himself (...); in reply, I laughed a great big Ha! Ha! and then said no, the book he read is a novel, a novel is a work of fiction; (KINCAID, 1997, p.174)

Even though the name of the novel is not mentioned by Devon, the Kincaid avid reader will notice that he is referring to *Lucy* (1990), Kincaid's second novel. Not mentioning the name might represent, as already pointed earlier in this chapter, a strategy to avoid giving away all the coincidences between author and narrator at once. However, if the reader has already read *Lucy* (1990), he or she might remember the passage when Lucy tells Mariah the episode when she asked her mother the reason for her to be named like that. When giving the setting and context of how it happened, Lucy says:

My mother was stooped over a bowl of fish, cleaning and seasoning them in preparation for our supper. She was pregnant with the last of her children. She did not want to be pregnant and three times had tried to throw away the child, but all her methods had failed and she remained pregnant. (KINCAID, 1990, pos.187)

It becomes clear, then, that Devon is asking Jamaica about *Lucy* (1990), which in the *memoir* was published by the protagonist, and in real life was published by the author of the same *memoir*. These shared coincidences show how intricate the relation between autobiography and fiction is in Kincaid's works.

Moreover, a motif permeates most of her narratives and its correspondence to Kincaid's autobiography becomes inevitable: the mother-daughter issue. In *My Brother* (1997), for instance, the narrator Jamaica remembers an episode when her mother asked her to take care of her baby brother and her father while she went outside. However, at the time, Jamaica chose to spend her time reading her books instead of taking care of them. Once her mother got home, she was very angry with the girl, who was severely punished for leaving her brother and her father unattended. Her mother went straight for her books as if they were responsible for her resistance to conform to gender-attributed chores, depriving Annie John of her most cherished activity:

But there was a moment when in a fury at me for not taking care of her mistakes (my brother with the lump of shit in his diapers, his father who was sick and could not properly support his family, who even when well had made a family that he could not properly support, her mistake in marrying a man so lacking, so lacking) she looked in every crevice of our yard, under our house, under my bed (...), and in



all those places she found my books, the things that had come between me and the smooth flow of her life, (...) and in this fury, which she was conscious of then but cannot now remember, but which to her regret I can, she gathered all the books of mine she could find, and placing them on her stone heap (...), she doused them with kerosene (oil from the kerosene lamp by the light of which I used to strain my eyes reading some of the books that I was about to lose) and then set fire to them. (KINCAID, 1997, p.133-134)

The passage above, that runs longer as some details from the stone heap and the privacy of having a bed for herself are given by Jamaica, shows that the relationship between mother and daughter has been turbulent ever since Jamaica was a child. The episode is a demonstration on how she and her mother interacted, especially when she was not a baby herself and after her first brother was born.

In *Annie John* (1985), the shift in the relationship between Annie John and her mother was mostly but not only caused by the fact that she was growing up. Annie John tells several different stories involving herself and her mother: initially, the child narrates moments of joy and companionship between the two, such as bathing together or walking down the street wearing dresses from the same cloth; gradually, the stories about Annie John and her mother become filled with bitterness and resentment – just as Lucy and Jamaica regard their mothers. In the end of the chapter *Columbus in Chains*, Annie John tells how she was fooled by her mother, who deliberately made her eat something she did not like:

I washed my hands and took my place at the table. My mother brought me my lunch. I took one smell of it, and I could tell that it was the much hated breadfruit. My mother said not at all, it was a new kind of rice imported from Belgium, and not breadfruit, mashed and forced through a ricer, as I thought. (KINCAID, 1985, p.83.)

Annie John continues the account by describing how happy and joyful her mother and her father looked, talking and laughing while the girl ate her lunch. Annie John claims she felt bitter about the way her mother enjoyed her father, and she “could not believe how she laughed at everything he said” (KINCAID, 1985, p.83). The chapter ends with the girl questioning her mother about the truth: was it breadfruit? Annie John was right, after all, and being right made her feel betrayed by her mother:

I ate my meal. The more I ate of it, the more I was sure it was breadfruit. When I finished, my mother got up to remove my plate. As she started out the door, I said, “Tell me, really, the name of the thing I just ate.” My mother said, “You just ate some breadfruit. I made it look like rice so that you would eat it. It’s very good for you, filled with lots of vitamins.” As she said this, she laughed. (...) When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, shiny, sharp white teeth. It was as if my mother had suddenly turned into a crocodile. (KINCAID, 1985, p.83-84)

Examples such as the burning of the pile of books and tricking the daughter into eating breadfruit for lunch are just some of the many traces of issues between mother and daughter spread throughout Jamaica Kincaid's works. The relationships presented in her novels and other pieces of fiction have been analyzed over and over by scholars who, as Kincaid herself, cannot help but address the matter.

As this chapter deals with the autobiographical element in Jamaica Kincaid's narratives, I also propose that a comparison between her literary works and her interviews can be made in order to identify the complex relation between autobiography and fiction in her novels, essays and so on. In her interview to Kathleen M. Balutansky, for instance, Kincaid is asked about the daffodil, a flower that is featured in *Lucy* (1990). In the novel, Lucy describes an outburst of rage she had after seeing daffodils for the first time, while working as an au pair in the USA. She had been made to memorize the famous poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", also known as "Daffodils", by William Wordsworth when she was ten years old and attending school in Antigua, where there were no daffodils (KINCAID, 1990, pos.37-38). When questioned about daffodils by Balutansky, Kincaid claims she does not hate the poem itself, but the way English literature was imposed to the colonized:

BALUTANSKY: Of course, you also have other characters who garden. And who will forget the daffodil, which you've transformed into the ultimate symbol of imperialism.

KINCAID: I hope it makes people read the poem. Wordsworth happens to be my favorite. It's not Wordsworth's fault, mind you. It was only the way in which he was used. Poor man, he would have highly disapproved. (BALUTANSKY, 2002, p.799)

As usual, Kincaid does not deny the autobiographical aspect of her writing. Balutansky uses Kincaid's comment on Wordsworth to ask her about the limitations imposed by a canon in literature. As Kincaid argues that reading classics such as Chaucer is more important than reading herself, she adds examples to the relevance of English literature in her education and, consequently, in her life writing:

KINCAID: I say, "read everything." In fact I think they should read Zora Neale Hurston before they read me. But the truth is that the thing we are talking about, the canon, we come out of it. Listen, no one is more political than I am, nor more interested in how this stuff works and I had to memorize "Ode to a Daffodil," "I wondered lonely as a cloud..." and many other things. I had to write out parts of *Paradise Lost* as a punishment. I had done something bad and I had to write out books one and two and it changed my life. Of course, I could identify with Lucy. I got a whole novel, *Lucy*, out of that one little episode in my life, so you see, you just never know where things are going to come from. (BALUTANSKY, 2002, p.800)

In the answer mentioned above, besides mentioning *Lucy* (1990) and the rage about the daffodils, she also comments on a punishment that is described in *Annie John* (1985),

when the protagonist is made to copy books I and II from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* after mocking Christopher Columbus in a picture from her history book. The interweaving between autobiography and fiction here shows that the intertextuality exceeds the limits of the novels and memoirs, making connections to what Kincaid produces in her answers when being interviewed.

The daffodils are also mentioned in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), the botany-themed collection of essays by Jamaica Kincaid. In the essay *What Joseph Banks Wrought*, the narrator comments on daffodils in a very similar fashion as Kincaid does in the interview for Kathleen M. Balutansky (2002): she highlights that the imposition of English literature, hereby represented by the image of the daffodil, is what makes it so difficult to enjoy the poem. In the essay, the narrator states "I do not like daffodils, but that's a legacy of the gun-to-the-head approach, for I was forced to memorize the poem by William Wordsworth when I was a child" (KINCAID, 1999, p.142). The daffodils, then, became the symbol for imperialism created by Kincaid, as observed by Balutansky (2002), making it unbearable for the narrator in *My Garden (book)*: (1999) to have them in her garden.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the autobiographical in Jamaica Kincaid can also exceed the scope of the individual and refer to a collective history. Throughout her narratives, Kincaid makes constant reference to the history of Antigua and the Caribbean in general which, of course, being her homeland, is part of her identity and her autobiography. It is by the comments on history by the narrators that the reader can identify this sort of collective autobiography of which Kincaid is part of.

In *A Small Place* (1988), for instance, the narrator explains that the streets where she lived in Antigua are named after historical figures. However, she is very critical of the people whose names were given to the streets in Antigua because they were part of the processes of colonization in the Caribbean:

In the Antigua that I knew, we lived on a street named after an English maritime criminal, Horatio Nelson, and all the other streets around us were named after some other English maritime criminals. There was Rodney Street, there was Hood Street, there was Hawkins Street, and there was Drake Street. (KINCAID, 1988, p.24)

The reference to British conquerors such as Horatio Nelson and Francis Drake is a reference to the early years of colonialism in the Caribbean. Even though Jamaica Kincaid was not born in the first centuries after the arrival of the British and the Spanish, every step of the process of colonization of the region has had an influence in the history of Antigua and, consequently, her autobiography as a native from St. John's. Needless to say that calling those

historical figures “criminals”, rather than “navigators” or “explorers”, shows that her position is one of criticizing their actions towards the Caribbean.

In *My Brother* (1997), those historical figures are referred to in a very similar fashion. In a passage that has already been mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, the narrator Jamaica talks about her brother Devon’s passion for history books:

He was obsessed with the great thieves who had inhabited his part of the world, the great hero thieves of English maritime history: Horatio Nelson, John Hawkins, Francis Drake. He thought that the thing called history was an account of significant triumphs over significant defeats recorded by significant people who had benefited from the significant triumphs; (KINCAID, 1997, p.94-95)

In the *memoir*, as in the non-fictional text mentioned before, instead of using words that would describe people like Nelson and Hawkins as heroes, the narrator chooses nouns that imply her perspective on what colonialism represented for her: a crime. By associating the names of conquerors to robbery and murder, Kincaid’s narrators inevitably tell a little bit of the Caribbean’s collective autobiography.

Throughout the third chapter of this thesis, it was possible to discuss how Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiographical elements appear in her works. As an Antiguan author who writes about Antigua and other parts of the Caribbean, Kincaid uses her personal experience to create protagonists and narrators who reflect her individual and collective history. In her interviews, Kincaid carefully plays with this complex relation between autobiography and fiction in her writing, preventing her readers from reading her works as autobiographies, but confirming the strong autobiographical aspects in them.

In order to understand how autobiography intertwines with fiction in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, it is essential to discuss what is autobiography and, as proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), the autobiographical discourse. In their explanation on life writing, it becomes clear that the shift from the genre of autobiography to an autobiographical discourse gives room for previously marginalized and invalidated identities to access this kind of expression. In addition, Smith and Watson (2010) also contribute with their discussion on the main difference between life writing and fiction: the world they refer to. Even though life writing is not exempt from fictionalization, it necessarily refers to a shared world between reader and writer, whereas fiction can refer to a universe created from scratch by the author.

Following the discussion on autobiography and fiction, Gudmundsdóttir (2003) argues that life writing mixes both of them as the writer is in constant negotiation on how these two aspects will interact in the text. When dealing with universal conventions and structures, the writer relies on fiction to make public his or her individual experience. The French writer

Vincent Colonna (2014) also addresses this issue, claiming that the decision to fictionalize more or less is on the author, corroborating the negotiation mentioned by Gudmundsdóttir (2003).

However, as Paul John Eakin (2008) warns, the writer must be careful when balancing autobiography and fiction in life writing, as readers and critics create their expectations on whether the writer is telling the truth. The audience might be flexible with this rule about truth, but authors might face the consequences if they push the limits too far. It seems, then, that finding the balance between autobiography and fiction in life writing is not an easy task but is one that Kincaid accomplishes when adding pages to her “family album”.

The comparisons between Kincaid’s works and a family album were made by Susheila Nasta (2009), who claims that the Antiguan writer blurs the lines that separate fiction, non-fiction, autobiography and memoir (NASTA, 2009, p.64). According to Nasta, each of Jamaica Kincaid’s narrative is a picture of herself and her family added to her family album, portraying autobiographical elements that permeate her body of work. Susheila Nasta (2009) also adds that Kincaid creates, with her novels, essays and other texts, a self-inventory which makes public her past and her relation to the colonial past of Antigua.

In consonance with Nasta (2009), Leigh Gilmore (2001) points that Jamaica Kincaid maintains an ongoing self-representational project with her literary production. Due to the autobiographical slant present in Kincaid’s works, Gilmore (2001) calls this open-ended project a “serial autobiography”, which resists closing as each new volume is an addition to the representations of herself, her family and her homeland. The scholar also underscores that Kincaid’s autobiography surfaces in her texts more from the intertextuality among them than through one-to-one correspondences between fact and fiction.

Keeping this in mind, it was possible to analyze Jamaica Kincaid’s novels, essays and interviews in order to identify this intertextuality mentioned by Gilmore (2001). By finding coincidences among her works, one can notice that some episodes, names and comments are repeated throughout Kincaid’s body of work, highlighting the autobiographical elements present in her life writing. As Leigh Gilmore (2001) suggests, the intertextuality produced by Kincaid gives her readers an uncanny sense of having heard that story somewhere else, which dismisses the need to keep looking for documented proof of any information found in the Antiguan writer’s literary production.

It is intertextuality, then, the key to find the evidences of Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiography in her works. As the author herself has stated innumerous times, her texts are not autobiographies; therefore, should not be read as such. However, the use of elements from

her past, her family and her homeland has also been confirmed by the author in several opportunities, which leads to an understanding that the characters she creates share parts of her identity, to a major or minor extent. This way, it is possible to better grasp how Kincaid is able to represent Caribbean subjects in her narratives.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the pages of this thesis, I have proposed an approach to Jamaica Kincaid's works that enables the reader to understand the main elements that constitute the identity of her narrators and characters. Considering that Kincaid is an Antiguan author who has lived in the USA for over forty years and writes about Antigua and the Caribbean in general, a careful reading of her narratives can provide the reader with details of how the identities of people from the same region are shaped. Literature, especially life writing, allows previously marginalized individuals and groups to have their voices heard. The aesthetic aspect of literature may distance it from the alleged scientific objectivity attributed to historical records, but it is this aspect that is used by postcolonial writers to access a way to express their realities and create narratives that give a different perspective of their experiences. Literature, then, is a means used by postcolonial writers to have their voices heard, something that has been systematically denied to their people by hegemonic narratives of history.

As the countries in the Caribbean were colonized for centuries by different nations from Europe, the first step towards understanding the formation of the identity of Kincaid's narrators and characters is comprehending the idea of coloniality and how it is not restrained to a time or period. In the introduction, my main concern was to establish what is coloniality and make clear why it is different from colonialism. The theoretical framework chosen to describe coloniality relied on works by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, whose explanation on the difference between coloniality and colonialism helps clarify that the second refers to the time between the arrival of the colonizers and the process of independence, while the first refers to a logic created and maintained through colonial practices, regardless the period in history. Anibal Quijano's thoughts were also relevant to this conceptualization, as the scholar points that despite the end of colonialism as it existed and endured during the last five centuries, coloniality is still a strong and common form of domination of a nation over another.

The approach I have chosen in order to understand how the identities of narrators and characters are shaped in Kincaid's narratives involves analyzing different characteristics in her works. For the first chapter, I have decided to discuss Kincaid's critique of the use of the English language to implement and maintain the logic of coloniality running in the Caribbean. The second chapter brings a reflection on how the events, details and experience presented in Kincaid's stories can be read as revisions to the hegemonic narratives about the Caribbean that are widespread around the world. Finally, the third chapter is dedicated to the

intertextuality among Jamaica Kincaid's works, which indicates a strong autobiographical slant, especially when it comes to her narrators.

Language, as concluded in the first chapter of this thesis, plays a major part in the hybrid aspect of Kincaid's characters. As the relations of power between colonizer and colonized are uneven, people from Antigua have been forced into speaking English as the primary form of acquiring new habits, ideology, religion and other aspects that stimulate the domination of the local people. Language works as the driving force to the imposition of new forms of education, and literature, for instance, is one of the strategies used to reinforce coloniality.

The analysis of the relation Antiguans have with the English language has shown that Kincaid's narrators might feel displaced when using it, as it is the case in *A Small Place* (1988). She denounces the absurd of using a language that was imposed to her people once the British colonizers arrived. The same feeling of displacement is described by Jamaica, the narrator in *My Brother* (1997), but for another reason: after living for three decades in the United States, she and her brother face some difficulty when having a conversation. Jamaica notices how Dr. Ramsey, the Antiguan doctor she called to try to save her brother, seems to negotiate well with the accent and register, adapting his speech according to his audience, in an act of "translation" that she is not familiar with. Considering the discussions conducted, it is possible to understand that hybridity is a strong aspect of the characters' and narrators' identities in Jamaica Kincaid's works, and it is manifested mainly through language. Besides, the subjectivities of those characters have been shaped through the contact they have had with hegemonic cultures.

The history of the Caribbean as learned from history textbooks is not the same history experienced by Antiguans, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The widespread versions of history which privilege the conqueror over the conquered were created and supported by hegemonic nations, who denied the colonized the right to write their own history. However, the worldwide acceptance of those narratives does not imply a complete denial of production of history in the former colonies. Caribbean voices have found in literature, among other forms of expression, a way to share their experience and denounce colonial practices, questioning these unilateral versions created by countries from the Old World.

Throughout the reading of Kincaid's works, many aspects from the history of Antigua could be grasped. In *A Small Place* (1988), for instance, the narrator is constantly addressing issues in Antigua related to coloniality. The legacy left by the British was one of



underdevelopment, few expectations of improvement and complete lack of infrastructure. Similar complaints are made by Jamaica Kincaid, in *My Brother* (1997), as she maps the Antigua in her latest visits and compares her impressions to her memories from her childhood years, before moving to the United States. Her comments revolve around the state of decay of the island, the poor health system and other problems faced by the Antiguans. Moreover, the essay *In History*, published in *My Garden (book)*: (1999), features a discussion on what history means to the people in the Caribbean and how the narrative they call “history” was created by the Europeans. In another essay, *What Joseph Banks Wrought*, the narrator addresses the British influence in Antigua, which appears in the language, in their gardens and many other aspects. Not by chance, all three narrators comment on how history as a narrative was created by the Europeans, while Antiguans were prevented taking part in the process.

The third approach to Jamaica Kincaid’s writings takes into account the autobiographical inscriptions in her works. What Kincaid does, then, is considered life writing, according to the definitions given by Smith and Watson (2010) and Gudmundsdóttir (2003). In addition, a quick look at her interviews shows that Kincaid is aware that in life writing, the author is in constant negotiation with both autobiography and fiction, a process discussed by Eakin (2008) and Colonna (2014), among others. However, Kincaid’s autobiographical inscriptions do not need to be searched and confirmed via historical documentation. Rather, as Leigh Gilmore (2001) suggests, the identity of the author can be found in her works due to the intertextuality that exists among them.

Intertextuality is a key to identify the autobiographical elements in Jamaica Kincaid’s body of work, allowing the reader to identify several coincidences. “Serial autobiography”, then, as Gilmore (2001) calls the collection of novels, essays, *memoirs* and other texts by Kincaid, seems to be an appropriate description as the reader, facing the repetition of episodes in different texts, gets the uncanny sense that he or she had already read that story before. Coincidences such as the attack of the red ants, letters from an impoverished widowed mother and even references to a collective history show that the Antiguan author does not refrain from using elements from her life to create the lives of her narrators and characters. This strategy culminates in the creation of a family album, as Susheila Nasta (2009) suggests, a cross-genre literary project that resists closure. The implicit connection with photography, another artistic medium, strengthens the aesthetic aspect of Kincaid’s works.

Considering the analyses performed in each of the three chapters, it is possible to have a broader perspective on the identity of the narrators and characters created by Jamaica Kincaid. The three topics chosen to guide the reading of the literary corpus articulate with the

identity of the author herself and, consequently, surface in her narratives as parts of the identities of each of the subjects portrayed in the texts. Once the conclusions of each chapter are added, one can have a clear notion on how Jamaica Kincaid composes her characters through signs of hybridity, history and autobiographical elements.

First of all, many of Kincaid's characters manifest their hybrid subjectivity mainly through language. The use of the English language is problematized by many of her narrators, who question the imposition of the language in the process of colonization of Antigua, as the language was the main driving force to achieve domination over the natives. Especially in schools, English was used in an attempt to replace former ideologies, religions, epistemologies, etc., for new ones, brought to the Caribbean by the Europeans, who crossed the Atlantic from the Old World. It is possible to conclude, then, that the English language plays a major role in highlighting the hybrid aspect of Kincaid's characters. Through language, they may manifest complaints about coloniality or, through a process of appropriation, create their own version of the English language.

In addition, the identities of the characters in Kincaid's works have a strong connection to the history that was imposed on them by the British colonizers. This is an issue that is also constantly found among the texts by the Antiguan author, as her narrators problematize the relation Antiguans – and Caribbeans in general – were forced to maintain with the narrative created by the Europeans. In Kincaid's works, some narrators comment that the history of Antigua and its natives started in 1492, when the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in the so-called New World. This indicates that: first, the beginning of colonialism in the Caribbean represented the erasure of the previous history from the different societies that existed in the Caribbean; second, everything that followed the arrival of Christopher Columbus was fundamental in leading Antigua to turn into what is described by Kincaid's narrators, an underdeveloped place with poor conditions in health, education and other areas. By understanding how history is addressed in Jamaica Kincaid's body of work, it was possible to conclude that the comments her narrators make about the Caribbean can be used as "asterisks" to add revisions to the official European versions of history. Their history as colonized people – and especially their awareness of it – is also an important part in the composition of their identities.

Finally, the autobiographical elements included in the narratives by Kincaid contribute to see her narrators as Antiguan subjects who share their experiences from the point of view of the insider/outsider. Grasped from her texts and many times confirmed by the author herself in interviews, the details from her life as a child in Antigua and her experience as a

United States resident are present throughout her novels, essays and *memoir*. The reading presented in this thesis privileged intertextuality as the source of these autobiographical elements, which are repeated in different contexts, but are interrelated by the coincidences they generate. The analysis of those coincidences leads to the understanding of the way Jamaica Kincaid inscribes her own life in her works, fictionalizing episodes and going back to them in each of her narratives. It is possible to conclude, then, that the autobiographical elements inserted in her texts are essential to compose the identities of her characters and, especially, her narrators.

Together, the topics chosen to guide the reading in each chapter of this thesis shape the identities of the narrators and other characters in Jamaica Kincaid's works. In *A Small Place* (1988), the narrator does not spare words to denounce coloniality in Antigua. She refers to a collective history from her people that is usually denied in textbooks produced in and by hegemonic nations – the same nations that once colonized different regions of the Caribbean and other parts of the world, and nations that use their great economic power to control other countries. In *My Brother* (1997), Jamaica maps Antigua as she had been away for a long time, and the state of decay of the island can be compared to her brother's health, both harmed by the centuries of colonial oppression. In Kincaid's novels *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990), the narrators comment on issues related to education in Antigua and the habit of sending a sibling abroad to help provide for the family. The narrator in *My Garden (book):* (1999) reviews the history of Antigua and the Caribbean, showing that what was done by the European colonizers in botany – naming, claiming, possessing, deracinating, transplanting – was also done to the people in the region and those who were taken from African countries.

Overall, understanding the composition of the identities of Jamaica Kincaid's narrators and characters contributes to a better notion on the Antiguan subjectivity. As mentioned in the previous pages of this thesis, literature is an alternative for postcolonial writers who seek to have their voices heard. History, or the narrative created by hegemonic centers which exclude the perspective of the colonized, does not allow room for the marginalized to add their points of view on everything that happened neither before nor after 1492. It is through literature, then, that postcolonial writers express their personal and collective views on the uneven relations of power between colonizer and colonized, besides discussing how coloniality affected and still affects their homelands.

Jamaica Kincaid, who clearly crafts her writing privileging the aesthetic aspect that fiction allows, discusses the issues presented throughout this thesis, whether with the tenderness and innocence of a child or the bitter and angry tone of someone who understands

the depth of colonial oppression in her country. Her works are source for asterisks, as mentioned in *My Garden (book):* (1999), that contribute to review history as widely known from a Eurocentric perspective. Hopefully, her contributions – and the ones by other postcolonial writers around the world – will continue fostering the discussions on coloniality and the ways to end it.

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